



RECEIVED

JAN 28 2008

January 22, 2008

Office of the Governor

Governor Christine Gregoire
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Re: Climate Report Comments

Dear Governor Gregoire:

Sound Transit appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report issued by the Climate Advisory Team. We applaud the excellent work of the team and technical work groups and support the various strategies and mitigation options that have been developed. We also applaud your strong leadership and commitment to address this critical issue for the State of Washington.

The report, in concert with climate experts across the country, points to the need to drastically reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in order to make a real difference in emissions. This will only happen if we provide alternative forms of transportation, and that's exactly what regional high capacity transit (HCT) is all about. Sound Transit is helping to address climate change by delivering a multi-modal program of regional HCT improvements. Our district serves the state's most populous region, with nearly three million people -- about 40% of the state's population. Sound Transit began providing regional express bus service in 1999, Sounder commuter rail in 2000, and Tacoma Link light rail in 2003. Ridership on our HCT services has increased steadily and substantially each year, reaching about 14 million in 2007.

Sound Transit has built ten HOV Direct Access ramps that are improving the performance of the State HOV system, built more than 11,000 parking stalls, and added 19 park-and-rides and transit center facilities around the region, and there is more on the way. All of this helps provide alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel and helps reduce VMT. Central Puget Sound residents have shown they want alternatives to driving alone. When I-5 construction closed downtown Seattle freeway lanes in August, Sounder commuter rail ridership jumped. Enough of those first-time riders stayed with it afterward to increase Sounder ridership by 10%. New riders also tell us they are inspired to try transit because of environmental concerns and rising gas costs.

AGENDA

CHAIR

John W. Ladenburg
Pierce County Executive

VICE CHAIRS

Connie Marshall
Bellevue Councilmember

Mark G. Olson
Everett Council Vice President

Julie Anderson
Tacoma Councilmember

Mary-Alyce Burleigh
Kirkland Councilmember

Fred Butler
Issaquah Deputy Council President

Dow Constantine
King County Councilmember

Dave Enslow
Summer Mayor

Doug MacDonald
Washington State Department of Transportation Secretary

Richard L. Marin
Edmonds Councilmember

Richard J. McIver
Seattle Councilmember

Greg Nickels
Seattle Mayor

Julia Patterson
King County Council Vice Chair

Larry Phillips
King County Councilmember

Aaron Reardon
Snohomish County Executive

Ron Sims
King County Executive

Claudia Thomas
Lakewood Mayor

Peter von Reichbauer
King County Councilmember

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Joni Earl

BOARD ADMINISTRATOR

Marcia Walker

A million more people are expected to live here by 2030, a 30% increase. Coupled with our already-taxed roadways, public demand for high capacity transit is increasing. Link light rail from downtown Seattle to Sea-Tac Airport (opening in 2009) is expected to carry more than 45,000 riders each day by the year 2020. Funding for construction of the light rail extension to the University of Washington, through one of the state's most populous regions, received the highest possible ranking in the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) competitive New Starts grants program based upon the project's major public benefits to the region, including exceptionally high ridership and substantial travel time savings. Construction is expected to begin late this year, with trains running by 2016. By 2030, this line alone is projected to add 70,000 daily boardings to the light rail system, and will carry passengers from downtown Seattle to the UW in seven minutes.

Sound Transit is also committed to minimizing our carbon footprint. Last year, the Sound Transit Board adopted a Sustainability Initiative integrating sustainable business practices throughout the agency. The Initiative was followed by an Executive Order directing staff on ways to implement the Board's direction. Our plan for addressing climate change includes measurable targets related to fuels, vehicles, and emissions; ecosystem protection; green procurement; recycling and waste prevention; energy and water conservation; sustainable design and building; and education and awareness. To manage this effort, we have developed and successfully implemented an Environmental and Sustainability Management System. We are proud to be the only transit agency in the Northwest and one of six nationwide to have its program certified under international environmental standards (ISO 14001).

Regional HCT is essential to responding to the challenge of climate change by connecting and fostering compact communities (consistent with the Growth Management Act), reducing vehicle VMT, and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. While the report does include some recommendations regarding regional HCT, we believe the report should do more to acknowledge and emphasize the importance of regional HCT as one of the most effective strategies for addressing climate change and be more specific and directive about expanding, implementing, and funding regional HCT mitigation options.

As an example, the report makes a number of references to transportation as the single largest source of GHG emissions in Washington State. Rather than lumping all forms of transportation together and characterizing them as the problem, the report should clarify that the problem is due to fossil-fuel burning vehicles, especially single occupant vehicles (SOVs). As the report notes on Table 1, the largest contributor to GHG emissions in the transportation section is onroad gasoline vehicles. Other forms of transportation, such as regional HCT, are not the problem (even heavy rail ranks the lowest of the sector in GHG emissions). In fact, they are a huge part of the solution.

For this reason, the report should go further in recommending aggressive expansion of the HCT system. The report does recommend expanding Sound Transit's Sounder commuter rail service, which we commend, but it hardly mentions light rail or regional express/bus rapid transit, other modes of service that Sound Transit provides and which have enormous potential benefits in stemming the tide of GHG emissions. Instead these modes are grouped together under a very general heading of T-1 (Transit, Ridesharing, and Commuter Choice Programs).

The Puget Sound region has voted for and invested in the development of a light rail system, the initial segment of which will open next year. As noted above, the light rail system will have a projected ridership of at least 70,000 by 2030 (which is likely a very conservative estimate). Expanding the light rail system should be identified and promoted as a stand-alone mitigation option, supported by sufficient funding, similar to the way commuter rail service is handled in mitigation option T-6 (Improvements to Freight Railroads and Intercity Passenger Railroads).

Electric light rail has virtually zero emissions, reduces VMT, and is unparalleled in contributing to the kinds of transit-oriented communities called for by the report. In addition, bus rapid transit (BRT)/regional express bus service should be specifically identified and expanded throughout the region. We support the recommendation to increase the Regional Mobility Grant state program from \$40 million to \$200 million, but that amount is woefully inadequate to support everything listed in T-1: park-and-ride expansion, BRT implementation, speed and reliability improvements, fleet and base expansion needs, vanpools, and light rail.

We recognize that the draft report is a starting point and that there is considerable work to be done, and our comments are offered in the spirit of improving a final product. All of the mitigation options identified in the draft report will require further analysis and discussion about how they can best be implemented. In this regard, we respectfully request that Sound Transit be included in these future discussions. We have exclusive jurisdiction for HCT in the Puget Sound region, we have experience and expertise on a wide range of transportation issues, we have a dedicated and talented staff, and we have a strong commitment to sustainability. As this work moves forward, we would like to be included as a formal participant in the Climate Advisory Team, the Transportation Technical Working Group, and/or in other groups charged with implementing the mitigation options.

Sound Transit can provide valuable insights and contributions to a number mitigation options, such as T-1 (Transit, Ridesharing, and Commuter Choice Programs), T-2 (State, Regional, and Local VMT Reduction Goals and Standards), T-3 (Transportation Pricing), especially since transit is a potential mitigation for any pricing framework; T-4 (Promotion of Compact and Transit-Oriented Development); T-5 (Quantification of Greenhouse Gas Emissions for Transportation Plans, Programs, and Projects), especially since we develop transportation plans, programs, and projects; T-6 (Improvements to Freight Railroads and Intercity Passenger Railroads), especially since this mitigation option makes assumptions and recommendations about our Sounder program and apparently was developed without any coordination with Sound Transit staff; and T-7 (Diesel Engine Emission Reductions and Fuel Efficiency Improvements).

We look forward to working together as Sound Transit continues to develop a multimodal, regional HCT plan to bring before the voters. We welcome your ideas and your leadership so that, together, we can build on our success and deliver the citizens of our State an expanded HCT network in support of a more efficient regional transportation system. HCT is the foundation upon which we can reduce our dependency on cars and oil, reduce sprawl by creating urban villages and compact communities, improve the economy with more efficient movement of people and goods, and--perhaps most important of all--take meaningful and effective steps to address climate change.

Thank you again for your leadership on addressing climate change in Washington State and for your ongoing commitment to addressing transportation issues in the Puget Sound region.

Very truly yours,



Joan M. Earl
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Department of Ecology
Sound Transit Board
Citizens Oversight Panel