
CTAC III Focus Groups July 19 and 21, 2011 Overview of Findings

Below is a summary of findings from focus groups held on July 19 and July 21, 2011 as part of community engagement work PRR, Inc. conducted for the Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee III (CTAC III). This is an overview of key themes from the two groups and is not intended to be a detailed summary of findings. Specific questions and discussion points are included in Appendix A.

Each focus group included eight Seattle residents and a mix of ages, income levels, ethnicities, gender and homeowners/renters. The groups were held at PRR's focus group facility in downtown Seattle.

Perception of Transportation in Seattle

The purpose of this segment of the focus groups was to understand how participants feel about transportation in general, each mode of transportation, and their top transportation priorities.

Impressions of different modes of travel

When asked to identify what comes to mind when they think about driving, biking, walking and taking transit in the City of Seattle, participants cited a wide range of reactions and perceptions. In general, participants expressed frustration with the transportation system.

Driving

Answers ranged from "anger at having to sit in traffic" to frustration over "ongoing construction." Participants said that driving also offered "self reliance" and "flexibility" but led to people being "isolated."

Biking

Participants mentioned friction between drivers and bicyclists, the need for more enforcement of the rules of the road and the fact that biking is "fun" and "good exercise."

Walking

Both groups said walking was less convenient and not as fast as other modes and several participants mentioned safety concerns. Participants generally viewed walking as a recreational activity, rather than a method for getting from one place to another or commuting.

Taking Transit

Group #1 expressed frustration with bus service being off schedule, too many stops, rising fares and recent service cuts. Group #2 mentioned the opportunity to save money by taking transit, "unsanitary" conditions on transit, and poor connections between light rail and bus service.

Most important transportation issues

The moderator asked participants to list the most important transportation issues facing Seattle and then asked them to identify which issue they felt should be addressed if they could choose only one. The most popular issues were improving transit (Group #1) and congestion/traffic (Group #2).

Maintenance vs. New Projects

The purpose of this segment of the focus group session was to further probe how participants felt about maintaining the existing transportation system versus investing in new projects, given limited resources.

When asked to choose which they feel is more important: building new transportation projects, maintaining and preserving the existing transportation system or both, participants felt that both are needed and funds should be split between both types of projects. When forced to choose one or the other, Group 1 agreed that improvements were more important than focusing on maintenance and preservation, although several participants said they also think it is important to take care of existing infrastructure. All participants in Group 2 felt funds should be split between new projects and maintenance, with funds for new projects focused on planning for growth and expanding mass transit.

There was some variability in how people define “maintenance and preservation”. For example, some people interpreted maintenance of the existing system to include investments in projects that would increase the efficiency of the existing transit system. Others considered this type of investment to be a new project.

Communications and Messaging

The purpose of this segment of the focus group session was to determine whether participants understand some of the terms that the City of Seattle uses to describe different transportation priorities and to learn more about how people felt about different transportation priorities.

Participants were asked to write down what they *think* and what they *feel* about different transportation terms and identify what they think each term means. While participants were somewhat familiar with several of the terms, they could not accurately define the majority of terms on the list. The following table summarizes responses for each term.

Term	How many participants knew what the term means?		Discussion*
	Group 1	Group 2	
Bike lanes and bike boxes	None	Most	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group 1 participants thought bike boxes were lockers where bikes are stored during the day• Group 2 said they support bike

Term	How many participants knew what the term means?		Discussion*
	Group 1	Group 2	
			facilities, but are frustrated with bicyclists behavior (i.e. riding on the sidewalk, bypassing cars at a light, holding up traffic)
Re-channelization	Most	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This is thinking smarter and what we need to do more of, like on Fauntleroy Ave SW (from someone who correctly defined the term)</i> • <i>This sounds like a term referring to increased efficiency</i> • <i>Does this mean re-channeling funds to another part of the budget?</i>
Road Diet	Some	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participants were generally unclear on what the term means and suggested a wide variety of possible definitions • <i>This probably means higher parking fees and more bike lanes</i> • <i>Terrible name – those two words should not be used together</i>
Complete streets	None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participants thought this was a street where construction or repair was “finally complete” • <i>I guess this is better than ‘incomplete’ streets</i>
Pothole/Spot repair	Most	Most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>This is a huge issue</i> • <i>Make repairs before it gets too bad; don’t rely on stop-gap measures</i> • <i>This only a street Band-Aid</i> • Most participants were aware that they could report potholes to the City, although some expressed skepticism over whether and how efficiently repairs are made
Neighborhood greenways	Some	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There was general confusion between what this term means. Several participants were confused between “greenways” and “greenbelts” and others suggested the term was referring to: parking strips, traffic

Term	How many participants knew what the term means?		Discussion*
	Group 1	Group 2	
			<p>circles, median strips or neighborhood parks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Incredible resource; we should protect them and do more</i> (referring to Burke Gilman Trail) • <i>Who's going to pay for maintenance? This makes me think it could lead to more crime or disrepair.</i>
High-capacity transit	Most	Most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most participants focused on light rail, although there was some understanding that this could also include other forms of transit • <i>Limited in where you can go on high-capacity transit – it would be better if it went all over Seattle</i> • <i>Need to provide people the motive to use it in order for it to be more successful</i> • <i>One word – fabulous</i>
Light rail	Most	Most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Expand light rail to the Eastside</i> • <i>Costly and inefficient</i> • <i>More people would ride rail if we had an extensive system; it seems cleaner, more comfortable and easier than riding the bus</i>
Streetcar	Most	Most	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Only goes from point A to point B; it should be expanded to go everywhere</i> • Several participants felt circulator buses were a better alternative (i.e. the West Seattle Water Taxi shuttle) • <i>Slower; stuck in traffic just like cars</i> • <i>Good for neighborhood connectors</i>
Walkable Zone	Most	Some	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally, participants were in favor of more “urban village” areas with good neighborhood connections (i.e. plazas in European cities) • <i>This would be great – they should do it for all of Downtown and up to Capitol Hill</i> • <i>Like a sidewalk – no bikes, no cars</i>

Term	How many participants knew what the term means?		Discussion*
	Group 1	Group 2	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One participant mentioned <i>woonerfs</i> in Holland and said that concept should be replicated in Seattle
Placemaking	None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None of the participants knew what this term means

* This column includes observations and paraphrased quotes (in italics) from each focus group

Definition of the term “System Preservation and Safety”

The moderator asked participants what the term “system preservation and safety” means to them and what types of projects they would expect to be funded by money set aside for this purpose. Participants generally expressed confusion over the term and had differing opinions over what it means. Some participants focused on the safety aspect (“makes lanes safer and more operable”), while others focused on preservation (“makes me think we’re stuck and not moving forward” and “preserving views and good elements of projects”).

Transportation Funding Recommendations

The purpose of this segment was to test the recommendations from the CTAC III and learn whether participants would support these recommendations. It was also intended to identify some of the questions and concerns that participants would have about these recommendations.

After reviewing a simplified matrix (see Appendix B) showing the CTAC III’s recommendations, participants were hesitant to agree or disagree with the recommendations without more information. Most participants expressed a willingness to pay for transportation improvements, but wanted additional data or more education before expressing support for the allocations on the matrix. They felt that it was too vague and did not provide enough information on what they would be getting for their money.

The types of additional information that participants wanted varied. When asked about what information they needed to support these recommendations, we heard the following responses:

- Some said they would like to know how many sidewalks the money would buy, or how many potholes it would fill.
- Some wanted to know where the money would be spent and what neighborhoods would benefit.
- Some wanted more information on how this fits into the City’s overall transportation budget (what percentage this represented for each mode, how far these funds would go to addressing the need, etc).

Although participants generally expressed a willingness to pay, some felt that \$80 was too high and suggested starting with a lower amount or phasing the vehicle license fee in over several years. Others suggested that it would be fairer to have a tax based on the value of the vehicle (“if I have an expensive car I should pay more”).

Participants in Group 2 said that maintenance and preservation are things “the City should be doing anyway,” which made them less willing to support the recommendation. However, when one participant mentioned Initiative 695 that passed in 1999¹, others began to remember the history and understand how the City could be facing a funding shortage. Most participants agreed that the history needs to be part of the story and that it makes people more likely to be sympathetic to the City’s position.

“See, it’s interesting to hear her perspective and this history because I didn’t know about it. The [important] thing is educating the public because if you know more about this history and what happened than, okay, it makes more sense.”

Participants in both groups emphasized the importance of communication and education to help generate support for transportation improvements. Generally, the more participants knew about the specific need and the history of the funding crisis facing the City, the more they were supportive of the recommendations.

Perceptions of the City of Seattle and SDOT

The purpose of this section was to test perceptions of the City of Seattle and the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT). Due to lack of time, this section was only discussed with Group 2.

The moderator asked participants whether they feel things in the City are going in the right direction or have gotten off track. Participants said they felt that things have generally gotten “off track.” When asked to describe their attitude toward SDOT, six participants said they have a “negative” perception and two participants said they have a “neutral” attitude.

Participants said they feel SDOT is “dysfunctional” and “does not have a clear focus.” One participant said the department is: “like a college student who can’t pick a major.” One participant agreed that, “with the resources they’ve got, [SDOT] is doing a good job” and all participants felt that workers on the street (“out in the trucks”) are doing a great job.

Participants suggest that SDOT should do a better job of communicating successes and demonstrating how funds are being used (i.e. when a project is completed) and why decisions are made.

“[...] get the public excited so they want to give more money. When nothing’s getting done, it’s like, ‘why are we giving more?’”

¹ I-695 was the Tim Eyman initiative that cut the state motor vehicle excise tax. I-695 was declared unconstitutional but effectively went into effect when the state legislature passed its own version to prevent voter backlash,

Transportation Benefits

The purpose of this section was to test some of the statements that might be used to convey the benefits of the CTAC III recommendations and determine which ones are the most compelling to the public.

The moderator asked participants to rank a list of benefits according to which ones they think are most compelling and which are the least important.

Participants felt the benefits that directly related to transportation were the most compelling. The top benefits were:

- Faster and more reliable transit
- Better transit connections
- More transportation choices

Participants agreed that it is better to focus on transportation benefits rather than the side benefits that come with improving transportation.

The benefits marked as least compelling included:

- Environmental stewardship
- Convenience
- More vibrant, people-oriented spaces

Participants did not like the indirect benefits because they thought they were vague and confusing. They also said it was unclear how they relate to transportation improvements.

Wrap-up and Recommendations

Based on the outcomes from the focus groups, PRR has the following recommendations:

1. Initially, people balked at using funds from the proposed \$80 VLF to pay for maintenance, because they believed that the City should be taking care of this already. However, when one participant reminded them of how funds for transportation were cut drastically when I-695 passed, many of them made the connection between this loss of revenue and the current state of the SDOT budget. In describing the purpose of and need for the \$80 VLF, we recommend telling this story and making the connection between the loss of revenue and the current shortfall in the SDOT budget.
2. Given that participants did not understand the terms that the City uses to describe certain transportation investments, we recommend that the City avoid using these terms if possible. Instead, the City should use more descriptive words and graphic depictions to describe some of these investments.
3. When describing the CTAC III recommendations, it will be important to provide residents with data that helps explain what the \$80 VLF will buy (such as specific projects that will be funded, areas of the City that will benefit and data on how the additional funds fit within SDOT's overall budget).
4. When describing the benefits of the \$80 VLF package, we recommend that the City identify those benefits that are more specific and tied directly to transportation. Those benefits that

were vague or tied to indirect benefits, such as environmental stewardship and community building were less compelling to participants.

Appendix A: Moderator Guide

(Revised July 21, 2011)

CTAC III

Focus Group Moderator Guide

I. Introduction (7 minutes)

- Moderator introduces herself/himself.
- [Explain:] A focus group is a group discussion where we can learn more in-depth about peoples' ideas and opinions (compared to telephone or written surveys).
- My job is to facilitate the discussion and make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak **and to make sure that no one dominates the conversation.**
- Mention observers in separate room.
- Housekeeping – Bathrooms and refreshments.
- Mention ground rules:
 - There is no right or wrong answer; we're interested in your honest and candid opinions and ideas.
 - Our discussion is totally confidential. We will not use your contact information in any report.
 - Our discussion today is being recorded. These recordings allow us to write a more complete report, and to make sure we accurately reflect your opinions. However, please only speak one at a time, so that the recorder can pick up all your comments.
 - It is important to tell YOUR thoughts, not what you think others will think, or what you think others want to hear.
 - Please turn off cell phones.
 - Your stipend will be provided as you leave.
 - Relax and enjoy!
- We're going to spend our time today talking about transportation improvements for Seattle. Any questions about the purpose of our focus group or the ground rules before we begin?

I'd like you each to introduce yourselves. Please tell us:

- Your first name
- What part of Seattle you live in
- Your primary mode of transportation for commuting or traveling around the City? Do you usually take the bus, walk, drive, ride a bike, etc?

II. Perception of Transportation in Seattle (12 minutes)

1. I am distributing a form that has four columns. Please write down what comes to mind when you think about driving, biking, walking, or taking transit in Seattle. **[Open up to discussion and write**

down common themes on flip-chart. Listen for and probe on what words are used to describe their travel experience.]

2. In your opinion, what is the most important transportation issue facing Seattle? [List issues on flip chart and categorize them according to common themes, such as maintenance, safety, mobility, equity, and accessibility.]

III. Maintenance vs. New Projects (10 minutes)

3. Looking at the transportation issues you identified earlier, if you knew that only one transportation issue could be addressed, which one should it be? Please take a moment to think about your top choice. [Ask each participant to give their top choice and tally on the flip chart]
4. Given limited resources, which would you say is more important: building new transportation projects or maintenance and preservation of the existing transportation system or both? Why?

IV. Communicating about Transportation Improvements (35 minutes)

5. Now I'm going to provide you with a form that lists different transportation terms and ask you to write down what you *think* each term means and what you *feel* about each term. [Open up to brief discussion of each term and write common themes on flip-chart. Listen for and probe on what's behind their attitudes toward different terms (i.e. why they like or don't like a particular term)].

- Bike lanes and bike boxes
- Re-channelization
- Road Diet
- Complete Streets
- Pothole/Spot repair
- Neighborhood greenways
- High-capacity transit
- Light Rail
- Streetcar
- Walkable Zone
- Placemaking

6. What about the term "System Preservation and Safety? What does this mean to you and what types of projects would you expect to be funded by money set aside for this purpose?

ASK CLIENT IF THEY HAVE ANY OTHER QUESTIONS BEFORE MOVING ON

V. Recommendations (40 minutes)

A committee comprised of Seattle citizens has shared their transportation priorities with the City Council. The City Council and Mayor could offer a ballot measure asking voters to approve up to \$80 in a vehicle license fee to pay for these transportation priorities. Now we are going to discuss some specific improvements that the citizen committee is recommending. I'm interested in your opinion of these recommendations and why you would or would not support them.

7. I'm going to distribute a sheet of paper that describes how the citizens committee recommends allocating money. Please read this paper and indicate in the space at the bottom whether you agree or disagree with this recommendation.
8. I'd like to see where we stand. Let's find out by a show of hands how many of you agree with this recommendation. [Then probe on why or why not. For those that don't agree with the recommendation, how would they allocate funds differently?]
 - a. Let's discuss your priorities for these three recommended funding categories. What are your priorities for each of the three categories?
 - b. What type of projects or programs would you want to see funded with this money?
 - c. What are important considerations? [Facilitate discussion. Probe for why people support various priorities.]
9. I am distributing a list of things that some people think are the benefits of the projects listed on your sheet of paper. Please number the TOP three with #1 being what you see as the top benefit, #2 as the second most important benefit, and #3 as the third most important benefit. Please also put an "x" next to the least important benefit:
 - d. Better accessibility for seniors and people with mobility challenges
 - e. More transportation choices
 - f. Environmental stewardship
 - g. Equity for underserved communities
 - h. Economic vitality for Seattle and Washington State
 - i. More livable communities
 - j. Faster and more reliable transit
 - k. Timely and cost-effective investments in maintenance that would prevent more expensive future repairs
 - l. More vibrant, people-oriented spaces
 - m. Better transit connections
 - n. Convenience
 - o. Pedestrian or bicyclist safety
 - p. Reducing maintenance backlog

[As a group, tally the number of those who ranked each benefit as #1. For those benefits that rise to the top, ask how many ranked those as benefit #2. Open up to discussion regarding why certain benefits were ranked higher than others. Probe on:

- Which is most compelling? Why?
- Which is the most believable? Why?
- Are there any others you might suggest?
- Are there any "fatal flaws" (e.g. misunderstandings, duplicative meanings, negative connotations, etc.)]

VI. Perception of City of Seattle and SDOT (10 minutes)

[If time remains]

10. Do you feel things in the City of Seattle are going in the right direction, or that things have gotten off track? Why?
11. Would you say you have a positive, negative, or neutral attitude toward SDOT? [show of hands]
12. I'd like to know what you think about the Seattle Department of Transportation. What do you think is SDOT's main responsibility? How well do you think they are fulfilling that responsibility? [Discuss. Probe on why.]

VII. Wrap Up (6 minutes)

13. Now that we've completed our discussion, is there anything that particularly stands out for you? Any other thoughts or comments?

Ask client if they have any other questions they want asked.

Thank you for your time. Please see the host on the way out to collect your stipend.

Appendix B: Recommendations Matrix

Allocation of \$80 VLF Revenues

Transportation Projects and Programs	Recommended Annual Funding Levels for \$80 VLF
<i>System Preservation and Safety</i>	
Pavement Preservation Make repairs that prevent more expensive future repair	\$ 5,000,000
Traffic Safety Maintain systems that are important to safety, such as traffic signals and lane markings	\$3,000,000
Total Preservation and Safety	\$8,000,000 (about 30%)
<i>Transit Master Plan Implementation</i>	
Transit Access Make it easier for people to access transit	\$1,300,000
Neighborhood Transit Opportunity Fund Partner with other agencies to improve transit access for people with mobility challenges and to link neighborhoods to bus stops and transit stations	\$2,700,000
Transit Corridor Improvements Make improvements along 15 high productivity corridors prioritized by Seattle’s Transit Master Plan increasing reliability, speed and convenience	\$9,800,000
Total Transit Improvements	\$13,800,000 (about 50%)
<i>Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Implementation</i>	
Pedestrian Safety and Access For example sidewalks and crossing improvements	\$2,850,000
Bicycle Safety and Access For example bike lanes, neighborhood greenways and trails	\$1,850,000
Neighborhood Street Fund Large Projects Increase funding for neighborhood improvements. Projects nominated by neighborhoods and would enhance safety and mobility	\$ 700,000
Total Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvements	\$5,400,000 (about 20%)
Total Funding	\$27.2M