

Dear King County County Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2021 budget. As the County looks to rebuild King County Metro, in the wake of both I-976 and the COVID-19 pandemic, Transportation Choices Coalition supports centering racial equity in service planning and programming; prioritizing transit as a component of overall economic recovery; and pursuing and supporting potential long-term funding solutions.

With that framework in mind, we believe the King County Metro budget (and any cuts) should be based on the adopted Mobility Framework, and offer the following comments on proposed budget items and actions:

- **We commend a budget that has maintained the vast majority of service hours, despite challenging financial pressures.** COVID-19 has highlighted areas of the system where needs are greatest; we are supportive of service reallocations that serve transit-dependent people and essential workers at this time.
- **Fully fund, embrace, and expand on Executive Constantine’s “reimagining fare enforcement” budget priority.** King County continues to be a national leader in fare enforcement reform, and the budget must support these efforts. We strongly support Executive Constantine’s commitment to continuing the evolution of fare enforcement. While the necessary engagement and development process is underway we advocate to proviso funds related to policing and transit (specifically, funds allocated for public-facing transit police, a portion of the \$15M budget item), so that Council can re-examine how these funds are spent, and work with the community on priorities for reallocation.
- **Continue support for Equity Cabinet and robust engagement.** We strongly support KCM’s commitment to operationalizing equity within the agency; including \$6M in additional funds to increase outreach and engagement efforts. This work, especially through partnerships with community liaisons and community-based organizations, produces better outcomes for underserved populations and builds long-term trust between government and community. Service and programming without engagement will perpetuate historic disparities.
- **Regarding fares & fare media:**
 - **We fully support funding and implementing the Annual Pass Program** (formerly “income-based fares”).
 - **Provide additional visibility and public engagement for Next Generation ORCA.** (\$14.7M is budgeted, for both communications and capital; ~\$60M total). With plans to launch in 2022, Next Generation ORCA is nearing implementation. We advocate for increased engagement with riders, and increased transparency

and visibility regarding policy decisions made during the development of this important user-facing product.

- **Do not phase out cash fares.** While we support additional engagement to help cash payers access the benefits of ORCA cards and reduced fare programs, we have deep concerns about the well-documented disproportionate impacts on low-income, unhoused, and BIPOC communities of removing the option of cash payments. If engagement on this topic does move forward, we advocate to maintain flexibility regarding farebox replacement plans.
- **Resource increased access to ORCA card procurement locations.** ORCA cards of all types (including student and senior discount cards) should be easily, readily accessible to the public. The potential for the continuation of the discussion around “cashless” makes this even more urgent. We support fully funding efforts to increase ORCA card procurement locations.

We look forward to continued budget discussions. Thank you for your commitment to King County Metro and public transit.

Sincerely,

Transportation Choices Coalition