Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

Candidate Name:  Mark Solomon  
City Council District:  2

1. Many employers in the downtown and center city neighborhoods— including the City of Seattle— fully or partially cover the cost of ORCA transit passes for their employees. Incentivizing public transit and reducing drive-alone commuting is especially important during the next five years, with the “Seattle Squeeze” creating challenging traffic conditions. However, many employers don't provide any transit pass subsidy. Anecdotally, higher-paid workers are more likely to receive employer-subsidized passes than lower-wage workers, who are disproportionately women and people of color. Many lower-wage workers earn too much to be eligible for the ORCA LIFT low-income reduced fare program, but not enough to afford housing in Seattle without being severely cost-burdened. For the following questions, please choose either Yes or No. You may explain your answers if you like.

- **Do you think employers of a certain size should subsidize employee transit passes?**  
  - Yes. Some already do.

- **Would you support city council action to make this a requirement?**  
  - No. I don’t want to mandate more requirements on employers, but would work with them to encourage they offer this benefit to their employees.

- **Do you think the City should cover the costs of transit passes for employees of human service providers that are funded by city contracts?**  
  - Yes. Human service providers, case management workers and others whose primary work is in service to others, are often paid at salaries below the median average; frankly they are not paid enough for the work they do. Funding their transit to and from is the least we can do.

2. Report after report— notably the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report released in October 2018— tells us we need to cut carbon emissions dramatically NOW. What will you do to put Seattle on the path to decarbonization?

I would start by greening the City's fleet of vehicles. This means increasing the number of Hybrid and electric vehicles while phasing out petroleum only fueled vehicles. To do so would mean increasing the number of charging stations to accommodate this increase. Further, I would look at increasing energy efficiencies in City-owned buildings and facilities, and support the use of renewable energy sources wherever possible.

3. What is one community, specifically in your district, that you feel is being “left out” as our city grows and changes? What will you do to make sure their voices are heard?

While many communities in my District feel they have been left out or ignored by City Council as a whole, Georgetown comes to mind as one community where they especially feel that they are ignored, where things are done to them and not with them. One reason I am running is to make sure the voices of all of the communities of District 2 are heard by City Council and by our City Departments. People need a City government listens to them, addresses their concerns and is accessible, accountable and responsive to them.
4. What should the City’s role be in creating a healthy climate for business in Seattle?
The City should make it easier for businesses to actually do business and thrive in this City. We should reduce onerous regulations that stifle growth and viability, and impede employability. The City needs to work with the business community, especially our small family-owned businesses to reduce their tax burden and occupancy rates to ensure they can stay in their neighborhoods and not be displaced by development. I will advocate for legislation to stop the displacement of small businesses, such as equitable development funding for commercial space development, property tax credits to reduce small commercial space lease rates, marketing District 2 to attract businesses, promote business retention and expansion, and bolster community enhancement projects throughout District 2.

5. Seattle has the most regressive tax system of any city in Washington State, which has the most regressive tax system of any state in the US. Do you believe that the City has a responsibility to raise significant new revenue to address the challenges facing our communities? If so, what tax policies would you advocate for at the city level to generate new revenue?
Rather than raise taxes on businesses or individuals, we need to be smarter about how we spend the money we already have. The City needs to do a thorough audit of what it is spending, where it’s spending it, and to whom. We need to determine if we are getting the return on investment we want and adjust our spending accordingly. We need to be more efficient with our dollars, not just raise more dollars without a plan as to what we’re going to do with the money.

6. Seattle is deeply divided on how to address the homelessness crisis. How would you characterize these divisions, and how would you address them?
On one hand, you have those who want to criminalize homelessness. On the other, you have those that want to allow people who are homeless to be wherever they want. Between these two extremes are a myriad of positions, including “tiny villages and safe parking lots are okay, but not in my neighborhood.” I would address them by encouraging people to recognize that 1) homelessness is not a crime, it is a circumstance, one that people can move out of with the proper support and participation; 2) Allowing people to live unsheltered is not safe, sanitary, compassionate or humane. We need to work to prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place. This can be done with rental assistance, assistance with utilities, employment opportunities, access to transportation or assistance to affect car repairs so people can get to work or appointments if a vehicle is their best option. These supports already exist; people need to know there are there and how to access them. For those that are currently homeless, let’s get them inside and safe as quickly as possible and provide immediate, effective wrap-around services they need to change their circumstance. These include case management, mental health counseling, drug dependence and addiction treatment, physical health screening, education, help finding a job, and so on. Again, these services already exist, but they are underfunded. My vision is that we fund these efforts so we can increase our capacity to serve our unsheltered neighbors.
• We need to reopen the hygiene centers, increase the number of them and make sure they are not concentrated in just one area of the city.
• We need to increase finding for the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program to increase their capacity to serve our unsheltered neighbors.
• We need to fund more Field Coordinators in the Navigation Team to increase their capacity to reach and serve those living unsheltered.
• We need to fund more low-to-moderate barrier shelters.
• We need to build more affordable housing and reduce the permitting process so units can be built quicker.
• We need to fix the Coordinated Entry program because it doesn't well serve homeless youth or families. We know that youth who have experienced homelessness early in life are more likely to become homelessness as an adult.
• The city can also work with Seattle Housing Authority to increase the number of small scale, scattered site, multi-unit housing options.
• We need to involve those who are homeless as well as those in our communities to address this. The City can’t do it alone.

7. There is widespread agreement that all areas of response to the homelessness crisis need to be stepped up—but in practice, an elected official’s job is often to prioritize. How would you rank the following in terms of relative priority for increased funding and attention? (1=highest, 4=lowest) You may explain your choice, but if you fail to rank the options, we will not consider your answer.
   • Homelessness prevention (1)
   • Emergency shelter (2)
   • Mental health and drug treatment services (3)
   • Low-income housing (4)
I consider all of these Priority 1. We need to do these in tandem, not one at a time. I feel we have the capacity to do this, but it will take partnership. Local, county, state and federal entities, businesses, Faith-based organizations, community members, and the homeless themselves all have a role and are part of the solution.

8. What lessons do you think should be drawn from the experience of the “head tax” last year?
Two things come to mind. First, rather than targeting our largest employers and property tax, B & O Tax and L & I payers and blame them for the problem, include them in the discussion about how we can work together to address the problem. Second, a proposal with no plan or accountability is a non-starter. The goal was to raise $250M to address homelessness. However, there was no clear plan as to what to do with the money once it was raised, how it was going to be spent, or accountability or transparency to ensure it was being spent properly.