

Seattle Weekly, 10-14-08

# Cyclists, the Tunnel Is Yours

## Sims and Co. lift moratorium for downtown depot.

By [Brian Miller](#)

Published on October 14, 2008 at 8:04pm

When King County Executive Ron Sims last month announced a projected Metro bus system deficit of between \$30 and \$40 million, along with fare increases and service expansion, few took notice of a small bus tunnel-related paragraph. Effective Sept. 22, said Sims, bicyclists would be allowed into the Third Avenue tunnel to load or unload from the bike racks installed on all Metro buses. Until then, they had been excluded.

This is understandably confusing for bicycle commuters who, because of a flat tire or after-work symphony tickets, have wanted to catch a downtown bus home. Before Sims' press conference, cyclists had to schlep north to Convention Place or south to the International District station to use the bus racks on tunnel routes.

"It has been a long conversation," says Cascade Bicycle Club advocacy director David Hiller of the bike-in-tunnel prohibition, which CBC began to appeal in 2002. Looking ahead to August 2009, when the tunnel will open to Sound Transit light-rail trains (which admit bicycles inside), CBC argued—with apparent success—that the tunnel had to be system-compatible.

Meanwhile, *above* ground, downtown cyclists are generally prevented from using Metro racks in the Ride Free Area, meaning they must schlep to stops at Battery or South Jackson Streets if they want to bring their bike along for the ride—which would seem to contradict Metro's new subterranean pilot program (projected to last through February 2010). Yet the above-ground policy is also soon to change, through a second pilot program announced by Sims, an avid cyclist who has participated in the nearly 200-mile Seattle-to-Portland ride. Beginning next February, above-ground loading downtown will be permitted at all hours *except* 6–9 a.m. and 3–7 p.m. Monday through Friday. (The current policy is to ban bikes on racks in the Ride Free Area between the hours of 6 a.m. and 7 p.m. In the rest of the city, anything goes, no matter the hour or the day.)

The new rules are all about safety, says Metro spokesperson Eileen Kadesh. Of the old bike-tunnel ban, she explains, "It was intended to mirror our policy [above ground]...with buses being nose-to-nose." So has there been a history of bike-loading accidents that proves the procedure is unusually dangerous? Metro told *SW* to file public-disclosure requests to get an answer, but Hiller says the agency is bluffing. "We know of [no accidents]," he says. "We've got no safety data one way or the other."

"Our goal is universal bicycle access to and on transit," concludes Hiller, including the downtown rush hours in the Ride Free Area. "It's a simpler, more logical approach than varying access by time and/or location."