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Date: December 8, 2017  
To: Seattle City Councilmembers  
Subject: Seattle Transit Benefit District Year 2 Performance Report

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Seattle Transit Benefit District (STBD) Year 2 Performance Report*. We have enjoyed serving as Transit Advisory Board (TAB) members and are grateful for the opportunity to serve the City, representing Seattleites in matters related to transit and providing citizen oversight of these important Proposition 1 funds. We offer the following comments and thoughts regarding Seattle Department of Transportation’s (SDOT) STBD Year 2 Report:

*The Seattle Transit Advisory Board shall advise the City Council, the Mayor, and all departments and offices of the City on matters related to transit and the possible and actual impact of actions by the City upon all forms of public transportation.*

*The Board shall be provided the opportunity to comment and make recommendations on City policies, plans, and projects as they may relate to transit capital improvements, transit mobility, and transit operations throughout the City...*

*The Board shall help facilitate City policies, plans, and projects that support local and region-wide transit mobility efforts, to help ensure a functioning and coordinated transit system throughout the City and region.*

*The Board shall function as the public oversight committee of revenues collected under Seattle Transportation Benefit District (STBD) Proposition 1, as described in Resolution 12 of the STBD...*

*The Board shall make an annual report to the City Council on the status of its work program and the achievement of its goals.*

*City Council Resolution  
31572*

**More Seattleites are riding transit.** The primary function of these Proposition 1 funds is to reduce overcrowding, improve frequency, and reliability in buses for Seattle residents. As an oversight board, we can say with full confidence that transit service in and to Seattle has drastically improved, as evidenced by the notable increases in transit ridership since 2015 and in the percent of households within a 10-minute walk of 10-minute or better frequent transit service as outlined in the STBD Year 2 Report. Thousands of Seattleites are choosing transit as a first option, not only to commute, but also to travel to school, go shopping, and more.

**Evening service sees improvements.** Many Seattle residents do not work a typical 9 to 5 schedule. Since its inception, the TAB has asked SDOT to make additional evening, early morning, and late night service investments, especially in areas known to serve shift workers. SDOT, in coordination with King County Metro (KCM), responded to our request with an exciting proposal to revamp Night Owl service. We look forward to seeing increased ridership on KCM’s improved Night Owl routes as more residents become aware of these service improvements.

**Strong focus on race and social justice.** Last year, TAB members expressed strong concerns about whether Proposition 1 funds were being equitably distributed. We repeatedly expressed our desire to see past and future STBD investments analyzed through the lenses of racial equity and social justice. SDOT’s Transit & Mobility Division took our requests seriously and developed an RSJI-based analysis methodology, which was used to identify areas in the city where marginalized, low-income communities had disproportionately less access to frequent transit service.

As evidenced in the report, SDOT used the results of this analysis to direct their service investments, making it easier for TAB members and the community to see how racial equity and social justice are being considered in the distribution of STBD funds. TAB members strongly believe that transit is a tool to connect Seattle residents to opportunity. We look forward to SDOT's continued emphasis on equitably distributing STBD funds in the years to come.

**Increasing low-income access to transit.** The Proposition 1 legislation includes up to \$2 million per year to improve transit access for low-income Seattle residents. TAB members are pleased with how SDOT has developed and implemented its Youth ORCA program, especially because SDOT has clearly worked to assess, iterate, and improve upon the program since it began. We commend the Transit Division on partnering closely with Seattle Public Schools to create value for our city's children with this program.

The success of all-ages ORCA LIFT outreach, though steadily improving, is harder to quantify. Though only 19% of eligible residents are currently enrolled in the program – a percentage unlikely to represent the upper bound of possible enrollment – this number is hard to interpret without context. For example, it is unclear whether the ORCA LIFT enrollment numbers are low because eligible residents may be finding other ways to access transit at a lower cost, such as qualifying for a Regional Reduced Fare Permit (RRFP). Councilmembers in the past have highlighted low ORCA LIFT enrollment numbers as cause for concern, a sentiment the TAB has echoed. We encourage SDOT to partner with KCM to identify existing barriers to enrollment and to determine a realistic enrollment level given other programs that exist.

**Next steps.** Looking forward, we encourage SDOT to:

1. Continue using a race and social justice lens to assess where to invest future STBD funds, seeking to ensure that low-income and transit-dependent communities have increasingly improved access to this important public good.
2. Expand the types of locations considered important to connect by transit beyond Urban Villages, including K-12 schools, healthcare facilities beyond hospitals such as low-income clinics, and other areas of cultural value such as parks and museums.
3. Continue investing in Rapid Ride routes and routes that are time-competitive to driving in order to increase ridership and develop rider populations in advance of the next phases of Rapid Ride implementation.
4. Begin planning for 2020 as the funding mechanisms for STBD sunset. The next decade will be a transformational time for transit in Seattle, as Link light rail expands, the Alaskan Way Viaduct closes to buses, and the Seattle Streetcar lines connect. The City should take this opportunity to analyze the structure of the STBD ballot measure and consider how it could be strengthened before seeking renewal. We particularly encourage service purchase contracts with providers beyond King County Metro (such as with Sound Transit), a Regional Partnership Program that allows both public and private partners, and a more flexible definition of "Seattle

routes” that allows for the funding of routes that provide vital connections to Seattleites but do not have 80% of their stops in the city limits. We also encourage SDOT to consider whether the STBD funding mechanism could be expanded to include capital purchases and infrastructure improvements.

Sincerely,

Seattle Transit Advisory Board