2012 Seattle City Council Statement of Legislative Intent

Ready for Notebook

Tab	Action	Option	Version
114	2	A	1

Budget Action Title: Third Avenue Transit Corridor Initiative

Councilmembers: Bagshaw; Burgess; Clark; Conlin; Rasmussen

Staff Analyst: Bill Laborde; Ben Noble

Date		Total	SB	BH	SC	TR	JG	NL	RC	TB	MO
	Yes										
	No										
	Abstain										
	Absent										

Statement of Legislative Intent:
The Council requests the Executive create a task force to identify actions needed to improve the functionality, urban design, safety and security of the downtown Third Ave Transit Corridor, as well as to recommend options for addressing the impacts on tourism, economic development and social equity arising from the elimination of Metro's Ride Free Area (RFA).

Multiple City departments will need to be represented on the task force, including the Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle Police Department, Seattle Public Utilities, Department of Planning and Development and the Office of Economic Development. Given that the impending elimination of Metro's RFA will significantly affect the corridor, King County Metro Transit will also need to be a key player in developing recommendations and a strategy for implementing those recommendations, as will representatives from the neighboring business community, the Downtown Seattle Association, non-profit service providers, and other stakeholders. This effort would build on previous work conducted by the City and other agencies and stakeholders over the past few years along Third Avenue, with the goal of reassessing existing programs and previous plans in light of current conditions and the impending transit changes. The team will be tasked with identifying short term and long term actions, potential changes in policy, resource needs and possible funding sources and strategies.

In support of this effort, Council plans to appropriate additional funding for regular cleaning in the corridor and to set aside one-time capital funding to support appropriate infrastructure investments. The Council looks forward to recommendations from the task force about how best to invest these dollars.

The following highlights some of the key challenges to be addressed by the task force:

- Continuing coordination with King County to mitigate the impact of the elimination of the RFA (scheduled for October 2012), both with regard to concerns about social equity and impacts on transit operations;

- Improving signage, lighting and/or other physical changes that improve visitors' feelings of safety and security;
- Identifying and implementing effective means of policing the corridor and ensuring public safety, particularly in hotspots such as Third and Lenora and Third between Pike and Pine;
- Integrating well-maintained transit waiting areas into the streetscape in a manner that serves transit operations and improves perceptions of public safety and security, while maintaining pedestrian access to neighboring businesses;
- Engaging adjacent building owners/businesses to coordinate and improve street edges and improve stewardship of sidewalks, building entrances and retail fronts;
- Expanding existing efforts to remove trash and clean sidewalks on a daily basis;
- Promoting increased and more vibrant retail activity; and
- Engaging low-income housing operators and social service providers in their efforts to maintain security and livability near their entrances.

Background:

On August 16, 2011, the King County Council enacted Ordinance 17169, imposing a two-year congestion reduction charge of $20 on vehicle registration renewals. The County legislation also included a provision (Sec. 11) discontinuing the downtown RFA by October 2012. The County Executive has until May 2012 to submit to the County Council an implementation plan for elimination of the RFA. King County Metro has convened several work groups to develop the implementation plan. Seattle staff are participating in the two groups focused on human service impacts and bus speed and reliability.

The RFA was established in 1973 as part of an effort to revitalize downtown, but allowing riders to board downtown without payment has also allowed large masses of buses to move more quickly through downtown and to stay on schedule in the area where a huge proportion of the system's riders board or alight. Now that most riders carry Orca cards, buses board more quickly. However, with the high level of regional and local buses working their way through downtown, Metro and SDOT planners still have concerns about delays when the RFA ceases. Moreover, in the nearly 40 years the RFA has been in place, many human service providers have located within the RFA. Even though Metro plans to continue and expand a robust free and reduced fare ticket program, these service providers and advocates have expressed concerns about a loss of mobility for homeless and other vulnerable populations.

Additionally, Third Avenue has long had problems with poor urban design, insufficient lighting, crime, graffiti and trash on the street. A handful of storefront businesses and building entrances have become nodes for loitering, with a couple streetcorners in particular perceived to operate day and night as open-air drug markets. In the last few years there have been some high profile violent crimes on Third Avenue. All this, along with several empty storefronts, has created a popular perception that Third Avenue and the downtown commercial core as a whole are becoming more dangerous.

Downtown stakeholders have long recognized these problems. In 2007, the City of Seattle, King County Metro and the Downtown Seattle Association negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding to assign responsibilities for a long list of short-term improvements in the areas of Public Safety, Cleaning and Trash Collection, Lighting, Urban Design and Tracking Programs. The MOU was never executed. Department of Planning and Development also undertook development of an urban design study that produced a two-part set of recommendations on bus shelters, signage, glass canopies, landscaping, sidewalk improvements, storefront improvements and public art. That plan was never implemented although the recommendations were well received by stakeholders.

Responsible Council Committee(s): Transportation

Date Due to Council: Written quarterly reports or briefings due in March 31, June 30, September 30, and December
31, 2012