Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

Candidate Name: Lisa Herbold
City Council District: District 1

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**
- Would you support city council action to make this a requirement? **Yes**
- 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**

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 current Climate Action Plan has no carbon reduction goals. I believe that carbon reduction goals and commitments to measuring them is a critical component to decarbonization. I’ve recently met with climate advocates about exploring updated requirements for the City’s Climate Action Plan, regarding annual reporting, clear transparent data, and clear goals. It’s important to work with groups led by people of color in this work.

66% of carbon emissions in Seattle come from transportation - alternatives to driving, especially driving alone, are of critical importance. We must build light rail, and renew Seattle funding for additional bus service, and spend the funding wisely. As noted in the 2018 Seattle Transportation Benefit District Report, in 2015 only 25% of Seattle households had access to 10-minute or better transit service within a 10 minute walk. By 2018 it had increased to 67%. This kind of investment throughout Seattle’s neighborhood pays dividends for all Seattle neighborhoods, and reduces car traffic Downtown.

Further we must require the use of shore power for ships docked at our port.

In addition, under my leadership on policy issues related to Seattle Public Utilities, our garbage and recycling truck fleet now has green trucks. As the technology allows it, we must expand our green fleet. I am also exploring follow up on a 2012 pilot on once every two weeks garbage pick up, again to reduce the transportation-related carbon footprint on our city. Exploration of congestion pricing for TNC vehicles is warranted, since, in
many cities, TNCs are hurting transit ridership goals.

Finally, we should create new incentives for green development, as well as retrofitting existing buildings to renewable energy, in order to help drive the market toward greener and renewable building standards.

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 voice of seniors is one that I believe both deserves and demands amplification.

In King County:
• Seventeen percent of the population is age 60 and older. This represents a 43 percent increase since the year 2000.
• The fastest-growing segment of the total population is the “oldest old”—age 85 and older.
• About 23 percent (78,504) of residents age 60 and older are people of color—up four percent from 2011.
• Among residents age 65 and older, 19 percent (41,899) speak a language other than English at home and three percent (7,431) do not speak any English.
• As the older adult population becomes more diverse, the number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) older adults is also expected to grow.
• The poverty rate among the age 65 and older population is highest in Seattle and south urban King County sub-regions.

Councilmember Sally Bagshaw has been the most vocal advocate on the City Council for age-friendly city policies. I intend to take that role if I am re-elected to promote age-friendly approaches across public policies including outdoor spaces and buildings, transportation, housing, social participation, respect and social inclusion, civic participation and employment, communication and information, and community and health services.

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

Despite claims to the contrary, we have a healthy business climate in Seattle. This is, in a large part, because of our lack of an income tax. It is also a result our investments that make employers want to move to Seattle. For instance, the 2014 Arts Economic Impact Study proved that the activity of nonprofit cultural organizations and their patrons in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish Counties generated $2.4 billion in the Washington State economy and created 35,376 jobs, $996 million in labor income and $105 million in taxes.

Investments in transportation infrastructure, utility infrastructure, open space, affordable housing, public safety, and schools, and apprenticeship programs as well as pre-apprenticeship programs to develop the career pipeline so that employers have local talent are all critical for a healthy business climate.

We lead the nation in job growth, low unemployment, and cranes in the air building housing and commercial businesses. As chair of the Council committee with oversight of the Office of Economic Development, as well as my service on regional economic
development committees like the PSRC’s Economic Development Council of Seattle King County, I am keenly aware that we have to work to create balance in the growth of Seattle’s strategic industry sectors: manufacturing, maritime, life science/global health, information technology/startups, green business/technology, film/music/nightlife, and the restaurant/hospitality sectors. To do so we must not only increase support for the technical assistance programs for small businesses getting a start in these sectors but we must also enhance programs that allow communities that have traditionally been left behind to be job-ready for the employers in these sectors.

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?

According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, Washington State households with incomes below $21,000 paid on average 16.8 percent of their income in state and local taxes in 2015, whereas households with income in excess of $500,000 paid only 2.4 percent.

Local economist Dick Conway has noted we finish last when you consider fairness, transparency, adequacy, stability, and economic vitality. Our tax system inhibits affordability for middle and lower income residents. Less revenue available contributes to our difficulties keeping people housed and results on our increasing and unsustainable reliance on property tax levies. I have sought to address this.

I sponsored a tax on personal income that is over $250,000 for individuals, or $500,000 for couples. The first purpose listed for the legislation states, “(1) lowering the property tax burden and the impact of other regressive taxes, including the business and occupation tax rate.” The legislation is currently under legal challenge.

In Conway’s study, Washington State and Local Tax System: Dysfunction and Reform, he noted,

“high-tech job creates two or three other jobs in the economy through the multiplier process. These workers and their families place demands on the public sector for schools, roads, and safety. If the added costs of these public goods and services were to fall disproportionately on low and middle-income households, as they do now under Washington’s sales-based tax system, those households would in effect be subsidizing the high-tech companies and their employees”.

Given the limitations of our tax system, I co-sponsored an employee hours tax, and limited it to only those companies with the highest revenues, in the same way I supported limiting the business license tax increase supported by the Chamber for hiring police officers to only businesses with the 15% highest revenues. A corporate income tax on net income, as in most other states, would be a fairer approach.
If re-elected as the City Councilmember representing District 1, I will continue to work on progressive taxation efforts.

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 those who believe city government is over-spending on programs to address homelessness and that city government should fund less of them and increase our response to homelessness with public safety approaches. There are others that believe that the solution to homelessness is more funding for permanently affordable housing and other performance-based interventions like enhanced shelter and the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion program. All parties agree that we want approaches that have data-driven outcomes. We need to do a better job of explaining how relying on public safety approached are ineffective, inefficient, and more expensive than ramping up our investment in what we can demonstrate is effective, efficient, less expensive and will result in outcomes that we all agree are desired.

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 3 In 2018, 1302 households were served with 89% success in avoiding homelessness.
- Mental health and drug treatment services 1 - Though critical, mental health and drug treatment services are in the jurisdiction of the state and King County.
- Low-income housing 4 Housing is the solution to homelessness, regardless of the conditions that lead one to homelessness. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is a model that can be home regardless of mental illness, disability, or substance addition. Outcomes show the 93% of those accessing PSH are still housed after a year of placement.
- Emergency shelter 2 Enhanced Shelter capacity results in more, than basic shelter, acceptance of alternatives to sleeping outside from our neighbors living unsheltered.

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

I co-sponsored an employee hours tax. After opponents gathered signatures for a referendum, the advocates I worked with said they did not believe they could win an election campaign against the limitless funding from the Chamber. I reluctantly voted to repeal, but voted in support of a new Employee Hours Tax (EHT) during the budget process. Budget legislation is not subject to referendum. There were only 3 votes at that time to support a new Employee Hours Tax.

As TRU said at the time, a movement was built to successfully deliver a unanimous City Council vote, but not the support necessary to defeat a referendum. During the legislative campaign, we’d lost the narrative around a. the result of our city’s prosperity on increased
homelessness, b. the impact of an EHT on business and growth as well as c. the existence of a spending plan and the need for a new revenue source to support that spending plan and the outcomes that would result.

I believe that any effort to advocate for and pass progressive revenue sources must establish goals and measures to accomplish a-c above, before a vote.