



King County

Department of Transportation

Metro Transit Division

General Manager's Office

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December 2, 2010

Ms. Barbara Gilliland
Parsons Brinckerhoff
555 17th Street, Suite 500
Denver, CO 80202

RE: Draft JTC Recommendations Report on State's Role in Public Transportation

Dear Ms. Gilliland:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Joint Transportation Committee recommendations report on the State's Role in Public Transportation. We are encouraged by the general direction of the report and largely support the recommendations. We appreciate the extensive information included in the white papers prepared for background, and feel that this will provide useful information for future discussions with the State Legislature, the Washington State Department of Transportation, and the state's public transportation providers.

We are pleased that the report acknowledges that the state has an interest in assuring a healthy, comprehensive and integrated public transportation system, and that an effective system will be increasingly critical to achieving future state goals. Moreover, we are encouraged that the report recognizes the acute funding problem facing public transportation agencies and that public transportation is "less visible and not considered as a systemic element to the state's overall transportation system." We agree that the state increasingly will need multi-modal solutions to address current and future transportation objectives.

However, we are concerned that the report appears to reinforce a fundamental policy disconnect between the notion of the state's interests and the state's responsibilities. As noted, the state does have a compelling interest in a healthy and vibrant public transportation system, yet the report goes on to assert that public transit is fundamentally a local responsibility. We believe this is a narrow and misleading interpretation, and one that risks perpetuating a policy stalemate.

Historically, the state has been directly involved in supporting public transit, including the original legislation that created the public transit agencies, the direct allocation of the motor vehicle excise tax, and the enhanced sales tax authority after MVET was removed as well as the emergency bridge funding. Where the state does directly participate now (including the successful CTR program, the development of thousands of park-and-ride stalls serving state highways, vanpool vehicle funding, some special needs transportation assistance, and the mobility grants) the targeted support has been effective. Though limited in scope, these programs do support several existing state transportation goals.

We believe the report should have been more explicit about how and where public transportation supports the state's existing transportation objectives, especially with respect to mobility, economic vitality and the environment. My colleagues and I attempted to demonstrate how public transportation helps to support these important objectives. We urge that as the JTC considers the findings and recommendations of the report that the existing and potential value of public transit towards the realization of the core state transportation objectives be factored into future policy-making and funding decisions.

We support the concept of creating a distinct public transportation integration role within each WSDOT region to assure that public transit is more fully integrated into state transportation planning and operation. We look forward to working with the Department on how this role is developed and implemented, as well as the development of incentives that encourage public/private partnerships between public transportation providers, the private sector and local jurisdictions.

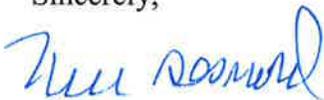
In the policy section, we suggest that recommendation 2.b.1 be revised. The broad objective to ensure that state facilities are located where there is effective public transit is sensible. However, as written, it would suggest that the transit service has to *follow* the facility location decision, rather than the facility should be planned where transit already exists and/or can be effectively and efficiently provided. All too often new developments are planned without considering transit up front and only after the fact is transit service considered.

We agree that the state should have key performance measures for public transit. Although some progress was made in this area, we believe more work needs to be done to develop a meaningful set of indicators. We look forward to working with WSDOT and the Washington State Public Transit Association on this effort.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the report described the impact of the recession on transit funding and finances throughout the state. Transit's overwhelming reliance on local sales tax collections for our operating budget has created an unstable financial planning environment. We are encouraged that the report recommends new funding options for public transit that are predictable, sustainable and flexible.

I appreciate the opportunity to serve on this important advisory panel and thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Kevin Desmond
General Manager
Metro Transit Division