

Eastside Transportation Association

“Dedicated to improving our quality of life and environment by reducing congestion through increased mobility”

P.O. Box 50621
Bellevue, WA 98015

March 8, 2007

Senator Mary Margaret Haugen
Senator Dan Swecker
Representative Judy Clibborn
Representative Fred Jarrett

Dear Sen. Haugen, Sen. Swecker, Rep. Clibborn and Rep. Jarrett:

We have reviewed the Regional Transportation Commission’s November 15th and December 31st reports. There is much that is good in these reports: informative data, excellent description of the problem, and recognition of the need for a regional body to bring some order to our disorganized efforts.

We have also reviewed Senator Dan McDonald’s minority report. His introduction modestly acknowledges the difficulty in creating a “new order of things”. We also appreciate the fact that the Commission had a limited amount of time to deal with a complex subject. However, we feel that the report introduced a new order for a few selected subjects but left untouched our more serious problems – a failed transportation planning system, blind acceptance of extravagant transit spending with no suggestion of a review of cost-effectiveness, and a failure to confront the congestion issue directly in the recommendations.

ETA endorses all five of RTC report failures identified in Senator McDonald’s Minority Report, including:

- 1. The report does not provide a comprehensive regional transportation finance plan. A “plan” with a \$67 billion funding gap is not a finance plan.**
- 2. The recommendations do not focus on the primary issue of congestion. In fact, the report repeats the transportation myth that “we cannot simply build our way out of congestion.”**
- 3. The report pins a lot of hope on tolling, without fully acknowledging the difficulties of selling this to the public. Tolling roads previously built with taxpayers dollars will make raising taxes for future transportation improvements virtually impossible.**
- 4. The recommendations increase the risk that money will be raised in the entire Central Puget Sound region with the majority being spent in the Seattle area.**
- 5. The combined elected and appointed board in the recommended governance structure fails to provide one-man, one-vote representative democracy. The Report’s expectation is that having six appointed members will assure transportation technical skills on the Commission. If that were true, the**

Washington Transportation Commission would be loaded with technical skills.

To these five points, we would add three of our own:

6. **The regional transportation planning system is a failure.** The Commission failed to acknowledge this. In 2005, the Economist magazine said that Seattle “probably had the worst transport planning in North America.” Our current, piecemeal efforts seem to bear that out. Consider the tragic comedy of Alaskan Way Viaduct plans, the folly of not recognizing the real transportation issues on SR-520, and the potential drastic reduction in capacity of I-90 with Sound Transit’s planned “taking” of the I-90 center roadway for low-capacity light rail. **Our current regional approach to transportation planning is to start with a politically popular end-result (e.g., light rail) and then to set up a planning process that will justify that end-result.** The Commission accepted a major part of this failed transportation planning by accepting, without question, PSRC’s estimate of the cost of total regional needs. Even worse, the Commission accepted PSRC’s allocation of about half of regional funding through 2030 to transit with a projected market share of 3.2% to 4.5% of daily regional travel. It is irresponsible to not question the cost-effectiveness of this allocation.
7. **Extravagant Costs.** Capital costs of both transit and planned highway programs are far out of line with other national and international experience. In various locations in the RTC report, there is mention of cost-cutting, but there is not identification of how bad the problem is, nor are there specific recommendations on what to do about it. In addition, the Commission accepted, without question, that all projects on the region’s wish list actually contribute to congestion reduction.
8. **Acceptance of Transportation Myths.** The report repeats the transportation myth that “we cannot simply build our way out of congestion.” Anyone who has given even brief analysis to this knows we cannot eliminate congestion, but we can reduce it to more reasonable levels. This is one of several examples where RTC has accepted the quotations of conventional wisdom without any critical evaluation. As you know, this is a slogan used by those who either want to do nothing or to do only transit.

If the Legislature decides to examine the important issues raised by the RTC reports and by Senator Dan McDonald’s minority report, then the Eastside Transportation Association would be pleased to assist in any way helpful to your Committees.

Sincerely,

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Jim Horn, Chairman

cc: Mayor Norm Rice
John Stanton
Senator Dan McDonald