Transit Riders Union Questionnaire for 2019 Seattle City Council Primary Candidates

Candidate Name: Emily Myers  
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) **YES** it is vital that large employers support and encourage their employees to use public transportation and help reduce the number of cars on the road. I have organized at UW for free UPASS. We won this for our unionized employees and I have fought beside TRU with UAW4121 and UPASS or Fail to get subsidized UPASS for all employees.

- **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.**

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 decided to run for Seattle City Council after reading the 2018 IPCC report. Here’s my plan for making sure Seattle is well on the road to decarbonization:

- Implement green apprenticeships to build a workforce for retrofits of existing buildings, electrification of transit infrastructure and ports
- Enact congestion pricing and use funds to offset free transit
- Push back on master bike plan rollouts to see the completion of a connected city bike network
- Look at increasing the number of bus only lanes, implementing bus only streets in downtown and pedestrianizing more areas, including the Ave, parts of Pioneer Square, and Pike Place Market
- Build green social housing with funds raised by using our bonding capacity, through new progressive taxation like an inequity tax, and by restructuring/streamlining our multiple public housing offices
  - Consider mixed income social housing projects that address our increasing need for affordable housing and missing middle housing
  - Housing that is walkable, urban, and uses renewable power & efficient utilities
- Legalize small multifamily units like triplexes in “single family” neighborhoods because duplexes, condos, etc are more energy efficient
- Increase fines for large buildings failing to meet benchmarking goals
- Massive infrastructure projects at the Port of Seattle to move from diesel to electricity
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?

I believe that the youth homeless and housing insecure are being left out in district four as our city grows and changes. The displacement of essential services like the People’s Harm Reduction Alliance (PHRA), the ROOTS Young Adult Shelter, and the U Temple Thrift Store with the upcoming demolition of the U Temple Methodist Church leaves even less for some of the most vulnerable people in the district. We know that displacement is an unfortunate consequence of increased density—a density that will lead to more affordable housing—but not density that will rebuild services like those mentioned above. We need to have city caseworkers talking to youth who regularly use these services to understand their needs and prepare for the crisis that is coming. Ultimately, the people we hear the least from the people most in need of new housing, shelter, and other support.

In addition to looking into how we strengthen anti-displacement protections without disrupting necessary density increases, I believe we should strengthen and rebuild district councils. I hear from many constituents that they don’t feel they are being heard. One means by which to alleviate this feeling amongst aggrieved constituents and to hear more from vulnerable and marginalized constituents would be to fund outreach to and stipend support for a truly representative district council. It would require a small budget to cover monthly or bimonthly meeting space, stipends used to support working class people and people of color joining the group, and for several trainings a year. If each district council was required to go through anti-racism training and bystander intervention training, we could raise expectations that these are spaces free of white supremacy and hold all members to that standard. If we could fund stipends, we could build more representative district councils. And if we had respectful, grassroots organized neighborhood groups, we could better understand and predict how coming changes would affect the most vulnerable in our community and plan and prepare for this.

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

The city should take a role in protecting small business owners, particularly for women and minority-owned businesses. While Seattle is seeing much needed density improvements and development, and displacement is at times inevitable, we need to be conscientious about who is most likely to lose their home or job. Large developers and large corporations have a big enough voice and the city should be working to identify vulnerable businesses and support those small-business owners and workers.

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 am advocating for a tax on pay inequity. Although I would have supported the head tax, I recognize there were legitimate concerns about how it would affect employers like grocers that run on thin profit margins. However, it’s past time for businesses making billions in profit on the backs of low-wage workers to contribute fairly to our city’s taxes. We need progressive taxation to
support the housing and transit infrastructure needed to grow, mitigate climate change, and provide social services to our most vulnerable. In Portland, they have passed a CEO-Median pay tax, where companies that have highly paid executives in companies with low-wage workers, must contribute more in a business tax, like a restructured head tax. A policy structure this way would raise revenue up front and also push businesses to have more equitable pay, reducing income inequality over time. Policies like this are necessary because if you look at income inequality, you can see CEO pay as a direct measure - back in the 1970s, the average CEO made 30x the median worker. These days, it is closer to 300x. I also think that for crises like affordable housing, we should consider using our bonding capacity in the short term to begin building housing, and should consider expanding the housing levy, through voter approval.

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 believe that these divisions ultimately fall along the lines of people who feel fear and discomfort in response to homelessness, as opposed to those who see it as a traumatic, unjust experience for the person living unsheltered. As a neurobiologist with training in understanding behavioral health and interpreting data, I've found that I'm able to connect with many in the former group while knocking on doors. I try to meet people where they are, acknowledging and hearing their fears and frustrations, then use the frame of chronic stress, poverty, and trauma to build a story about what homelessness is. I also work to explain the nuance to people -- recognizing that although there are people experiencing decades of chronic homelessness who likely have co-occurring mental health disorders including addiction, there are also teens recently kicked out of their home for coming out or families who lost their source of income or were evicted. By explaining both the nuance and the trauma of homelessness, supported by actual data, it tends to help bring people to the same place from which to explain potential solutions. The data is there to support housing first, permanent supportive housing, and other harm reduction models to homelessness. So as long as I can get a person to a place of empathy not fear, I’m often able to reduce these divisions. Ultimately by focusing on homelessness as a public health crisis, we build common ground.

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)

1. Low-income housing
2. Homelessness prevention
3. Mental Health and drug treatment services
4. Emergency Shelter

The reason I ordered these as such is that I think Seattle is addressing these priorities incorrectly and they are ordered in such a way as to how we should divert focus. We are building far too little
affordable housing as compared to the need and expected the market to take care of the rest. Thus, that is my number one priority to PUSH on. Similarly, we have too many restrictions on rental assistance and other prevention programs. Every night a person spends on the street is trauma and increases the risk that the individual will ultimately end up needing additional supportive services; when on day one they just needed a roof over their heads. We can save a lot of long-term money and help people avoid extreme trauma and loss of dignity with prevention. Our state’s behavioral health infrastructure has many flaws, but in the last cycle, a ton more money was put toward this. We also have LEAD which is working effectively, and the opioid taskforce put together a very strong and effective response. As such - I do not think mental health and drug treatment are a top priority. I have put emergency shelters last. I do think we need to make sure people are not sleeping unsheltered, but at this point, our city is doing as much to create a population of people in need of emergency shelter, like through sweeps, as we are building evidence-based emergency shelter. Too much of the budget is focused on this short term problem when there is more we can be doing to work with people experiencing homelessness to provide them with housing and shelter more rapidly. Long-term housing that has dignity and does not separate families, as many emergency shelters do

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

To me, the top lesson was to have a strong base of support who you know trusts you and has your back. These people will help keep you centered and committed to your values. I say this because only councilmembers Teresa Mosqueda and Kshama Sawant voted against the repeal. Through speaking with them both and observing them in public life, it is clear to me that whether it be Teresa’s union family or Kshama’s Socialist Alternative base, knowing you have a well-organized base of regular people, who are ready to mobilize and who will back you up after tough decisions is essential.

Second, I think we have to think through how Washington’s business tax laws - which focus on revenue, not profit - make this type of taxation challenging. This can harm businesses with a thin profit line leading to unintentional consequences to workers. If we are more strategic about who and how we tax, we may be able to build more popular support. In that line, I learned that, for major and controversial legislation, we need strong messaging to counter corporatist propaganda. I would have voted for the head tax, but am running with an inequality tax in my platform. This is in my platform because I believe workers should be paid their fair share when CEOs are taking home millions every year. I believe that we can build solidarity between people making $30,000 a year and those making $150,000 if we focus taxation on the ultra-wealthy.