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- I am worried about the impact on low margin retailers who are already disproportionately impacted by B&O tax, but I think it is a good idea on the whole

- Would you support city council action to make this a requirement? (Yes/No) Yes but I would prefer subsidy for employers under the number also be considered

- 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 cities form needs to be transformed to support density and walkability, that happens now in urban villages but that is a very small part of the city, we need to increase density in the whole city to ramp up to density that can support transit and other services and make more neighborhoods less car dependant. It is a growth process that results in a network of small towns with transit between them. Moving away from car dependant design is the key to making real change on carbon in our city.

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?

   Crown Hill has special concerns and has gotten some downzoning, but the bigger concern is that there are a lot of big streets and not really a comparable amount of transit with longer transit times, working to create safe walkability in this neighborhood is going to be an important first step in getting support for density

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

   The Amazon HQ2 search was really instructive. In the final selections infrastructure and a skilled workforce beat even the biggest incentives. We should pay attention to what they did and work on infrastructure, workforce development, and focus on being a place where people are excited to live in and move to.
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?

Yes. I think taxes are “luck’s share” and should come first from events tied to luck like capital gains and inheritance. I also support income tax. As an intermediate measure I suggest we consider “investing in companies or real estate” as a business category subject to B&O taxation and the return of inheritance taxes.

But when looking at the narrow things within the city’s current power, unless the courts do something unlikely and support the high earner’s tax, we don’t have other proven taxation options and there is just not a good user’s fee option for affordable housing.

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

I think people

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) 4 - this is the biggest bang for the buck and it is just not right to have people being economically evicted from subsidized housing. I would also include modest needs type grants in this category.
- Mental health and drug treatment services (1, 2, 3, 4) 4 but only because if we can get people stable and enrolled in medicaid this can mostly be covered, but you still need caseworkers to stabilize and keep people enrolled.
- Low-income housing (1, 2, 3, 4) 3 Housing helps everything else and much of our crisis is people who have jobs and just don’t have housing.
- Emergency shelter (1, 2, 3, 4) 3 Until we have home for people we need sanctioned encampments, tiny homes and other forms of shelter with dignity. Mass shelter is not a good solution for anything longer than a few nights and until we can offer real home we need to do our best in helping them build livable shelter.

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

Focus on what it is for, punishment plays well in some areas but can backfire so focus messaging on the need being met.