

**MUNICIPAL LEAGUE OF KING COUNTY  
OPPOSES  
SEATTLE TRANSPORTATION BENEFIT DISTRICT PROPOSITION 1**

Seattle Transportation Benefit District Proposition 1 asks Seattle voters to raise their car-tab fees by \$60 a year to pay for a range of transportation improvements in the city. The fee will last for 10 years, and will raise an estimated \$204 million. The initiative was authored by a group of citizens who took testimony at numerous public meetings over a two-year period.

The proposal includes:

- **Transit:** Speed and reliability improvements to eight major corridors; projects that provide better access from neighborhoods to light rail and frequent bus service corridors; and improved safety for transit riders.
- **Pavement preservation:** Allows the city to capitalize on Bridging the Gap investments to accomplish 26 major pavement preservation projects each year and 38 major spot repairs.
- **Pedestrian and bike mobility:** Additional sidewalk, crosswalk, pedestrian signals and projects that improve safety and mobility.
- **High-Capacity Transit investments:** Preserves \$20 (plus possibility of bonding authority) for High-Capacity Transit investments, once city has demonstrated need, completed planning and is eligible for matching dollars from federal or private funds.

**ARGUMENTS FOR THIS MEASURE**

- Improves speed and reliability on major transit corridors. Forty-nine percent of the funding enhances transit infrastructure; investing in dedicated bus lanes, more electric wires for bus trolleys, and improving speed and reliability of the transit system.
- Invests 24% of funds in pedestrian and bicycle improvements including 80 blocks of new sidewalks and 40 miles of bike lanes and sharrows
- Devotes 30% of the overall funding to repair and repave roads. This doubles the number of road repairs and fixes thousands of potholes on major streets.
- Reflects community priorities identified through a comprehensive community input process
- Relies on existing master plans (e.g., transit, pedestrian and bike) to define specific projects/investments
- Funds transportation improvements on a broad basis and is not overly invested in one specific large project. Instead, the plan prioritizes equity and return on investments
- Investments are needed now and this is one of the few ways the money can be raised. Several organizations supporting the poorest citizens back this measure because of the millions of dollars that would go to transit over the decade.

## **ARGUMENTS AGAINST THIS MEASURE**

- Does little to address the “Bridging the Gap” backlog since only 29% actually goes to roads and maintenance. Proponents’ claim that this measure will repave and repair local streets to make them safer is misleading. This measure only funds two lane miles a year.
- Does little to improve transit. Of the \$100 million designated to be spent on transit, \$18 million goes to studies for streetcars yet there is no money in sight for building any streetcar extensions. There is only funding for .89 corridors per year and the average benefit is only an improvement of four minutes. Proponents tout the expansion of the electric bus network, yet there will be no new bus routes funded by this measure. Instead, the expansion electrifies existing diesel bus routes. The proposal funds no new bus hours and no new bus routes.
- Fails to address much needed bridge investments. Over 60% of Seattle’s 115 bridges are rated poor or worse.
- Overly vague. Proponents argue that this allows for “flexibility” and alignment with existing transportation plans. But critics say it’s essentially a blank check and an opportunity for misspending.
- Places a disproportionate burden on the poor and working class. The owner of a Lamborghini pays the same as the unemployed owner of an old Pinto or motor scooter. We are in the midst of a severe economic downturn and people are having a difficult time paying taxes and expenses. This is the wrong time to propose such a regressive measure. The additional \$60 car tab from this measure raises the average car tab in Seattle to \$180 (125 percent increase from beginning of the year). The State Legislature provided for multiple fundraising tools including property taxes, sales taxes, tolls and impact fees charged to developers.
- Transportation investments are important, but this measure, as currently structured is unwise. A better approach would be to focus on the transportation investments that benefit multiple users and that show the strongest returns on investment.

## **RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE**

### **The Municipal League of King County Opposes Seattle Transportation Benefit District Proposition 1.**

While we recognize the importance of investing in the City’s transportation system, the measure as structured is problematic. We are troubled by the vague nature of the plan and the priorities reflected (particularly the significant support for high-capacity planning studies when there is a significant maintenance backlog). In these uncertain economic times, we are also hesitant to support a measure that relies on such a regressive tax.

**MUNICIPAL LEAGUE OF KING COUNTY  
SUPPORTS  
CITY OF SEATTLE PROPOSITION 1: FAMILIES AND EDUCATION LEVY**

Seattle voters are being asked to renew the City of Seattle Regular Tax Levy Including Families and Education (known as the Families & Education Levy). If approved, the measure would direct \$232 million to educational investments over the next seven years. The levy-funded programs aim to improve school readiness, academic achievement, graduation rates and college/career readiness. Specific investments include:

- Enhanced academic programs at schools with a high proportion of low-income students;
- Early-learning programs that improve academic success;
- School-based health clinics proven to increase learning and graduation rates;
- Extra learning time and summer school programs for students struggling to advance from middle to high school;
- Academic & college readiness programs for middle and high school students.

Based on an average estimated residential assessed value of \$462,045 in 2012 and of \$567,971 in 2018, the estimated annual cost to the average homeowner will be \$124 in 2012 and \$126 in 2018.

**ARGUMENTS FOR THE FAMILIES & EDUCATION LEVY**

- This measure funds needed programs benefiting Seattle's most vulnerable children including enhanced academics at schools with a high proportion of low income students; school-based health clinics; early learning clinics; early learning programs; extra learning time and summer school programs for struggling students; and academic and college readiness programs.
- Increased funding will help reach more in-need students. The magnitude of the problems facing children and families warrant this size of investment. This measure targets the students and schools with the greatest opportunity for improvement.
- Levy-funded programs are held accountable for specific and measurable results. Contracts with community organizations are competitively awarded and performance-based. Third parties review data to help understand, evaluate and improve efforts. Indicators and outcomes are reported annually and interim data will be used for continuous improvement. Investments not achieving desired outcomes will be defunded.
- The levy's recommendations were developed by the Levy Advisory Committee comprised of a broad base of community members appointed by the Mayor and City Council. Considerable public input, review and comment was also involved including numerous outreach meetings and opportunities, including translation and interpretation services.
- Investing in the education of our children is a paramount responsibility of society and makes good economic sense – an educated, skilled workforce benefits employers and the community.
- This measure continues and enhances a strong partnership between the City of Seattle and Seattle Public Schools to maximize the outcomes of educational investments.

## **ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE FAMILIES AND EDUCATION LEVY**

- In the twenty years that City of Seattle residents have been paying for the Families and Education Levy (the levy has been renewed and expanded twice since initially passing in 1990), the levy has not produced the benefits supporters predicted: closing the achievement gap and ensuring more students stay in school. Only a minority of children in these programs are showing measurable gains.
- Seattle voters have been generous to Seattle Schools. This will be the fourth levy in two years. Yet, despite this funding, the achievement gap remains large and is not closing.
- Approving this measure sends the message that no change is needed in the Seattle public schools. There's no incentive to rethink how education is delivered, to reform the system, or to make significant changes that improve learning outcomes.
- The current economic climate is troubling and many homeowners are struggling to make ends meet. The burden of this measure falls on property owners – many of whom have lost equity in their homes.
- The School District is responsible for education policy and must be held accountable. Funding education through the City creates unnecessary bureaucracy and diffuses accountability. Funding this levy gives the District an opportunity to give the appearance of fiscal responsibility while backfilling programs through the City.

## **RECOMMENDATION AND RATIONALE**

### **The Municipal League of King County SUPPORTS the City of Seattle Proposition 1: Families and Education Levy.**

We strongly support the goal of ensuring that all Seattle students graduate from high school prepared for college or the career of their choice. Approving this levy will make needed investments in successful, scalable programs so that this goal can be achieved.

We are impressed by the community input, evidence-based decision-making, and accountability measures that have already been put into place by the City and the Levy Oversight Committee. The strong evaluative component offers an excellent opportunity to fine-tune programs and build on successes.

We are concerned about the cost of this measure – which will be a hardship for some struggling homeowners – but we believe that the overall return on investment far exceeds the costs. Also, since the measure relies on property taxes it is not as regressive as other taxes.

Passage of this measure must not be viewed as a vote of confidence in the Seattle School District. Instead, it is a signal of the importance of strategic educational investments.