



Disability Rights
WASHINGTON



To: Mayor's Office, Seattle City Council, and SDOT
From: Cascade Bicycle Club, Commute Seattle, Disability Rights Washington, Seattle Neighborhood Greenways, Transit Riders Union, Transportation Choices Coalition
Re: Advocate Priorities in Upcoming Seattle Transportation Levy
Date: 7/31/2023

Dear Mayor's Office, Seattle City Council, and Seattle Department of Transportation,

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on the anticipated 2024 Seattle transportation levy. We are a group of nonprofit organizations interested in safe, equitable, sustainable, and accessible transportation. We understand you are currently exploring possible funding options and program/policy scenarios. We'd like to offer our early thinking on these issues as well as a request for seats "at the planning table" as levy development moves forward. As advocacy organizations, we are committed to throwing our weight behind a package that meaningfully tackles the safety, equity, and climate challenges we have collectively agreed our city faces.

Be bold

- We support a levy sized commensurate with the issues we are facing. The climate and safety crisis — all disproportionately impacting historically, systemically underserved communities — need significant, bold action.
- To that end, we know that investments in multimodal infrastructure simultaneously address safety, equity, sustainability, and accessibility, so we must increase both overall investments *and* proportions of multimodal spending from the Move Seattle Levy.
- Seattle needs to dramatically reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in line with other visionary plans from leading cities around the world. We must make walking, biking, rolling, and taking transit the most convenient ways to get around, which will, in turn, address issues of climate, safety, and accessibility. Therefore every new Levy project should demonstrably reduce VMT and not increase or incentivize driving or unsafe behavior.
- We also know that while it may not seem bold, it is also critical to maintain what we have in order to create safe conditions for all.

Make safety the marquee investment

- The pedestrian safety crisis cannot live around the edges of this levy. Make investments that reverse recent trends and get Seattle to zero fatalities and serious injuries the cornerstone/centerpiece of this effort.
- Use data from the High Injury Network, Bike/Ped Safety Analysis, and other research as tools to prioritize projects and ensure that street improvements address known safety issues.
- Include funding commitments that address on a large scale the city's most dangerous corridors, including Aurora Avenue, Rainier Avenue, MLK Jr. Way, 4th Ave S. in SODO, and others identified in the research listed above.

Embed safety in every project

- Recognize that preservation and safety are integrated outcomes. We must ensure every street project — including paving projects — includes the installation of missing sidewalks, repairing sidewalk deficiencies, and other safety upgrades such as rechannelizations that can be efficiently added during construction work. We must create dedicated funds for these upgrades so that they do not compete with other existing multimodal safety projects that have been planned and prioritized.
- Industrial lands are a critical element of our region's economy. Mobility issues in these areas are complex. People travel to, through, and from industrial lands using all modes, including freight vehicles, transit, biking, and walking. Safe streets and blue-collar jobs are complementary and necessary, as was brought into stark relief when Lutumba, mother of four, was killed earlier this year by a driver when walking home from her shift at a recycling company in SODO. The foundation of the levy must be policies, plans, and stakeholder coordination that helps us co-exist safely.

Fund programming that addresses/responds to other high-impact issues

- With growing public support for pedestrianizing streets, SDOT should include a new investment portfolio in the levy to support this opportunity – such as pedestrian streets or zones at the heart of every neighborhood. Additionally, funding should be allocated to support the activation of these streets through partnerships with small business district associations to increase community connection and economic vibrancy.
- How can lighting, bus shelters, and transit reliability improvements address rider experiences of safety and comfort on and around transit? How do we improve safety for all without increasing harms from policing and enforcement?
- What infrastructure, programs, or efficiencies can we make to respond to and address the transit and transportation worker shortage locally and regionally?
- As the City focuses on electrification and addressing transportation emissions, recognize that electric vehicles alone will be insufficient to meet our climate goals. Fund programs that promote other forms of electric transportation, such as local rebates for e-bikes or better bike storage.

Employ thoughtful and transparent prioritization

- Prioritization of projects (both in selecting what goes in the levy and the timeline of deliverables) should be based on the values of the levy (e.g., safety, sustainability, accessibility, and equity). It should also have a clear and direct connection to work, plans, and engagement that has been done in these areas (e.g., high injury network, Transportation Equity Framework, ADA plans, Climate Action Plan).

Ensure an equitable levy development process

- Continue to use the Transportation Equity Workgroup and Equity Framework to guide the development of both funding options and programmatic elements.
- Coordinate with similar stakeholder groups at partner agencies, such as the Metro Equity Cabinet and their mobility framework.
- Quickly and proactively create ongoing opportunities for nontypical, most impacted organizations to be at the table through an equity-forward steering committee or similar structure. Don't let partner readiness be the driving factor behind which organizations you engage.
- Start now and clearly communicate to interested stakeholders and the public how the STP becomes a potential ballot measure.

Focus on progressive, creative, and flexible funding

- Use the least regressive options, based on community feedback. Some opportunities to explore:
 - Local cordon, road usage, or congestion charge to help address road damage, VMT, and equity concerns.
 - Market rate charges for street parking across the city.
 - Tolls to pay for larger bridge projects.
- Communicate to legislators and advocates early in advance of the state legislative session if new funding options are desired that require authorization.
- Approach Transportation Impact Fees (TIF) with caution, given concerns from affordable housing partners. Recognize that the process for TIF project lists is far less transparent and should be guided by the same equitable engagement as the levy.
- Explore partnering with Seattle Public Utilities to fund road projects that have a significant utilities component.

Earn trust and ensure accountability

- While we understand that SDOT faced real and significant challenges over the course of the Move Seattle levy, many stakeholders felt disappointed in the outcomes. Therefore SDOT should work closely with stakeholders to understand how SDOT and the Mayor's office can earn and maintain trust now through the delivery of a future levy. In particular, some stakeholders have expressed disappointment in how the promised robust multimodal corridor, mode shift, and safety projects were narrowed or weakened upon design and implementation.

- Explore delivery efficiencies. As you prepare for the next levy, explore changes to internal policies and decision-making processes to remove impediments to rapidly and boldly developing and implementing safety projects. Ensuring that community engagement is structured to prioritize historically underserved communities and the safety of all road users can help ensure that bold levy aims are not bogged down with inevitable complaints about change.
- Work with the SDOT Equity Work Group, current MSLOC members, other modal members, and other stakeholders to develop a levy oversight committee structure that has appropriate decision-making power, is not siloed from other efforts and committees, receives the appropriate level and amount of information, and includes diverse representation.
- Consider how to improve equity perspectives within any oversight committee. The current MSLOC substantially lacks representation from impacted communities, those with a strong understanding of equity, and those rooted in safety and climate work.
- When benchmarking success, use the equity and stakeholder resources, committees, and partnerships to help identify deliverables in a way that balances specificity and flexibility. For example, using metrics based on values (e.g., % BIPOC folks served, GHG reduction targets, etc.) gives the agency flexibility on meeting objectives, and naming/delivering specific projects or corridor improvements can help build trust and accountability.

Sincerely,

Cascade Bicycle Club
Commuter Seattle
Disability Rights Washington
Seattle Neighborhood Greenways
Transit Riders Union
Transportation Choices Coalition