Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

Candidate Name: Phyllis Porter
City Council District: 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/No)
   - Would you support city council action to make this a requirement? (Yes/No)
   - 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/No)

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?

   Our state legislature recently adopted landmark legislation that commits Washington state to 100-percent clean energy from renewable and zero-emissions sources by 2045. Our state is leading the nation by committing to transitioning from relying on fossil fuels for electricity, heat, and transportation to 100-percent clean energy from renewable and zero-emissions sources. We need to take results-oriented steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect our quality of life for generations to come. I will use my position to lead Seattle in the movement to renewables, and will ensure that it is done so in an equitable manner that doesn’t cause further displacement and gentrification.

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?

   I think Seattle does a great job of talking about equity and access, but has not lived up to its promises in the South End. Far too many of our immigrant neighbors are being pushed further and further away from their places of employment, our seniors who have lived here for generations cant keep up with the rising rents and property taxes, and our communities of color are being gentrified out of their homes. We need bold action NOW to ensure we keep our communities intact. I have dedicated myself to improving and promoting access through my work here in South Seattle, and if elected I will continue to be out in the community holding regular hours to ensure all voices are heard.

4. What should the City’s role be in creating a healthy climate for business in Seattle?
The city has a role in creating a healthy economic climate not just for business, but for the people who live here as well. If the city does more to ensure people have access to jobs that allow them to make a living wage, business will benefit as well. I am in favor of expanding programs designed to support entrepreneurs who are looking to start a small business, particularly minority and women owned businesses. During my time with the Rainier Beach Merchants Association, much of my time was spent doing just that, and if elected I will continue to support all small business here in South Seattle.

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?

I believe the city is going to have to raise revenue in order to pay for additional affordable housing and human services. I am open to looking at congestion pricing for example, so long as it is done in a way that doesn’t disproportionately impact our low-income community members. I am also intrigued by TRU’s Non-Residential Parking Tax that would require the owners of parking lots like those at big box stores to contribute to transportation funding, and would love to get more details on this.

6. Seattle is deeply divided on how to address the homelessness crisis. How would you characterize these divisions, and how would you address them?

There are people on both sides of the ideological spectrum when it comes to our homelessness crisis, though I believe there are far more people somewhere in the middle who are tired of both ends of the spectrum fighting instead of working together to address our crisis. Our homelessness crisis shows no signs of slowing down, and it is up to us as elected officials to do everything in our power to alleviate this problem. In terms of where I spend my energy, leadership and resources to have the greatest impact, I would focus on advocating for increased access to affordable housing as studies have shown that having access to more affordable housing is one of the most effective ways to get people off the streets.

Additionally, it is cheaper to keep someone in their home than it is to get them into housing once they have become homeless. I am supportive of rental and mortgage assistance and other programs to keep people out of homelessness because they are effective and cost effective. I would expand these programs and increase partnerships with non-government entities to provide no-strings funding to people that need immediate assistance when feasible.

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, 2, 3, 4)
- Mental health and drug treatment services (1, 2, 3, 4)
- Low-income housing (1, 2, 3, 4)
- Emergency shelter (1, 2, 3, 4)
Every single one of these policy areas is vitally important to ensuring we take a holistic approach to addressing our homelessness crisis. There is no one size fits all approach to homelessness.

8. What lessons do you think should be drawn from the experience of the “head tax” last year?

I think the biggest lesson from the head tax debate last year is that Seattle is deeply divided on how best to address the homelessness crisis facing our city and region. Polling conducted after the initial passage of the tax found that it was deeply unpopular and likely would have been defeated at the ballot should it have gotten to that point. Additional polling has found that Seattlites want to fix our homelessness crisis, but don’t trust the council to get it done. We have to begin repairing the council’s reputation and trust within the community if we want to stand a chance in making meaningful movement on this crisis.