



City of Seattle

Mike McGinn, Mayor

*Seattle
Freight
Advisory
Board*

April 21, 2011

Warren Aakervik

Linda Anderson

Alon Bassok

Cliff Bates

Bari Bookout

Eric Candelaria

Terry Finn

Anne Goodchild

Chris Martin

Michael Sheehan

Bob Viggers

Cameron Williams

Kate Joncas and Ref Lindmark
Co-Chairs, Citizens Transportation Action Committee III

Dear Ms. Joncas and Mr. Lindmark,

Thank you for your leadership in soliciting the opinions of the newly formed Seattle Freight Advisory Board as CTAC III seeks to develop funding recommendations for the Seattle Transportation Benefit District and for a potential transportation ballot measure. As you heard at our April 19 Freight Advisory Board meeting, our ability to comment on either project or funding priorities is hamstrung by the lack of a citywide freight plan and a previously articulated vision of freight transportation priorities. While we work to find the resources to begin this critical effort, we would like to solicit your support in preserving our existing freight system (our Major Truck Streets), until we have defined future freight needs and a viable plan for addressing them.

Even in the absence of a plan, however, we shall lay out some important considerations for your CTAC deliberations, and answer the three questions you posed in your March 22 letter to our board.

In developing a project list and spending plan, we would like the CTAC to remember that:

- Freight and goods movement is critical to the city's day-to-day livability as the mechanism by which essential goods (such as groceries and medical care products) are delivered to our citizens, and waste products are removed from the city for recycling, disposal, or reuse.
- Freight and goods movement is critical to maintaining economic vitality at the city, state, and national level. The Seattle and Washington economies are driven by freight dependent business - aerospace, international trade, fisheries, agricultural production and tourism.
- Freight activity in the region supports family-wage blue collar jobs in transportation as well as the jobs in the industries it supports.

The Seattle Freight Advisory Board shall advise the City Council, the Mayor, and all departments and offices of the City in development of a functional and efficient freight system and on all matters related to freight and the impact that actions by the City may have upon the freight environment.

City Council Resolution
31243

Clearly, freight transportation's primary contribution to the region is economic. Given this, we ask that questions of funding priorities across modes and specific project selection include consideration of economic returns. Does a proposed investment help job creation? Will it help existing employment centers function more efficiently? Will an investment make us more competitive for national or global markets? Not every investment can directly contribute to economic development, and we recognize that economic benefits may not always be well understood, but, many organizations faced with these decisions, including WSDOT and PSRC are using or developing these frameworks. You asked us to respond to three questions in your March 22 letter:

1. Given the limited resources available for transportation, is it more important to focus most of these new resources on new projects, or focus most of the resources on maintaining the existing system?
2. What are your highest priority specific freight improvement projects?
3. What are the most important things to consider when prioritizing transportation investments?

It is not possible to answer the first question in a meaningful way without additional information. What is the cost of specific maintenance projects and improvement projects? The current state of our infrastructure is so poor that some maintenance projects are necessary just for passability, however, in some cases, the returns from improvement projects will be more significant. If we had a framework for project evaluation, these decisions could be made systematically. With increasing traffic volumes, continued deterioration of the infrastructure, and existing gaps in the truck route network, it is not an either/or proposition, both maintenance and improvements will be necessary.

In response to your question asking for our highest priority freight projects, it is at this point that the absence of a freight plan puts our community at a disadvantage. With a comprehensive planning effort, we would be able to identify the critical freight network, and the projects that would most effectively complete or strengthen that. Also, we could compare that network to the bicycle and pedestrian networks, to consider their points of conflict or opportunities for collaboration. Unfortunately, we have not had the time, and do not currently have resources identified to do this work. In addition, with only \$6.4 million a year, the Seattle Transportation Benefit District bond issue is unlikely to be able to fund significant infrastructure improvement projects..

In responding to the third question, we would return to our previous point about economic returns. An efficient freight transportation system is one that sustains a healthy economy and quality of life in the city, region and state. Without a clearly defined and well-connected network of truck routes, trucks must travel longer distances, increasing CO₂ emissions, PM pollution, traffic congestion, and increasing the cost of goods. Without a set of roads where trucks have priority, trucks need to more frequently accelerate and decelerate, increasing PM pollution, noise levels, and reducing pedestrian and bicyclist safety. Given the CTAC III's charge is to "develop the framework and shared vision necessary to address the city's commitment to affordable, safe and efficient movement for persons, goods and services", we would like to see the economic contribution of freight transportation valued. If it is not, negative environmental, economic, and social consequences arise.

While a certain amount of freight activity will be resilient to increasing transportation costs (passing these costs on to the consumer through increased costs of goods), some businesses are not required to stay in this region. By under-investing in transportation, the cost of moving freight increases and this reduces the ability of our region to attract and retain businesses that provides essential goods and services, and employment opportunities.

Thank you for the opportunity to introduce some of our freight concerns to the CTAC III process. Please feel free to call me for any additional information or assistance.

Sincerely,

Anne Goodchild
SFAB Chair