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 think it is essential that employers and the City of Seattle work together to improve our public transit and expanding subsidies so that people can live in and commute to the city will be a top priority for me.
- Would you support city council action to make this a requirement? (Yes/No) 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/No) Yes. We need more people to use public transit if we are going to thrive as a city.

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?

I have had the opportunity to work to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and have written several reports about the impacts of our changing climate on indigenous peoples, as well as design environmental economic policies while completely my Masters degrees. I have also advised colleagues at the Union of Concerned Scientists on how to grow strong networks in an effort to institute clean energy policies in Massachusetts and New Mexico.

I would use my office in multiple ways to ensure that we as a region meet our goals by: - Instituting a congestion tax, beginning in downtown Seattle, where the profits would go to make public transportation in the area free, thus encouraging people to take transit, and making it cheaper to do so. This would be complemented by working with SDOT, King County Metro, and Sound Transit to make sure there are robust first and last mile solutions that can get riders to the light rail and make it easy to do so, thus making it an easy choice for people to go with public transit over driving.
- Working with King County to develop and implement a robust carbon credit program, and work to collaborate with the state to subsidize electric vehicles and solar panels.
- Working to implement the “Trees For All” program at the city level, which would ensure that our urban canopy does not shrink, and rather incentivizes residents and developers to institute more green spaces and plant more trees.
- Working to build a recycling plant locally that can provide green jobs while simultaneously opening a market up for our plastics since China is no longer purchasing them.
- Work with the city and county's stormwater scientists to address leaky side sewers that are causing human waste to enter our water sources, as well as work to update our sewage infrastructure and
make sure stormwater surges are not adversely impacting our fisheries, and thus our Orca population. Additionally, I would make sure to consistently connect with local stakeholders and experts, across the nonprofit, for-profit, and public sector, to make sure we are using best practices, learning and growing, and collaborating to achieve our goals.

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?

While it is an extremely important issue, I feel like the topic of homelessness has gotten much more attention than climate change, both from local leaders and the media. It was just announced this week that if we continue on our current course, over 1 million species are at risk of extinction, however, this was only a blip on the radar of our local media and leaders. This is unacceptable and is something I want to bring to the forefront of my tenure on the council.

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

The City has a huge role to play in building a healthy business climate for Seattle. To date, the relationship between the City and business leaders has been tenuous at best and is at a crucial turning point. We must do what we can as City leaders to enact business-savvy solutions that actually benefit all. The City and businesses must work together to move forward on key issues like climate change, technology adaptations, and inequality. There is a solution out there and we will find it.

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?

Washington has one of the most regressive taxation policies, and I hear over and over from constituents that they are feeling overtaxed, and although they want to support new levies and funding, they feel like it is never going to stop. I believe the political will is there to move forward on a state income tax, and this would help us to alleviate property taxes and get revenue in ways that do not disproportionately impact one segment of the population. Additionally, I believe a capital gains tax needs to be instituted at the state level and was extremely disappointed that it did not pass. I think this should be revisited as soon as possible as it will help to lift an extreme financial burden off of workers who are struggling.

I would focus first on raising revenue in a way that avoided increases in property taxes, and rather incentivized residents to take certain actions, and if they did the opposite, there would be small penalties imposed. For example, in another response I highlight how instilling a congestion tax would enable revenue that could allow for public transit to be free. I would work to implement more policies like this so that choices are available that would save residents money, however, if they chose not to utilize it, or were unable to, there would be a small fee that could be used to offset those incentives.
6. Seattle is deeply divided on how to address the homelessness crisis. How would you characterize these divisions, and how would you address them?

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

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

We learned two things. One that City Council needs to get out in front of the messaging to educate its constituents on proposals that they know will be controversial, and two that big business holds power and influence in the City like it never has before. We need to work together with business leaders to be able to incentivize them to invest in new solutions for the problems and opportunities that they have created. We would not have the housing crisis that we do now or the financial inequality we do now if Amazon, Microsoft, and others hadn’t decided to call Seattle home. We need to find new inroads to these business leaders to come up with solutions to move forward and rebuild our city so that it serves all.