



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 3

COUNCILMEMBER KSHAMA SAWANT

Dear Mayor Durkan and Executive Constantine,

I am writing to urge you to take every possible measure to mitigate traffic during the three weeks of the Viaduct demolition, referred to as the “Seattle Squeeze”, including encouraging usage of public transit by making it free for all throughout the city during that time.

During a recent briefing to the City Council, several Councilmembers and representatives of the Seattle Department of Transportation repeatedly suggested that workers could arrange with their bosses to come into work an hour late, or leave an hour early, to avoid rush hour traffic. This is not a realistic plan for the majority of working people. Anyone who has ever held a working class job knows that most bosses are not so accommodating. Despite words to the contrary, the burden of navigating these traffic jams falls overwhelmingly on the backs of working people who have no other option.

To mitigate this, the City and County should make public transit a more convenient alternative for regular people, many of whom have been gentrified out of their neighborhoods and far from their workplaces. **Immediately, public transit from Metro to the Light Rail should be made free for all during the three weeks of the Seattle Squeeze.**

Already, rider fares constitute only a small proportion of the revenue that Metro and other public transit agencies use to fund their operations. For example, Metro’s [2017 Annual Report](#) states that only 27.3% of its costs were covered by fare revenues. To make metro free for all, countywide, during the weeks of the Seattle Squeeze, would cost less than \$10 million, which is well within the ability of the county and its cities to fund. This would not only be a benefit for regular transit riders, it would also make public transit a more realistic alternative to driving for many working class people, and encourage its continued use. That will mean fewer cars on the roads, less traffic, and less pollution as an additional benefit.

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600 Fourth Avenue, Floor 2 | PO Box 34025, Seattle | Washington 98124-4025

Phone (206) 684-8016 **Fax** (206) 684-8587 **TTY** 711

Email kshama.sawant@seattle.gov

In order to make this viable, more buses and trains will be required to be deployed, Therefore, working with the unions representing them, drivers and maintenance workers should be compensated with overtime pay to fulfill the extra duties.

Free public transit will be essential during the anticipated traffic snarls of the Seattle Squeeze, but it should also point the way toward making public transit in the region permanently free, paid for by taxing big business. Many more people would use public transportation, leading to fewer cars on our roads. Public funds could be used more efficiently, since no public resources would need to be spent collecting fares (which substantially slows transit, making it less efficient) or selling ORCA cards, and fewer cars mean the roads would last longer before needing to be repaved. People would be more able to hop on a bus for a short trip, creating a more connected city. Free mass transit and fewer cars would also contribute considerably to reducing Seattle's environmental impact, and set an inspiring example at a time when climate change is leading to wildfires, hurricanes, and increasingly serious human costs.

The region's transit needs should be fully funded with big business taxes, with expansion of routes and frequency of bus service to make it viable for working families to not have to regularly depend on cars. A tax on big business would also make the deeply regressive tax system less onerous on working people, replacing the flat, regressive tax of fares with a progressive tax on those who hold the real wealth in society.

In the short term, I urge you to take immediate steps to make public transit free for all to use during the Seattle Squeeze, when working people will be hard-pressed just getting to and from work, with an already serious traffic situation being made much worse.

Sincerely,
Kshama Sawant
Seattle City Councilmember District 3