Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

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City Council District: 4

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** - the cost is minimal compared to other costs associated with employees.
- Would you support city council action to make this a requirement? (Yes/No) **Yes** - the cost is minimal, and it would benefit everyone in the city to decrease the number of vehicles on the road.
- 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** - these people are doing government work and should have similar benefits.

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 carbon footprint is broadly broken into two categories: emissions from vehicles and emissions from buildings. Our buildings are roughly on track for 2050 goals (though some worrying downturns have occurred) and so I will focus on vehicles in the short term.

Our bus system is in need of new carriages to add new routes and this is the perfect time to push ahead with an electric fleet to meet our 2040 goals. Twenty years seems far off, but if we don’t increase our rate of converting the fleet, then we won’t make it.

I want to promote new, modern, battery-powered personal mobility devices: from assisted bikes, to scooters, to other electronic forms of transportation. We should clarify our municipal code and open all our bike lanes, paths, and trails to allow these devices.

I will also push for the state and city to allow and promote self-driving cars. The majority of these vehicles are electric and will encourage people to stop using their fossil fuel engines.

Seattle, with its renewable electricity, is in a unique position to be a model green city. We have the knowledge and the ambition to do it; we need to have leadership to make it happen.
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 believe that the young working class is left out. Community councils usually only represent one viewpoint of the neighborhood and it’s often the established house-owning community. Seattle is growing with a lot of newcomers and renters and I want to make sure that their viewpoints and ideas on how the city progresses are heard and acted upon.

To this end, I want to use unbiased surveys and polls when making land-use and zoning decisions. I want to ensure that your ideas are heard even if you work all day and don’t have time to attend meetings.

4. What should the City’s role be in creating a healthy climate for business in Seattle?

Seattle should ensure that there is adequate commercial and retail space to keep rental prices down. I moved my business from the Ave in the U-District because I couldn’t justify the increases in rent, and I worry about what other small businesses face.

I want to see more mixed-use buildings with spaces dedicated for small businesses. We need new small businesses to meet the demands of our increasing density. If we don’t focus on these local needs then we will end up placing more demands on our transportation infrastructure with more deliveries and more car trips.

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 do believe that we should increase taxes to pay for stronger social nets. We have a duty to ensure everyone living within the city’s borders can receive services to have stable and healthy lives.

We have relied on levies on property owners to have a more progressive tax, but it’s not fair to make homeowners bear all the burden. I don’t believe that increases in sales tax are fair to lower-income people. I am in support of a state income tax, but until that time, I would also support an improved form of the head tax.

If we are to increase taxes, then it is my biggest concern that the budget reflect our earnest need to increase our social net. If elected, I will make it my top priority to ensure the money is spent where needed.

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

A division lies with the expediency of helping people off the streets. Most agree that we want people off the streets as soon as possible, but a portion of people have a zero-tolerance position and want people removed as soon as they are reported. This is a difficult
balancing act between respecting the rights of the homeless and respecting the rights of home and business owners.

I fall on the side of tolerance for our less fortunate neighbors and want to see meaningful change brought to their lives through social services and not by forcibly moving them to a different location. I want to ensure that shelters and transitional housing have open policies so that people can use our existing services, and I want to see an increase in housing via tiny homes on city land and mandatory affordable housing.

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) #2 - We have to lessen the problem at its source. We need to work with apartment management companies to assist evicted people and make them aware of their options. We need to make rental assistance programs easier to access for those who are only a little behind on their rent or payment. We need to work with hospitals to ensure people are released into stable homes or are given case assistance.

- Mental health and drug treatment services (1, 2, 3, 4) #1 - The best way to decrease homelessness is to prevent it from happening, but before that can be done we need to make sure people are mentally and physically stable and can function on their own. We need to step up our outreach services so that anyone who wants to change their lives know how to do it and have services available to them.

- Low-income housing (1, 2, 3, 4) #4 - I hate putting this last since it is so critical. I am a proponent of tiny houses on government land and for mandatory affordable housing. As suggested in the question, all areas of response to the homelessness crisis, including low-income housing, need to be stepped up.

- Emergency shelter (1, 2, 3, 4) #3 - Our shelter system needs to be more accepting of people and their needs so that no one is forced to live out on the street.

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

I have heard two main criticisms of the head tax. First, we need to consider the impact of small businesses when deciding who will pay the head tax. If the tax is to be progressive, then it should take into account the profits and infrastructure impact of businesses and not just their revenue.

Second, we need to have more concrete plans on where the money will go. The city has a variety of social programs and partners, and it wasn’t clear exactly who would be getting this new money and how they would be spending it. The fear was that the money would enter the general fund and the head tax would become just another general business tax. If we are to have a functioning head tax then we have to guarantee that the money is used for its intended purpose: to help people off the street.