

October 31, 2002

Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC

Dear Senator Murray,

We want to thank you for your service to our State and our beautiful Puget Sound Region. Your attention to our infrastructure, economic and social needs has been greatly appreciated. We are in unanimous agreement that our transportation and transit infrastructure needs major improvements if our Region is to remain vital, vibrant and successfully implement growth management. As locally elected representatives we have collectively spent many years paying attention to the details of planning and implementing our local and regional transit and transportation systems.

It is because of our commitment to improve this Region and our experience with what works here that we can no longer support continued funding of the Link light rail project. Our ten year experience with Link light rail reveals that, even if built to Northgate and SeaTac, it would provide no more added capacity, speed or ridership growth than if we maximized our investment in our present Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. That would be reason enough to stop and reassess our investment priorities. However, by closing the Downtown Bus Tunnel for two years and moving many of the buses back up to the surface permanently, Sound Transit effectively damages the parts of our regional system that are working best, and ignores the parts that need improvement. Local and regional bus riders will be asked to pay more, transfer more, wait in traffic more but see less service except if they are among the very few who live and work near a Link light rail station. Taxpayers in the North King sub-area see virtually no improvements for their thirteen years of payments.

Voters thought they were buying a regional system that would be integrated and that would help jurisdictions address the growing need for alternatives to driving alone. Voters were promised that it would enhance the present productive bus service and support neighborhoods. They were also promised conservative cost and ridership estimates, conservative borrowing and a commitment to return to the voters after ten

years if the agency wanted to extend the line. Six years after the vote we see that the cost has increased 60% for a line that is seven miles shorter. Projected ridership is 70% less, and planned bond debt for the North and South King Sub-areas is now nearly equal to what was projected for all five sub-areas combined, leaving those two sub-areas with almost no bonding capacity for the foreseeable future. Consequently it will not be possible for Sound Transit to extend Link to the Airport, the University District or Northgate without significant, voter-approved tax increases. If this project continues as planned, our region will have expended tremendous resources, borrowed against decades of future tax revenue and still need large additional tax revenues to deal with the growing needs of the region.

Communities and leaders that once supported the Link project now seriously question its value compared to the damage and costs it entails. Light rail proponents were unsuccessful in convincing a regional committee of county elected officials (RTID) to include additional funds for Sound Transit in a proposed package of transportation improvements. The RTID refused to even allow Sound Transit's taxing authority on the ballot because they feared it would cause voters to vote no on the whole package of potential improvements. The State legislature and Governor have turned down repeated requests from Sound Transit for State funding. Those requests represent another broken promise: that Sound Transit would not seek money from the State.

We are particularly troubled by Sound Transit's argument that they have authority to continue collecting taxes indefinitely. The voters were asked to approve a "Ten Year Plan" and that timeframe was one of the major selling points of the proposal to voters. Sound Transit continues spending precious tax dollars on yet more studies on route alignments from downtown to the north and on how to reach and serve the airport. Two years ago when major questions about the project began to emerge from broader groups, Sound Transit told us that the Link project had been "studied to death."

Our citizens cannot wait another two years for Sound Transit to decide how to build a light rail line. It clearly cannot be done within the parameters agreed to by the voters in 1996.

We are also disappointed by the serious under-reporting of bus capacity in the 2001 Evaluation of Joint Operations in the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel. A truly superior alternative should be able to withstand a fair comparison. It is time to invest in what we know works for our region. Many of our planned and designed transit projects are now on hold for lack of funds. We therefore support maximizing our existing investments by:

- Finishing the HOV system for Vanpools and Express Buses
- Running twice as many buses through the Downtown Bus Tunnel using the new hybrid-electric vehicles that Metro is acquiring
- Building more park and ride stalls
- Providing more transit centers and shelters that are attractive, safe and comfortable
- Keeping the cost affordable for transit and Vanpools
- Redeploying any saved transit hours into better local service
- Giving serious consideration to expanding our monorail technology to serve denser corridors where BRT may not fit or make sense.
- Objective cost/benefit analysis to determine the best ratio of investments

Senator Murray, you are in a position to redirect any request for Federal dollars to more cost-effective and integrated alternatives. There is great consensus forming around expanding Bus Rapid Transit and other cost-effective solutions in our region. BRT is already a major component of the Sound Move Plan and Metro's Six Year Plan. We have invested billions in it to date and consequently have a greater percentage of commuters using transit in our region than regions with light rail such as Portland. We actually rank seventh in the nation, even competing with major cities with heavy rail like Chicago and New York City, for percentage of commuters choosing transit.

Seattle voters have also clearly indicated an interest in expanding the present monorail line. Whether they want to spend additional dollars on top of their \$69,000,000 a year contribution to light rail will be decided in a few days. But they intuitively know that if

you spend money on rail, you may as well be up out of traffic enjoying the views than plodding along at an average of 25 MPH.

We stand ready to work with you, our colleagues in the Region, the FTA and Congress on an alternative proposal that is grounded in what really works for our Region. We believe continued funding and planning for light rail in Seattle leaves us further behind and further divided. Light rail is actually the least cost-effective way to provide future capacity needs in our region.

Sincerely,

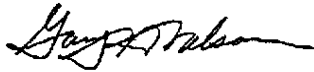
Council members and Mayors



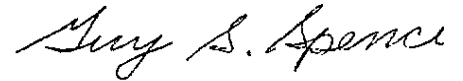
Kathy Lambert, King County



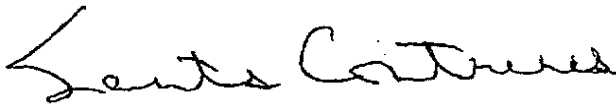
Rob McKenna, King County



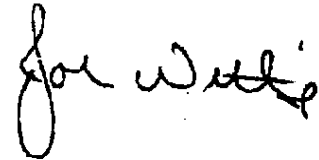
Gary Nelson, Snohomish County



Guy Spencer, Normandy Park



Sants Contreras, Kirkland



John Wiltse, Mayor Normandy



Nick Licata, Seattle



Don Gerend, Sammamish



John Chang, Shoreline



Tim Olsen, Bothell

Linda Kochmar, Federal Way

Dick Paylor, Bothell

Ed Sterner, Lake Forest Park

Fuzzy Fletcher, Mayor, Snoqualmie

Alan Kiest, Lake Forest Park

El Jahncke, Mercer Island

Mary Jane Goss, Lake Forest Park

Don Persson, Renton

Carolyn Armanini, Lake Forest Park

John Rankin, Normandy Park

Roger Olstad, Lake Forest Park

Sven Goldmans, Mercer Island

Nate Herzog, Lake Forest Park

Jeff Sax, Councilman  
Snohomish County Council

Tom Dillon, Kirkland City Councilmember

John Koster  
Snohomish County Council