

How To Resolve The Transit Fare Evasion Problem

by Guest Contributors - Thursday, May 10, 2012

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Transportation Minister Blair Leckstrom is bringing in new legislation to crack down on fare evaders, allowing collection agencies to go after people who don't buy tickets. If Leckstrom really wants to deal with fare evasion, then he needs to realize why people don't pay the transit fares.

If people can't afford to buy a transit ticket, then how can you expect them to pay the \$173 fines for not paying the fare? Now he wants to legislate collection agencies to further harass these people who can't afford to buy a bus ticket. He further wants to prevent fare evaders from being able to renew their drivers licence or buy car insurance. But Leckstrom does not realize that if people can't afford to buy a transit ticket, then how can they afford a car let alone buy car insurance.

Mayor Gregor Robertson who didn't pay a \$173 fine during his 2008 election campaign for accidentally riding two SkyTrain zones on a one-zone fare said he wanted to draw attention to what he called unreasonably high fines. He finally did pay the fine. BC NDP leader Adrian Dix also forgot to pay his fare and had to pay the fine. But people forgetting to pay the fare are not the problem. They can afford pay their fines. Now Leckstrom wants to go after those you can't pay their fines.

The problem is that low income people, particularly those on social assistance cannot afford to pay the fare which is why they evade the fare. The fare really becomes a problem when those who can't afford to pay the fare for three zones, so sometimes they only have a one or two zone fare to cross three zones, and then they get hit with a \$173 fine. Low income people have to pay the same one, two and three zone fares as those who are working.

After years of hard work and campaigning, concession fares were offered to post-secondary students to pay only a one zone fare to cross all three zones if they had a valid student card. But they were not afforded the same concession fare as high school students and seniors. University and College students now get a U pass as part of their student fees which makes transit accessible and affordable to them. The rationale given for this is that students are not able to work full-time. People with disabilities can access an annual pass a low annual fee. So fare evasion is not a problem for them.

How can low income people, especially those on social assistance pay the same fare as those who are working? They should also have access to concession fares or they should be given a transit pass with their assistance or both depending on their situation. This would solve problem of fare evasion and all so-called cost for cracking down on fare evasion with extra security costs and installing turnstiles. This type of legislation that goes after the poor is extremely counter productive and does not solve the problem of fare evasion.