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Title: A MOTION requesting the executive to discontinue the downtown Seattle ride free area by October 2012, and to develop and submit to council, by May 2012, an implementation plan to guide the elimination of the ride free area.

Sponsors: Jane Hague, Kathy Lambert, Julia Patterson

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Clerk 08/12/2011

A MOTION requesting the executive to discontinue the downtown Seattle ride free area by October 2012, and to develop and submit to council, by May 2012, an implementation plan to guide the elimination of the ride free area.

WHEREAS, the ride free area was established in 1973 in partnership with the city of Seattle to assist in economic development efforts in downtown Seattle, and

WHEREAS, bus riders in the downtown Seattle area are able to load and unload through all doors on buses during a specified time period without paying a fare if their trip is wholly within downtown Seattle. This includes the downtown tunnel, where buses are free but rail service is not, and

WHEREAS, K.C.C. 28.94.225 authorizes the executive, subject to council approval, to execute agreements to provide ride free services within geographic areas, and

WHEREAS, the most-recent agreement between King County and the city of Seattle in 1998, established terms for city payment to Metro transit to operate fare free in the downtown Seattle area and off-set

the lost fare revenue, and

WHEREAS, the agreement with the city of Seattle has expired, but the city has continued to pay Metro transit an annual amount to offset some of the lost fare revenue, and

WHEREAS, approximately two-thirds of downtown ride free area users have already paid for their trips through the purchase of monthly passes or other fare media, with the remaining approximately nine thousand daily riders using Metro transit fare free in the area, and

WHEREAS, continued transition to the ORCA card system will increase the efficiency and speed of fare payment, and

WHEREAS, recent studies have shown that traffic and transit operations would not be significantly impacted if Metro transit began collecting fares when riders board in downtown Seattle, and

WHEREAS, the ride free area has always created some confusion for riders trying to pay their fare since riders pay as they leave on trips originating in downtown during the ride free hours, while riders pay as they enter on all other trips. Elimination of the ride free area would simplify the fare payment process for riders as every bus would become "pay as they enter," and

WHEREAS, elimination of the ride free area would add additional fare revenue and reduce fare evasion as all riders would be required to pay or show a valid pass as they board the bus at the beginning of their trip;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

A. The executive is requested to discontinue the downtown Seattle ride free area by October 2012, and to develop and submit to council by May 2012 an implementation plan to guide the elimination of the ride free area. The plan should be filed in the form of a paper original and an electronic copy with the clerk of the council, who shall retain the original and provide an electronic copy to all councilmembers.

B. The implementation plan may include, but is not limited to the following elements to ensure a smooth transition:

1. Outreach and coordination with downtown Seattle human service agencies, including a description

of a partner program or programs designed to help mitigate the increased cost of trips in downtown Seattle for disadvantaged populations;

2. Consideration of an increase in the number of trips or level of subsidy available through the human services ticket program;

3. Outreach with downtown businesses, including further promotion of the ORCA card system;

4. Coordination with the city of Seattle and affected transit agencies.

5. A customer information plan to help riders transition to the new fare collection procedures in downtown Seattle;

Descriptions of any transit route and facility modifications; and

7. Employee training.

C. In order for the city of Seattle to continue to benefit from the ride free area in downtown Seattle, the city must negotiate a new methodology that accurately off-sets the cost of the service and that acknowledges the minimal benefit to the county in providing these services.