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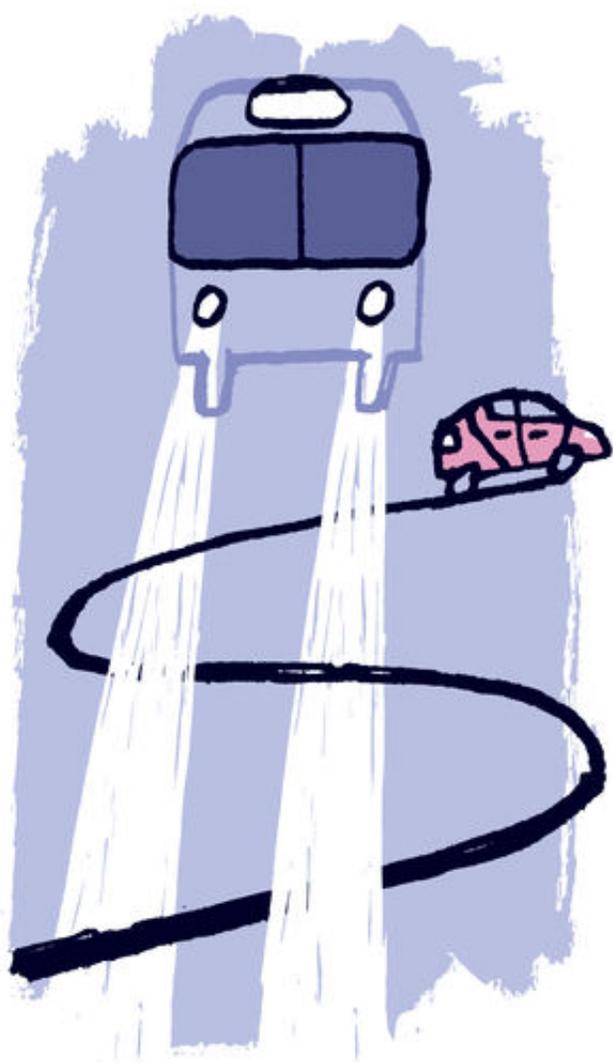
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Guest: Vote 'no' on Proposition 1, money better spent on roads

King County's Proposition 1 would increase taxes to support Metro but it would not solve Metro's financial problems. Voters should reject it.

By **Bill Eager**

Special to The Times



THE Metropolitan King County Council is asking voters, on the April 22 ballot, to consider increasing taxes for King County Metro and provide some funding for local streets. Proposition 1 would, for 10 years, add an annual \$60 fee on car tabs and increase the sales tax by 0.1 percent.

Voters should reject these proposed tax increases. This would be the county's fourth tax increase to benefit Metro in eight years. Despite this increased revenue, Metro has delivered only 35 percent of service increases it promised voters during that time frame.

This proposed increase would still not make Metro's budget sustainable.

Proposition 1 gives too much to Metro without asking for enough reform of the agency, gives too much to Seattle at the expense of South and East King County, and continues high subsidies for riders who can afford to pay more while imposing a regressive tax on all county taxpayers. Potentially, it could take funding away from crucial road needs as voters tire of opening their wallets.

Metro would replace the expiring annual \$20 congestion fee on private vehicles with a \$60 fee. Metro officials said they needed that temporary \$20 fee because sales-tax revenues were down due to the recession. The recession

is over and record sales-tax revenues for Metro of \$471 million are forecast for 2014.

Between 2000 and 2012, Metro's operating costs increased by 83 percent, revenues increased by 56 percent and ridership increased by only 20 percent. Metro's hourly operating cost is higher than all but three of the top 10 U.S. transit agencies, according to the National Transit Database (those higher are two in New York City and one in San Francisco). Proposition 1 does nothing to address this problem.

In its 2013 report, the Municipal League of King County recommended maintaining wage restraint for Metro employees and also noted, "The administrative expense that the county allocates to Metro increased significantly and poses a major challenge to meeting the Metro cost control goal."

There is a serious imbalance between those who pay for Metro and those who benefit, according to the 2010 Regional Transit Task Force Final Report and Recommendations.

Even taking into account commute trips to and from the Eastside, Seattle taxpayers pay 34 percent of Metro's operating costs and get 61 percent of Metro service. Eastside taxpayers pay 35 percent, but get only 17 percent of Metro's service. South King County taxpayers pay 31 percent, but only get 22 percent of the service. Proposition 1 would make the imbalance worse. Two-thirds of King County voters live in East and South King County.

Fares cover only 28 percent of Metro's operating cost. Of the top 10 U.S. transit agencies, only two have a slightly lower farebox recovery. The average farebox recovery for these top 10 is 36 percent. Is it fair to subsidize bus rides for a Queen Anne banker or lawyer while imposing a \$60 car tab on a single mother living in Auburn who needs a car to juggle two jobs? When Seattle proposed a \$60 car tab in a 2011 ballot measure, the Municipal League and others opposed it as a regressive tax. It was soundly defeated.

King County claims that some of the proposed funding would go to streets and highways. It would do so by tapping car-tab money to increase transit subsidies and to provide a smaller portion for roads.

This money could reduce the amount of potential car-tab funds that should go to roads in the future. The tunneling machine Bertha is indefinitely stalled; Highway 520's cracked pontoons are draining construction reserves and its Montlake segment is still underfunded by more than \$1 billion. Is it realistic to assume that the rest of the state would help pick up the tab?

Vote no on these regressive tax increases.

Bill Eager is chairman of the Eastside Transportation Association, an organization dedicated to increasing mobility through reduced congestion. Website: eastsideta.com



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