

12/7/2023 Rider Experience and Operations  
Committee Meeting Written Public  
Comment Submissions

Submissions

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## Stephen Fesler

I don't want to have to lecture the board about financial responsibility but it's come to my attention that TCC has misled other organisations around proposed fare policies and downplayed financial implications. TCC is reckless to waive away financial considerations in setting any fare rate -- flat, distance-based, or otherwise.

TCC is asking this board to cut the agency's remaining debt capacity by 11% through a single action, but more concerning is that TCC is asking this board to cut the remaining net debt coverage ratio by **46%**. This board has **zero** flexibility in what it must do with fares if it wants to ensure capital projects aren't further delayed and wants to be able to invest in services that actually matter for everyday riders.

The only responsible choice for this board is to adopt fares that do not create any negative pressure on agency finances. That means adopting one of the distance-based fares or adopting a flat fare at \$3.25 or higher. It may be inconvenient to tell riders that their fares are going to be higher, but in the constellation of choices it is the only fair and just thing to do. Adopting a lower fare would merely be a performative action that will harm this agency and riders in the long-run. And I'll reiterate past communications around this: the most fair and just thing to do is either maintain distance-based fares or study regionally equitable zone-based fares -- and [I'm not the only one saying that.](#)

Kind regards,  
Stephen A. Fesler

## Jacob Tukel

Boardmembers and Mayor Harrell,

I'd like to voice my opinion **in opposition to the upcoming flat fare proposal**. I believe the distance-based structure will reduce use of the system in urban areas, because most people in Seattle take the Link just to visit a friend, go to an event, or get groceries. A flat fare benefits suburban commuters, a group which the state and the country have spent the last century placating. This outdated policy subsidizes sprawl and leads us further away from meeting our climate goals. In my opinion, it's unlikely that *slightly* reducing the cost of long-distance rides will discourage ridership, since many commuters have their commute subsidized by their employers.

We've spent most of our money building out the urban parts of the Link system. Disincentivizing its use feels counterproductive.

Thank you,  
Jacob Tukel  
Seattle Resident

## Marcel Mayer

Hello,

I have recently heard that SoundTransit is trying to change the Link fare system to a flat fare instead of a zone-based fare or keeping the current distance-based fare. This is a horrible idea for ridership and

transit oriented development (TOD), will not have a significant impact on the amount of cars on the road, and will make stations in the city less useful.

Ridership: With a flat fare cost ridership will unquestionably go down in favor of using buses for anything but long distance trips, as riding the bus would be a lot cheaper at \$2.75, compared to a \$3.25 or \$3.50 flat fare (a \$3.00 fare, which is still higher than normal for most riders, wouldn't make financial sense for ST) For frequent transit riders, in Seattle, these costs are a huge jump from the original distance based fare for most riders, as most riders live in the city. I, and many others, won't ride the Link if it means I'll have to pay a 40% higher fare for the same distance.

Transit Oriented Development: In addition to the staggering increase in prices for all but a few, a flat rate would decrease the amount of people living in transit oriented places. Why? It would be expensive to use transit in transit oriented places and would be cheaper to live in the suburbs.

Places like Capitol Hill, University District, South Lake Union, Chinatown, Ballard, Beacon Hill, Northgate, and more will become unattractive, as it would be more affordable to live in the suburbs and commute via the Link and car, as housing would be cheaper. One of the goals of SoundTransit is to spur TOD, and a flat fare program would be the equivalent of shooting yourself in the foot.

Cars: With the rising transportation costs for the majority of Link users and the decrease of people living in transit oriented places, paired with the decrease of Link frequencies as we don't have enough Link trains, there will undoubtedly be more cars on the road. If we look at the ST3 expansion map, almost every station that will be positively affected by a flat fare is a Park&Ride. This encourages people living in single family homes (horrible for the environment), driving to the station (horrible for traffic and the environment), and then taking the Link into the city, which will be subsidized by people living in the city and transit oriented places.

Station Use: With a flat fare system, stations that are closer together will get less use, as it will be cheaper to take the bus. One of the most glaring ones would be going to and from the Capitol Hill district. Capitol Hill is VERY well connected by both bus and the Link, but with the abundance of non-link transit options, most people will choose to take the slower bus to get places instead of the faster Link, primarily due to the cost of the Link. This doesn't just apply to Capitol Hill though, but most of Seattle. It's not hard to see just how bad a flat fare system would be, especially when the majority of riders favor sticking with the current distance based system. Though this system may serve people living on the Eastside and the suburbs better, we must not forget that the system is primarily to serve Seattle residents as the majority of riders live in Seattle. Additionally, the suburbs and Eastside are served by ST Express buses and Sounder. Link is far from their only option, and they're a minority compared to the transit riders in Seattle. Transit is supposed to serve the people, so listen to what the people want.

Sincerely,

- Marcel Mayer

### *Unnamed Commenter*

I am transit dependent. I have never had a driver's license because of the financial impact of car ownership. I used to live in a neighborhood of Seattle where the only option to get to my job downtown was link because all transit agencies restructured service to FORCE riders onto the link. I have since moved to udistrict in part to shorten my commute to work but that move increased my housing costs. I make just enough money to NOT qualify for orca lift. I would like to know how it is equitable to force me to pay 40% more for my transit. I would also like to know why the people on this board who

probably do not use link think it is ok to force changes that riders do not want that will actually lower ridership when I have been told for a decade that transit like link needed to be expanded to alleviate traffic. Once again the people running things in this county are clueless and making it totally unaffordable for the working poor. If fares are going to be increased this drastically then orca lift program needs to be increased drastically so that I and people like me don't have even more financial stress. If the people who use the services don't want flat fares THEN DONT DO THEM.

Nick

Hello,

The proposed fare increases are unacceptable. I pay just \$2.25 to commute downtown from Capitol Hill. I can't justify a hike to \$3.50. That's over \$50/mo just for commuting!!

I think I'll take the bus or drive. But maybe that's what the board wants given link is going to be overcrowded after Lynwood opens.

I know it's not the intention, but this really seems like you're screwing over Seattle riders who are only going a few stops and rewarding suburbanites who commute in. I'm not sure how this could pass any of your Equity Analyses. This doesn't seem fair to me and flat fares are not used anywhere in Europe or Asia. Can we please get zone-based fares so the bus is the same price? Or keep it distance based??

Thanks,  
Nick

Steve

Reconsider making a blanket \$3.25 fare. A bulk of riders pay less than \$2.50 now, this plan makes no sense when all other agencies have solved this - do zone fares. Make Zone fares happen instead.

Ben

I urge you to retain distance-based fares and not to punish the vast majority of current users of the light rail system, where 2/3rds currently pay \$2.50 or less to ride just to subsidize suburban commuters. At every junction in 2023 you, The Board, have shown your disdain for transit riders and a functioning transportation system, prioritizing parking garages, worse station alignments, and construction impacts to automobile traffic. You have one more opportunity in 2023 to your job correctly, please don't ruin this too.

## Daniel

Hello,

Please don't do flat rate fees. Many people take the light rail as an easy and efficient way to get around locally. I personally like to take the light rail from the University St station to Chinatown station during my lunch break during work. It is ridiculous that I would be charged the same rate for an afternoon downtown trip as someone traveling from Federal Way to Lynwood!

The longer you ride the train, the more you are saving from not driving. The increase in service from ST should come with an increase in fee.

Stop subsidising suburbanites by raiding the city for money. It is inequitable and encourages anti-climate sprawl.

Best,

Daniel

## Luke Distelhorst

I'm writing to you today to support distance or zone-based fares.

As Snohomish County residents (Edmonds), my family and I would actually personally financially benefit from a cheaper, flat fare!

However, this is not an equitable solution and is not in line with the community feedback that Sound Transit received. If I'm riding for 75 minutes from Lynnwood to SeaTac, or even just 30 minutes to downtown Seattle, I should absolutely pay more than a rider going two or three stops.

If the current distance-based is deemed too complicated, there are ample examples of zone-based fares, which was the comment I provided in Sound Transit's public engagement opportunity. When we lived in Vancouver, BC where I took the SkyTrain to work every day for five years, the 1 Zone vs 2 Zone fare system was simple and understandable. You can learn more about that framework

here: <https://www.translink.ca/transit-fares/pricing-and-fare-zones>

I sincerely hope you will take a harder look at this policy, including who would be paying more vs less for a flat-fare system.

Thank you for your time and dedication to improving public transit in the Puget Sound region.

**Luke Distelhorst**

Public transit employee

Affordable Housing commissioner

Community Engagement professional

## Prem Subedi

Hello,

While I do like the simple fare structure without having to double tap, the cost increase might be an issue to people choosing to ride Light Rail over driving in Seattle. I do understand that it has been had for Sound Transit to get fare revenue to operating cost percentage to 30% but it was trending closer to 30% pre-pandemic.

Also there are so many with low-income but don't qualified to get discounted fare, please don't make it hurt from them,

I suggest Sound Transit to look at a zoned system since it is affordable and equitable.

Thank you,  
Prem Subedi

### *Irving Avila*

Hello,

As a resident of Seattle, I wanted to provide comments in opposition to the proposal to implement flat fares for the Link Light Rail. While the proposal "simplifies" the fare calculation for passengers, it is simply absurd that once the Lynwood station opens someone going from there all the way down to the airport will pay the same as someone hopping for a single stop. This will completely disincentivize ridership for non-commuters going short distances and hide the true price of transportation by subsidizing suburban riders.

It truly shows how a lot of people in Sound Transit making these decisions and planning for the future investments of the agency don't even use the system at all. Investing more money for expensive parking garages for Sounder stations and giving priority to people riding long distances at the expense of people who use the system on a daily basis for everyday trips.

And know that the 6% projected decrease in ridership you described as "minimal impact" will affect low-income communities the most. But hey, rich people going to concerts and Seahawks games from the suburbs will end up paying less, so I guess it's OK right?

**Irving Avila**

### *Tyler Simpson*

Hello Sound Transit Board,

I urge you to NOT switch to flat fares on Link. Doing so would make me think twice before taking the light rail, and jeopardizes how King County Metro can optimize the transit network in the coming years.

Right now, the \$99/month \$2.75 Puget Pass is sufficient for all KCM bus and Link Light Rail trips within the city of Seattle. I can freely take whichever route is best, and that's increasingly the Light Rail with each expansion. One stop Link rides are even economically encouraged by being cheaper than the bus, as should be the case: Link is operationally more efficient with less staffing needed per rider. KCM has taken advantage of this and rerouted buses to terminate at stations instead of going downtown. If fares are increased to being \$0.75 above the bus, riders will have to choose between avoiding Link and

continuing to pay \$99/month, or paying \$117/month for the ability to ride Link. I think many people who currently have a Puget Pass and only occasionally take the light rail will choose to risk fare evasion instead of taking on that increase in monthly expense. When the next light rail expansion happens in 2024 and thousands of people go from having a one seat ride downtown for \$2.75 to having to pay more money for a two seat ride, they're going to be angry about it and expect their elected representatives to be held responsible. It feels like transit riders are being punished for the expansion of Link.

While regional equity and transportation affordability is important, charging the exact same \$3.25 for a 100 mile trip from Everett to Tacoma as taking the light rail one quarter mile stop is an excessive subsidy for suburban commuters that urban transit riders are not afforded. Our public transit options have always reflected making that delicate balance - with \$10 fares on Sounder and \$5+ fares on STexpress buses that still do save suburban commuters a lot of money compared to driving. We have tools such as ORCA Lift to bridge the affordability and offer flat \$1 fares where it can make a true equity impact.

I hope you consider these concerns and reject this proposal.

Thank you,  
Tyler Simpson  
98122

### [Bill Hirt](#)

Dear Sound Transit Executive Committee Members,  
The below post from my blog <http://stopeastlinknow.blogspot.com> details an equitable fare structure for your consideration.

Bill Hirt

The November 15<sup>th</sup> meeting video of the Sound Transit and Board continued with what had been presented earlier to the Executive Board on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. It followed a "Public Hearing on Proposed Link Fare Structure" where a question was raised about using "zone-based" fares. The response being, "they had not been considered out of direction by the board to consider flat fares".

The afternoon briefing was a recap of fare-related work in 2023 and details of the staff recommendation on fare structure. That their fare guiding framework was:

*We serve passengers with a fare structure that is regionally integrated to encourage transit ridership through equitable and simple pricing, and financial stewardship.*

That a key takeaway was:

*No other agency in the region uses a distance-based fare structure."*

That flat fare considerations included:

*All trips would be the same fare.*

*Passengers would no longer have to tap off when completing their trip.*

That the initial staff recommendation for the December 15<sup>th</sup> Board was:

*Staff will recommend a flat fare structure on Link.*

Thus, Sound Transit's version of "equitable and simple" is charging someone traveling from Capital Hill to Westlake the same as a rider from Lynnwood. While a flat fare is "simple", most would believe "equitable" fares should be based on the cost of providing that service. Especially for what Sound Transit proudly proclaims as the "largest transit system expansion in the country".

While other cities use flat fares based on routes into the city, Sound Transit exacerbates the distance problem with fares for routes through the city. The rider from Lynnwood could continue to SeaTac with no increase in fare. Thus, Sound Transit's choice for flat fares is apparently due to concern that with a "distance-based fare" the Lynnwood commuter wouldn't tap off at Westgate.

Sound Transit could avoid the tap-off problem with an equitable combination of flat fares and distance-based fares. A flat fare could be used along routes from UW, Mercer Island, SeaTac and eventually Ballard and West Seattle into the DSTT. The fare would reflect the cost of both into and out of DSTT with no fares collected in tunnel, avoiding the need to identify and pay to reach their return destination.

Commuters outside that "flat fare" region would pay a fare based on the distance into the city. Each Link station having a posted fare reflecting the cost of the route to and from the DSTT. Doing so avoids the "inequity" of those traveling from Northgate having to pay the same fare as those from Lynnwood or beyond. Again, a result of Sound Transit's largest transit system expansion in country.

Flat-fare area commuters wanting to go beyond UW, Mercer Island, or SeaTac would pay fares on the return trip to reflect the cost from and to DSTT. Distance-based commuters wanting to go beyond DSTT to SeaTac or Bellevue would pay fares to reflect cost of to and from on their return.

The bottom line is Sound Transit needs to recognize that an "equitable" fare structure in the "largest transit system expansion" in the country requires a combination of flat fares and distance-based fares. The two fare structures avoid the "inequity" of the flat fare payers having to subsidize the distance-based commuters. Especially since ST3 would have never been approved without the 70% support from those in the flat fee area.

### *Unnamed Commenter*

Hello,

I have a comment on the features available to the bus drivers regarding being able to assign x2 when paying for a passenger i.e my spouse. I know this feature used to be available on basic buses, but this was out in Renton area.



If this feature is available I think it would be beneficial and less than the cost to buy two bus passes for people that travel together regularly.

Thanks