Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

Candidate Name: Shaun Scott  
City Council District: 4

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)

Would you support city council action to make this a requirement? (Yes/No)

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)

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?

On the question of climate justice, our leaders have not led. I’m running for Seattle City Council because I think we deserve better, and a key part of my platform is the implementation of a Seattle Green New Deal.

Once elected, I will facilitate the growth of dense, affordable neighborhoods, where working people aren’t priced out and we don’t have to spend hours a day commuting in cars that pump carbon emissions into the atmosphere. Right now, too many Seattleites live too far from where they work. If we’re committed to cutting our carbon emissions, that has to change. At the same time, we need greater investments in mass transit and free public transit for all. We deserve a city where all busses are battery-powered and the 60% of the county buses still running on fossil fuels are converted to electric.

According to the Climate Action Champions report, Seattle “has set itself the bold goal of achieving zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.” However, this timeline falls well outside the
window of time needed to address climate change as the emergency as it is. We need Seattle to be a city run 100% on clean energy by 2025. To do that, we’ll have to end our relationship with Puget Sound Energy, one of the single biggest polluters in the region, and gain full municipal control over our energy portfolio in the next 10 years.

I would rather still be paying off interest loans in 30 years than not have a planet to live on in 10 years.

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?

District 4 is defined by disparity: we have the richest neighborhood in the city in Laurelhurst, and the neighborhood with the highest percentage of Seattleites making poverty wages in the University District. I feel that the voices of students, renters, vulnerable homeowners, and people of color are not heeded often enough in decisions about affordable housing and transit infrastructure. I would like to establish an in-District constituent services office in the University District and maintain weekly office hours in a U-District cafe to be accessible to the people who need to be included in our political process the most.

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

We want to create a healthy climate for small business. That means implementing commercial rent control at the city level, having denser neighborhoods with a lot of street activity and commercial storefronts beneath affordable/public residential dwellings. I am in favor of pedestrianizing streets like The Ave so that people see more of what the small shops and restaurants in the Ave have to offer. We also want to create an economic climate where working people have disposable income to spend, and that means reducing our housing costs with a massive public investment in housing.

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?

The City certainly has a responsibility to raise significant new revenue to address the aforementioned challenges facing our communities. More than anything, we need to tax the rich. As a city councilmember, I would commit to re-introducing the Employee Head Tax, taking into account lessons learned from the 2018 battle (which I will go into in-depth in question 8). Seattle is home to some of the largest corporations in the world—Amazon, Boeing, Microsoft. However, their success is often at the expense of communities who have historically lived in these neighborhoods and have been pushed out, which manifests in a number of issues the city must take action on. These corporations also happen to be our biggest polluters, and while state
law may prohibit the city from enacting a tax on large polluters, nothing but a lack of courage and political will is stopping us from enacting a new Employee Head Tax, or from raising the B&O tax on our largest corporations.

One of the reasons the Seattle Green New Deal got its title is because it takes money to implement. Another opportunity to generate more revenue would be to implement congestion pricing, which is part of the City’s 2018 Climate Action document and has been successful in several places where it has been implemented (most notably London). Congestion pricing is a way to reduce single occupancy trips into the Central Business District and South Lake Union.

We should institute land value taxes and a tax on real estate speculation to discourage developers from building luxury apartments that lay empty but still use energy. The City Council should have the city go into debt to build affordable housing, and also to buy land, then redistribute parcels to non-profit housing providers at a discount.

Seattle should also raise taxes on privately owned golf courses, like the 55-acre Sandpoint Country Club, which are unfairly taxed an infinitesimally smaller rates than the property taxes working families have to pay on their homes.

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

The chief division on the question of homelessness is the divide between compassion and cruelty.

A cruel approach to “solving” homelessness involves mass-criminalization, sweeps of homeless encampments, and “emphasis patrols” implemented by the Mayor’s Office. While these approaches serve as a conduit of anger and frustration, they do nothing to actually address the root causes of homelessness or to house the homeless. Even Seattle Police Chief Carmen Best has said that the city of Seattle cannot “arrest its way out of” its current homelessness epidemic.

Compasionate approaches to solving homelessness involve addressing the problems at the root, and not criminalizing poverty. It involves reinstating and expanding the city’s Community Service Officer program to help direct and steward our houseless neighbors to services and housing. It involves alleviating the economic stressors (loss of job, rent increases) that lead to homeless, and also addressing the the fact that homelessness disproportionately impacts communities of color and LGBTQIA+ people.

As a former editor of Real Change News, I am committed to a compassionate approaches to solving homelessness. I would parter with councilmembers Teresa Mosqueda and Lorena Gonzales to identify safe consumption facilities that will allow houseless folks to get the treatment that they need; as police officers are allowed to use naloxone to treat citizens
suffering from opiate withdrawals, we should scale that approach to actual facilities that will reduce the amount of drug use we see in streets, parks, and greenways.

Compassion works, because we all benefit from safe, affordable neighborhoods with broadly shared prosperity and economic security. Compassion works.

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

Housing-first approach, always.

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

We need candidates who are prepared to lead on progressive revenue solutions, and are ready to suffer the political consequences of standing up for Seattleites in need of relief. As a city councilmember, I would commit to reintroducing the Employee Head Tax, by taking the lessons of the 2018 repeal into account and moving forward with a re-tooled political case to present to the people of Seattle.

I would work in collaboration with Councilmembers Mosqueda, Sawant, Herbold and hopefully Morales to create a climate where the moderate voices on the council can step forward to do what is right by working people in this city. Securing a decisive sixth, mayoral veto-proof vote on the City Council will be key to getting a new EHT passed—as will be making an appealing political case that focuses not only on where the revenue is coming from, but what it will be spent on.

Seattleites need elected officials who have a history of standing up to corporate power before ever seeking office, and a City Council that is committed to constructive collaboration to secure material gains for the 99%. As a former editor of Real Change News and a Seattle Democratic Socialists of America organizer, I sense the desperation that rent-burdened and homeless Seattleites feel, and share their frustration with the lack of urgency seen on progressive issues from city government.
As a former outreach coordinator for Seattle’s Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs who oversaw the city’s transformation of King Street Station into an arts hub, I understand how to hold constituent meetings and collaborative listening sessions to deliver positive policy results.