Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

Candidate Name:
City Council District:

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) **YES.**
- Would you support city council action to make this a requirement? (Yes/No) **Yes, but I would like to see the city & county chip in to help incentivize such a plan so that the burden is shared among our local firms and local governments.**
- 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) **YES.**

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?

The City of Seattle and Seattle City Light have taken important steps towards making Seattle a carbon neutral city, but we can’t ignore the damage done from the long commutes that result from a city where most can’t afford to live near their workplace. We must immediately increase the supply of housing for all income levels with a special emphasis on lower income units. We must also strive to create density and site new development around current and future transit hubs to give more residents easier access to public transportation. If we build density at Urban Hubs – locations already approved by community members in their respective neighborhoods – and provide the work opportunities and services the community said they wanted, most people could walk to work and shops, further reducing automobile trips and strain on our inadequate mass transit system.

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?

The Central District is left out of the conversation, the city appears to be actively ‘grooming’ black residents out of the very neighborhood they were redlined to decades ago, and are not represented at City Hall. Many long-term residents and business owners of the CD see the city changing around them and feel as though they were never asked for input nor are they valued as a community that must be preserved. I intend to be in the neighborhoods of District 3 frequently; meeting with residents and local business owners to find out what we
can do to better serve them and include them in the process. I also aim to start a fund that will support minority owned and local small business expansion and help to increase homeownership in areas such as the CD. I plan to assist in finding a location for community members to open an employee-owned and operated grocery store to replace Red Apple, which closed when Vulcan began developing the Promenade 23 site.

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

While Washington State has created a reasonably friendly climate for very large firms such as Boeing, Microsoft, Amazon & others, it is the small businesses that we often see struggle in Washington. In Seattle, we expect a lot from our businesses and rightly so. We are a city that believes firms should pay their workers a decent wage, provide sick and family leave, and be good stewards of our environment. However, along with these expectations should be an effort to make it as easy and simple as possible to do business in our city. In a progressive city like Seattle, we often see business painted as the “bad guy,” but we need to treat the business community as our partner in providing living-wage jobs and building a better city that benefits all of us. I support protections for legacy businesses that are in locations slated for redevelopment, allowing them to return to the same location at the same rent, and with a long-term affordable lease.

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?

Unless we revise our tax system, we will never be able to provide adequate relief for low-income community members. I will convince my fellow councilmembers to work in tandem with other municipalities to lobby the State Legislature to enact a graduated income tax, with no taxes for low-income wage earners and a higher percentage on our highest earners. This would be combined with a reduction in sales and property taxes. Additionally, a three-pronged tax base is a more stable revenue stream for the state and city.

I also propose a 15% foreign investors tax on property purchases. A recent purchase by a European firm would have resulted in $111 million in tax revenue that could have funded the construction of 370 new affordable housing units.

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

While there certainly is debate about the homelessness problem in Seattle and definite frustration at the lack of progress in addressing the issue, I don’t know that the divide is as deep as the media may present. Almost all Seattleites want compassionate solutions that both help our neighbors in need and protect the safety and character of the communities we live in. The frustration for some has grown to the point of calling for “sweeps” of encampments and using a punitive approach to remove people from certain areas; but this
is a strategy that has no positive outcomes and just shuffles the problem from neighborhood to neighborhood.

I believe we need leaders who are willing to take immediate action and provide no-barrier housing now. We should be converting any empty building at our disposal to supportive housing sites and use all resources we can to tackle this problem. Once people are housed, then we can work on helping them with other problems they may have, in a safe stable environment. Once the people of Seattle see true action and progress on this issue I believe they will come together to support our city’s work to bring effective and compassionate solutions to the homelessness crisis.

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) 1
- Mental health and drug treatment services (1, 2, 3, 4) 3
- Low-income housing (1, 2, 3, 4) 2
- Emergency shelter (1, 2, 3, 4) 4

While this is incredibly difficult to rank, I would say that we should go in order of what has the greatest impact for the lowest cost first. Eviction prevention in one of the cheapest and most effective ways to prevent homelessness. Next, providing more low-income housing and focusing on housing first strategies has been shown to make it easier to deal with other issues/needs once people are sheltered. My choice between mental health/drug treatment services and emergency shelters acknowledges that drug treatment and mental health services will be far more effective for individuals that are sheltered/housed first.

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

I think the biggest lesson is that the city needs to bring impacted parties to the table for discussion prior to enacting legislation – both labor and employers. When municipal leaders do not include all stakeholders in our planning and policy making, we miss out on the opportunity for the most effective and efficient strategies made possible by the cooperation of a spectrum of viewpoints. I understand that, as a city councilmember, I am going to take votes that some will disagree with; but we do need to at least try to bring everyone to the table before we make unilateral decisions for all parties.

The ‘head tax’ would not have even been an issue if our City Council had required more of developers in terms of disallowing in-lieu fees, mandated affordable, inclusionary units in every new development, and charged impact fees.