

Transit Riders Union



2023 highlights

Continuing the Fight for Progressive Revenue & Against Austerity



In 2020, TRU played a major role in winning JumpStart Seattle, a progressive payroll-based tax on our city’s largest corporations—notably Amazon—which now raises over \$250 million annually for affordable housing, equitable development, Green New Deal programs, economic resilience, and emergency used related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, we’ve fought alongside allies to defend this robust progressive tax, and the integrity of the community-supported spending plan, from multiple attempts to dismantle it.

Now, Seattle anticipates a major structural shortfall in the City’s general fund starting in 2025, forcing tough choices to raise new revenue or cut vital programs and services. This year, TRU’s general secretary served on the Seattle Revenue Stabilization Work Group, tasked with exploring progressive tax options to fill the gap.

We formed our own internal committee of TRU members who did extensive research on tax options and compiled a report, “Progressive Tax Options for Seattle,” which we issued alongside the official work group report. This will be an invaluable resource for future efforts to right

our unjust and regressive tax system and adequately fund vital public goods and services.

We anticipate a major fight over the Seattle City Budget next year, as big business interests will attempt to divert revenue from JumpStart to address the general fund shortfall, effectively defunding affordable housing and Green New Deal programs. With our longstanding leadership on this issue, TRU is well-placed to play a major role in yet another defensive effort and to push for new progressive revenue—such as a CEO Pay Ratio Tax or a city-level Capital Gains tax—to fill the structural budget gap.

Candidate Forums on Transportation, Equity, and Mobility

This spring we collaborated with transportation and climate allies to host candidate forums for open Seattle City Council seats in advance of the August Primary elections.



From transit reliability to safe places to walk, ride and roll, from smooth sidewalks to neighborhoods that can sustain and support us, mobility access and equity are part of all of our lives on a daily basis. And while our needs may be different, we all need to be able to get around our community safely, reliably and in ways that will lead us to a sustainable climate future.

We asked the candidates questions about their positions on issues of transportation, equity, and mobility. Forums were in person and virtual, and we posted recordings online.

Organizing for Renter Protections Across King County: Big Wins!



TRU continued our work with allies in the Stay Housed Stay Healthy coalition this year, organizing with renters to pass stronger renter protection laws in jurisdictions across King County. In 2023, we won big victories in the cities of Seattle, SeaTac, and Shoreline:

This year, Seattle joined the South King County cities of Auburn and Burien and **capped late fees at \$10 per month** — as far as we know, the strongest standard in the nation.

The same legislation **banned Notice Delivery Fees**. These arbitrary charges, often as much as \$50 or \$75, are tacked on whenever a landlord pins a notice to a tenant's door. As far as we know, Seattle is the first city in the nation to ban these fees. This is an important step toward addressing the growing problem of rental "junk fees," which TRU's campaign coordinator [wrote about in The Progressive magazine this year](#).

With our organizing and advocacy, the South King County **City of SeaTac** and the North King County **City of Shoreline** also passed strong sets of renter protections in 2023, including:

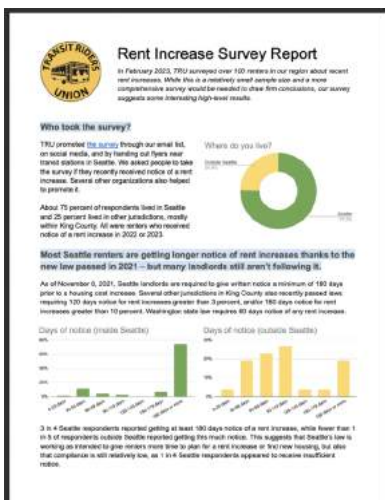
- 120 days notice for rent increases greater than 3%
- 180 days notice for rent increases greater than 10%
- Move in costs are capped and payable in installments.
- Late fees are capped (2% in SeaTac, 1.5% in Shoreline).
- Social security number can't be required to apply for a rental.
- Renters on a fixed income can adjust their rent due date.

SeaTac also passed stronger protections from eviction without just cause, and prohibited rent increases on uninhabitable units. Shoreline also banned Notice Delivery Fees and some other rental "junk fees," and required that all fees must be disclosed in the lease for transparency.

"I'm not sure how I am going to be able to afford to move to a cheaper place, since my current rent is so high and they have thousands in deposit...I can't save enough to be able to afford to move. So instead, I'll have to continue to struggle to pay all my bills and keep paying more rent than I can afford at this time." — **Samantha, Shoreline renter**

This year, TRU has also been organizing extensively with renters in the City of Tukwila, where we ran a successful minimum wage ballot initiative in 2022 and where over 60 percent of households are renters — a higher proportion than any other jurisdiction in King County. We will continue this organizing next year, and we expect the Tukwila City Council to pass legislation in the first half of 2024.

TRU Survey: Renter Laws Work, but Landlords are Breaking Them



Early this year, TRU asked renters who recently received notice of a rent increase to fill out a short survey. We analyzed the data, TRU's campaign coordinator [wrote about what we learned](#), and we analyzed and published a [report](#) on our results:

- New notice laws passed in Seattle and in other King County jurisdictions over the past few years appear to be working as intended to give many renters more time to adjust to a rent increase or find new housing.
- Seattle's new Economic Displacement Relocation Assistance law may be causing many landlords to keep rent increases under 10 percent (wow!).
- Non-compliance is high. The landlords of about 1 in 3 survey respondents appeared to be breaking at least one law related to rent increases. More work is needed to ensure that renters and landlords are aware of these laws, and to improve compliance by landlords.

Progress on Raising the Minimum Wage Across King County!

Last year, TRU coordinated Raise the Wage Tukwila, a citizens' initiative to raise Tukwila's minimum wage that passed with 83 percent of the vote! This year, we participated in the rule-making process and succeeded in winning major improvements to the City's proposed interpretation and implementation of the law. We also did outreach to Tukwila workers to identify violations of the new law and ensure that workers are paid the new, higher wage. In 2024, Tukwila's minimum wage will rise with a cost-of-living adjustment to \$20.29— as far as we know, the highest in the country.



TESTIFYING AT THE BURIEN CITY COUNCIL

This year, we built on that victory by organizing for higher minimum wages in several other King County jurisdictions. Working with labor and community allies, we pushed for legislation similar to Tukwila's in unincorporated King County— including White Center, Skyway, and Vashon Island, among many other regions—and in the City of Burien. While neither of these bills have yet been passed into law, we expect the King County Council to take action early next year for unincorporated areas. We are working with allies and community members to decide next steps in Burien.

We also supported *Raise the Wage Renton*, a campaign inspired by our

success in Tukwila and led by the Seattle Democratic Socialists of America and the Renton Education Association. Our organizers and members helped with signature gathering, we contributed some funds, and we gave the campaign's leadership team advice based on our experience last year. The campaign gathered enough signatures to qualify for a February special election in 2024! We plan to help get out the vote to win another big minimum wage victory early next year.



Encampment Outreach & Direct Mutual Aid to Houseless Neighbors



Throughout 2023, TRU's volunteer camp outreach team continued bringing home-cooked meals and life-saving supplies to our neighbors surviving outside every week. This project is supported by donations from individual TRU members and supporters specifically to our camp outreach fund, and also by a one-time pandemic-related grant from King County. This

project is totally volunteer-run, so all funds go directly to purchasing food, propane, batteries, water and other basic necessities.

