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 DISTRICT ONE

JUN 21 2001

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 MAGGI FIMIA

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June 19, 2001

Maggi Fimia
 Metropolitan King County Council
 516 Third Ave, Rm. 1200
 Seattle WA 98104-3272

Dear Councilmember Fimia:

The Downtown Seattle Association has repeatedly stated its opposition to light rail LINK alignments that usurp the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel ("DSTT") unless the resulting passenger capacity at least matches existing capacity for bus passengers. This was the principal basis for DSA's opposition to the alignments ending at the University of Washington. Without a transit collector on the northern I-5 corridor, tunnel capacity would decline and downtown congestion would worsen.

Incredibly, the Sound Transit Board is now considering four other alignments that usurp the DSTT but fall even shorter than the previous preferred alternative in terms of the critical criteria of ridership and transit collection points.

Currently, approximately 40% of downtown workers commute by bus. Particularly during peak traffic hours, the DSTT is a vital part of the regional transit system that serves this need. All four of the plans currently under consideration by Sound Transit would reduce the ultimate capacity of the DSTT for decades and none would significantly add transit capacity, reduce congestion or result in greater ease of movement into or out of downtown.

Further, these options require the DSTT to be removed entirely from service for more than two years, forcing all the busses onto our extremely crowded streets. All downtown bus riders will experience degraded service in the short-term and reductions in transit service will continue into the long term for bus commuters and visitors to Downtown from communities north and east.

Although we appreciate that possible joint bus/light rail use of the DSTT could reduce the impact of displaced rush hour buses on surface streets, the bus tunnel's capacity will be limited to less than 50 busses in each direction during the rush hour. This will certainly lead to a decline in service for long time transit riders.

The DSTT is an important regional transit asset that should not be devalued in an attempt to find an affordable plan to get some momentum for light rail. If the Sound Transit Board is determined to "do something" to get started, it should refrain from putting a foreshortened "starter segment" into the DSTT. This important asset should put to its best use by providing the bus transit capacity it was originally designed to deliver, until a light rail alignment can be extended to a northern transit collector.

If we must "do something", the Sound Transit Board should consider terminating a southern light rail line at the International District Transit Tunnel Station/Royal Brougham and maximizing the DSTT for buses for the reasons stated. We understand that this may have a detrimental short-term effect on light rail ridership for the "starter segment" but this option provides greater long-term flexibility and overall benefits for regional mass transit. With the upcoming decisions on the viaduct, there may be an opportunity to develop a new right of way through Downtown, and we could end up with a tunnel for bus and a tunnel for rail, but only if we leave our DSTT options open.

Downtown businesses have supported virtually every recent effort to improve public transit. We hope to provide similar support to a revised Sound Transit program that has as a high priority to improve overall transit services rather than continuing to look for the "silver bullet" that makes light rail viable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bill Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bill Lewis
Chair