

Regional Transportation Investment District of King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties

411 University Street, Suite 1200
Seattle, Washington 98101
(206) 442-4254 – fax: (206) 322-8486
WWW.RTID.DST.WA.US

January 26, 2006

The Honorable John Ladenburg
Chair, Sound Transit Board of Directors
401 South Jackson Street
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Regional Transportation Leadership Coordination

Dear Executive Ladenburg:

Thank you for the opportunity to attend today's Sound Transit Board of Directors' meeting. We, members of the Regional Transportation Investment District's Executive Board, have appreciated communicating with you and your vice-chairs over the past few months to discuss how we could move towards fashioning a combined transit and roads transportation package.

We are here today for two reasons. First, we would like to present a proposed package of regional road investments put together by local governmental elected officials and leaders in the transportation area. Second, we would like the Sound Transit Board of Directors to consider working formally with the RTID Executive Board to develop a joint roads and transit package that would be subject to public review and vote as soon as the 2006 election.

The timing is ripe for a joint effort. In 2000, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation issued its final report recommending that the legislature create a regional funding mechanism. In 2003, the legislature approved the "Nickel" package to fund critical statewide projects. In 2005, the legislature approved the Transportation Partnership Act to fund 270 statewide projects. Even with all of this good work, the Puget Sound region has critical projects that still must be addressed to reduce congestion and deal with safety concerns.

The region needs a joint roads and transit package that makes sense. Voters in Denver, San Diego, and Vancouver, B.C., have all approved regional packages that include both roads and transit. With the expected population increases in this region, we need to consider whatever infrastructure and operational changes that will work in any given area, whether they are roads or transit projects. To that end, members of both the Sound Transit and RTID boards met after the November 2005 election to discuss whether a joint regional roads and transit package could be developed to achieve the same result for our area.

It became clear that a package depended on the resolution of several key issues. Creating a proposed roads package within King County that garners support from throughout the County would be one of the keys to moving forward. The second key would be a common boundary for roads and transit investments. The third key element would be the sources of revenues. Finally, the Governor and state legislature would need to be partners in this effort.

We have developed a proposal addressing these issues. Of these issues, RTID's current county-wide boundaries and Sound Transit's smaller boundaries would make a joint ballot difficult. Our proposal is to reduce RTID's boundaries to match those of Sound Transit for King and Pierce County. In Snohomish County, such a reduction has a disproportionate effect on its projects and funding resources. The current Sound Transit boundaries also appear insufficient to provide necessary services in Snohomish County if you look ahead ten or twenty years. We understand that Sound Transit is beginning to explore the possibility of expanding its boundaries in Snohomish County. Therefore, we are proposing that key parties continue to explore the idea of reducing the RTID boundary and expanding the Sound Transit boundary in Snohomish County to enable a joint roads and transit package.

As described above, the size and scope of a potential roads package, particularly in King County, were also of critical importance to our discussions. Recognizing that there are far more transportation needs than dollars, we focused on congestion relief and safety projects in critical corridors. We also sought to take advantage of work already provided in recent state funding packages. As a result of these discussions, we are proposing investments for the following transportation needs. A more detailed description of these projects is included in the attached proposal entitled *Blueprint for Progress: Moving Forward Together*.

- Proposed RTID Investments in King County: Proposed investments target six key corridors and a few other targeted regional projects. The six key corridors are I-5, I-405, State Route 167, State Route 509, State Route 99 and the Alaska Way Viaduct, and the State Route 520 Bridge.
- Proposed RTID Investments in Pierce County: Proposed investments target three key corridors and a few other targeted regional projects. The three corridors are State Route 167, State Route 162, and State Route 704 (Cross Base Highway).
- Proposed RTID Investments in Snohomish County: Snohomish County has had a widely supported list of proposed investments for some time. Given the current discussions about changing RTID's boundaries, the proposed projects form the basis of an initial draft list that will be subject to further refinement. The proposed investments would improve critical chokepoints and safety concerns for both general purpose and transit in key north/south corridors, including State Route 9 and arterial projects that help improve the functioning of I-5, and key east/west corridors, including improving the US 2 Trestle and other integral routes.

The scope of these projects will be subject to additional review and cost analysis through the WSDOT, as well as through public discussion and hearings.

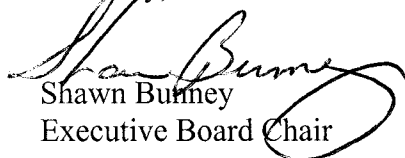
Funding sources for the roads package would depend on just two sources: a .6% Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) (or equivalent amount)¹ and a .1% sales tax. We want to minimize both the number of different sources and our impact on sales tax, the only funding source for both Sound Transit and King County Metro. We picked these sources for several reasons. The MVET is currently deductible and the sales tax has been deductible and is proposed to continue to be deductible from federal income taxes. This lowers the total tax burden on our citizens and businesses, and in effect means we are securing additional federal participation in funding our transportation needs. The sales tax also generates significant contributions from tourists and other out of state users of our transportation system. The MVET provides a source of revenue from those who use our transportation system regularly. This funding package would result in a long-term, stable source of money for our critical transportation needs.

Finally, we need simple legislative changes for RTID to proceed in a timely manner on a joint package with Sound Transit. These changes have been discussed over the past few years, including streamlining the ballot title, clarifying tolling authority, expanding project eligibility, expanding revenue authority to allow for a higher MVET, reducing local match requirements, setting parameters for State bonding authority, allowing boundary and other changes to help facilitate a joint ballot, and providing the flexibility for a single or combined ballot. A complete list of legislative requests is included in the attached proposal. Implementing these simple fixes would help assure a successful vote on a joint package.

While the appropriate timing for a regional ballot measure remains uncertain, we strongly request that you not preclude continued progress toward implementing the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission. Whether a ballot measure is presented to voters in 2006, 2007 or later, we fully recognize the amount of work before us and the need to continue our efforts to refine the plan and conduct important public outreach. We cannot delay these important tasks.

We will be looking to our state partners, the Governor, and the legislature to act on these proposed changes and dedicate sufficient resources to enable us to complete the task. In the meantime, we appreciate your leadership and cooperation. We look forward to a successful partnership and continuing to work with you to finalize a joint regional roads and transit package.

Sincerely,


Shawn Burney
Executive Board Chair


Julia Patterson
Vice Chair


Dave Gossett
Snohomish County

¹ Proposals are currently under discussion to reevaluate how the MVET is calculated. A change to this calculation may result in the need for a different MVET number.

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cc: The Honorable Tim Farrell
The Honorable Dow Constantine
The Honorable Kathy Lambert
The Honorable Gary Nelson
The Honorable Christine Gregoire, Governor, Washington State
Tom Fitzsimmons, Chief of Staff
Louise Bray, Transportation Policy Chief
Douglas MacDonald, Secretary of Transportation
Bob Drewel, Executive Director, Puget Sound Regional Council
Joni Earl, Executive Director, Sound Transit