

From: Mel Sheehan

Sent: Thursday, May 2, 2024 9:58 AM

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Subject: [EXTERNAL] Request for Delegation Status & Letter for Item 4.1 at SPPC Meeting on May 7th, 2024

Hello SPPC,

I am writing to you today to request Delegate Status on Item 4.1 at the upcoming SPPC meeting on May 7th, 2024, in regards to Fare-free/Car-free Day. I also wish to share my full thoughts on this motion put together by Councillor Franke not only to expand on what my delegation would include, but also to give more context on where my perspective comes from. I will preface this with saying I absolutely respect & honour the intentions, perspective, & goal of Councillor Franke in putting forward this motion. I only wish to offer my perspective as a daily dependent user of the LTC system, and offer a counter-offer to her motion for fare elimination for Car-Free Day that I believe is a reasonable, win-win alternative for everyone with the same goal as Councillor Franke in mind.

The content of my presentation will be my perspective as a current LTC rider who has had no choice but to depend on LTC for the better part of the past 10 years. I plan to speak on the fact that though I respect/honour Councillor Franke's intentions & perspective & goal with the motion, there are several reasons why this won't be an initiative worth exploring, let alone would a permanent free fare policy be productive when it comes to our transit system. I will also offer an alternative option that may accomplish Councillor Franke's goal/intention, but also may help improve the system as a whole more than eliminating fares for one day or permanently would.

One major reason why this initiative, or her ideas for free fares, won't work is because our transit system isn't healthy or convenient or accessible enough to entice/incentivize people to leave their cars at home. Fares aren't the standalone barrier to why people are leaving their cars at home, contrary to many people's beliefs. This was only proven to be more after COVID, when fares were not collected and the revenue loss is still very much keeping us from having the healthy transit system that we should have had decades ago that would better incentivize/entice people to use it.

A second major reason why this initiative, and her idea of permanent fare elimination, will not work is due to the fact that these fares are paying for the improvements to make our transit system the level of appropriate convenience & accessibility in order to entice people to get out of their cars & use transit. Even as a low-income person myself, I have never asked for fares to be free ever, nor have I supported any efforts to do so.

That is because not only do I have 10 plus years of experience in understanding (even though not always agreeing) with how the funding streams work for improvements to our transit system, but I've seen first-hand, not only as a user, but as an observer, the "passing the buck" that has happened constantly onto the ridership when other levels of government, even after several efforts by Council & others to advocate for better funding for transit, don't fund it properly themselves.

Just recently, on top of that, I was one of the hundreds of riders/dependents of the transit system who had to deal with the 2nd increase (of 15-17%, for a total of 40% total fare increases since 2018) to our fares, and it wasn't entirely due to COVID either, but COVID certainly played a part. But what played a more massive part, and this is again working against making fares

free, is that post-secondary institutions have refused to pay their fair share (pun intended) of the fare increase, considering their students make up the majority of the revenue stream & ridership. They refused to pay more than 6% of an increase to their fare program (which self-subsidizes I might add, unlike the fare system for the rest of us) because "they don't see a value in the system". Which was really ironic in the recent TA strike when suddenly students were complaining about not being able to take transit to campus/class. But I digress....

The third reason neither this initiative for Car-Free Day, or permanent fare elimination will not work is due to the fact that LTC is already willingly forgoing revenue by allowing people to ride free everyday if they make enough of an excuse, and with discouraging their operators from enforcing their already-in-existence fare policy. I shudder to think how much revenue loss is coming from that daily, considering not many operators know how to use the keypad on the fare box to accurately keep count of people who don't pay fares, meaning an additional loss in revenue that the rest of us have to compensate for is not being tracked or included properly.

As someone who has had several interactions & opportunities to learn about the transit system itself, from how the farebox works to the function of each key on the keypad, I learned a lot about the keypad & the importance of it. Presently, & historically, there is the "Insufficient fare" option on the keypad on the fare box, which is what should be pressed everytime someone either don't pay their entire fare, or their card doesn't work (which is still a HUGE issue across fare cards) to people refusing to pay. This would be a greater opportunity to not only discourage drivers from confronting/refusing service to people, but would also more accurately track the lost revenue that comes from it. I don't see many drivers using this keypad, nor do many new drivers even know about it in the first place.

Those of us, not only of low-income, but those who are also in the disabled community, who depend on the service out of no other option or due to not having the privilege of having another option, have already borne the brunt of the costs to improve our system as is, with little to no return on that investment & constant hit on our own finances. Due to either lack of government funding, or COVID revenue loss, to current daily revenue loss, to the fact that post-secondary students don't pay their fair share of any increases due to, quite frankly, a disgusting sense of entitlement & ignorance of their responsibility as users to share in the impact of fare increases, (and LTC having refused to take these post-secondary institutions to a referendum when they objected to paying their actual fair share, I might also add, which is a whole other can of worms by itself) so to not only have a fare-free day initiative, but also in the future present a permanent fare elimination, does nothing to actually improve the system for anyone, and the revenue loss will need to be recouped somehow. And if riders aren't going to be expected to pay fares, then that will mean improvements to the system will probably be on the chopping block, which is entirely opposite of Councillor Franke's clear goal.

I personally invite any councillor to give up their cars for a day & take a day to travel by bus with me in order to demonstrate just how unhealthy our current transit system is, & has been for several years, if not decades. Unfortunately, it may be a little more costly for any councillor, as cash fare for what will be multiple trips that will exceed a 90 minute transfer makes it very cost-ineffective for anyone who doesn't have a transit pass or stored value card or tickets or what have you.

Which of course would be much easier if our transit system offered a day pass instead of needing 3.50 every round trip. That in itself would be a great compromise for Car-Free Day & going forward if Councillor Franke wishes to entice/encourage people to leave their cars at home, not only on Car-Free Day, but on any day where they only need to make trips to and from somewhere, and maybe even a broader incentive for visitors as well. Other municipalities have it, and it allows unlimited trips on their transit system for the entire day, which is more cost-effective by itself than using tickets or cash fares or a monthly or weekly pass. The idea has been presented in the past, but LTC decided against implementing it several times when it's been presented by even former Chair of the Commission & other Commission members.

Which I have always found strange, as I think not only would it benefit users, but it would also benefit LTC as it would be an additional source of revenue towards improving the system to

being more of a healthy enough system to further entice people to get out of their cars or leave them at home. Maybe a day pass can finally be an option presented through this motion as a compromise.

I hope that in this letter, & in the delegation if it is granted, that I make a very clear case for while I support the intention/goal of Councillor Franke, the system, & the funding, as it is set up now does not help towards that goal of enticing people to take transit on not only Car-Free Day, but also permanently by eliminating fares. And I hope offering an alternative/compromise, that perhaps we could see the overall goal/intention of Councillor Franke realized.

I thank the Committee for your time and attention to this matter.

I also give my consent to include this letter on the public agenda.

Sincerely,

Melissa Sheehan