Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

Candidate Name: Don Harper  
City Council District: District 7

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, This should be apart of the transportation plan of all large employers  
• 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) No. This should be covered by the service providers and included in their contract with the city. Let’s not add another level of bureaucracy to the City when the provider can handle it most effectively.

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? Quality transit is the most effective way to encourage people to leave their vehicle when they can. I will support leaving 3rd Ave as a transit corridor for buses. Under current building codes it is far too easy to remove Significant & Heritage trees from building sites. I will work to make the removal of a tree a higher bar to achieve. I will continue to support the City & Metro’s effort to convert to electric and hybrid all transit & government vehicles.

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? What is missing now from our current council members is their ability to listen to all of their constituents. The Council only is able to hear those they agree with. All of the neighborhoods of District 7 are affected by the homeless crisis. Magnolia & Queen Anne suffer from people living in the parks and green spaces along with the broken down motor homes parking on the streets. Piles of needles left on the sidewalks and in the playgrounds of the parks is common place for all locale along with the “petty” theft of break ins. Belltown and Pioneer Square get the worst of the violent crimes and aggressive behavior. The Cascade neighborhood is being radically being changed by the inflow of large high rises and multitudes of workers along with the loss of their Parks community center to the leasing of it by the Boys & Girls Club. Once on the City Council I will continue doing what I have been doing for the last 20 years on the Queen Anne Community Council. I will listen to everyone and bring people together to find where we can find common ground so to move forward with successful results.
4. What should the City's role be in creating a healthy climate for business in Seattle? We need to have a more diversified economy. Not enough attention is being paid to encourage work in the trades and industrial jobs. Work with the Port rather than against them to create more opportunities for success. Once we house people who are homeless it will be a slim success unless we have jobs ready for them to take the next step to success & independence.

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? First we need to conduct performance audits on all departments, the mayor's office, city council and those contractors who provide city services to make sure we are operating at peak efficiency. Next, we have to prioritize what we want to accomplish. The homeless issue is taking up a lot of space in moving our city forward. When Barbara Poppe [former Executive Director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homeless under President Obama] was hired to analyze our programs she concluded that our City needed better accountability from our service providers in delivering services to the homeless, among other conclusions. We are limited in the taxes we can levy but we can become more efficient. Still every major city in the U.S. has a transit mitigation fee they charge to big developers – not us. Not Seattle. Why not? The burden of paying for that almost $1 billion transportation levy should never have fallen on the senior citizen trying to pay higher and higher property taxes or the middle class family struggling to stay afloat in the City – it should have been covered with a traffic mitigation fee on commercial building development. It is unbelievable how much money the City has 'left on the table' during the past few years of the building boom. I would support this type of tax.

6. Seattle is deeply divided on how to address the homelessness crisis. How would you characterize these divisions, and how would you address them? People are angry because the city has failed in its mission. Every neighborhood experiences the failure. As the homeless crisis was increasing the previous Mayor declared an emergency, he sold the affordable housing project at Yesler Terrace that was replaced with market rate units and yes, some affordable, or when the Mayor sold the land by City Hall to a developer instead of creating a new Permanent Supportive Housing development that could begin to get people off the streets – we missed major opportunities to begin to address this pressing issue. What will bring us back together is when people see success. Compassion alone will not solve the problem. If it did, the problem would already be solved. What are needed are results based solutions. Voters agree to more spending when they experience success from past investments. Let's prioritize this issue and solve it before we spend $450 million on a waterfront park or create more bike lanes.

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) 2
   - Low-income housing (1, 2, 3, 4) 2
   - Emergency shelter (1, 2, 3, 4) 3
Low-Income Housing: I favor some immediate Permanent Supportive Housing – it worked in Utah and it could work here as well. We have some City land we can use and we can raise money from the millions that have been promised to us to work on the problem, i.e., Gates Foundation, Amazon, etc...and I’ll bet we could find more.

8. What lessons do you think should be drawn from the experience of the “head tax” last year? We have been experiencing for over 6 years an increasing top down and one size fits all approach to managing our city. This is a short-term solution that eventually fails. We must have “buy in” from those affected by the decisions and most importantly; people need to feel they have been heard. This is what I will bring to the City Council.