



Kshama Sawant
Seattle City Councilmember

Sisters and Brothers,

I want to thank you for organizing this event tonight, and extend my apologies for being unable to join you in person. Young people need to take leadership of movements for social change, and you are demonstrating that through your work.

We all know that the cost and limited access of transit in this city is a major obstacle for Seattleites.

We can build a world-class public transit system in Seattle. We can massively expand our bus and light rail services. And we can make transit truly affordable, by reversing fare hikes, and providing free transit passes for students, low-income Seattleites, seniors, and disabled riders. We need 24 hour service. We need more feeder route connecting with major bus lines. The people of Seattle want all of this.

Our biggest obstacle is the "business as usual" political establishment, both at the city and state levels.

Washington is the most regressively taxed state in the nation. That means that low-income working people bear the brunt of all taxes. Another consequence of regressive taxation is that it simply does not raise the revenues needed. And the Republican and Democratic Party establishments have proven time and again that they aren't willing to fight for funding alternatives.

It's not just transit. The legislature has been censured for criminally underfunding K-12 education, and has long ignored social needs, ranging from mental health services to housing. At the same time, they don't hesitate to answer when Boeing executives call. How can the establishment find \$8.7 billion for Boeing in three days, but find itself at a loss when it comes to transit, education, and social services? It's a question of priorities.

The struggle to win high quality transit is thus tied to the struggle to force the establishment to tax corporations and the super-wealthy. We build that fight, we can secure real victories. The most immediate place to build that fight right now is at the city level. We can't settle for lip service. We need to hold them accountable to win.

Over the last two years, on three different occasions, Councilmember Licata and I put forward a business head tax and an increase in the commercial parking tax to increase transit funding. But every time the conservative majority of the Council voted no. We have a number of options – a business head tax, a commercial parking tax, an excise tax, a millionaires' tax. We have no shortage of options. What we lack are representatives with the political backbone to fight for them.

Currently, the Mayor's proposed budget does not provide nearly enough funding for transit. With pressure, we can secure amendments that will dramatically strengthen our transit services, and put us in a much better position to win full funding for transit next year.

I encourage you all to come to City Hall this upcoming Tuesday at 6 pm on October 27th to speak to our transit needs at a People's Budget Town Hall. Together we can lay the foundation for a budget that fully funds all of our city's basic human needs. Let's make this city a livable place for all, not a playground for the rich.

Solidarity,
Kshama

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