

February 22, 2007

Statement for the Public Hearing Record on Senate Bill 5803, creating regional transportation commissions.

AND

Statement for the Public Hearing Record on House Bill 2101, addressing regional transportation commission findings and recommendations.

Speaking as a private citizen with a background in transportation policy analysis, I broadly support the recommendations of the Rice-Stanton Regional Transportation Commission as stated in their final report, and thus I support, generally, legislative efforts to implement the recommendations, including two pending bills, SB 5803 and HB 2101. I urge that the Legislature move forward during this session to create a plan in the law for implementing transportation governance improvements as specified by the Rice-Stanton report.

Since public transportation funding for the Puget Sound region is at record levels, and the forecasts of future transit market share have been falling since the publication of the *Destination 2030 Metropolitan Transportation Plan* in 2001¹, I urge particular attention to the opportunities to reform public transit planning toward greater effectiveness in gaining new riders.

Furthermore, I urge that the Legislature order the implementation of Puget Sound transportation governance reform to occur before giving the broken system \$38 billion more to keep on doing what it is already doing so badly.

Following is further detail substantiating my concern:

The two bills address an immediate problem – failed and failing present day plans to improve the flow of traffic and increase transit use in the central Puget Sound region. SB 5803 notes, **“Our current system of transportation governance delivers inadequate results, and requires fundamental systemic change to meet our state's transportation needs.”** HB 2101 notes, **“A single authority for planning, prioritizing, and funding all modes of transportation would be able to choose the optimal solutions to the region's transportation challenges, rather than seek problems to solve with predetermined solutions.”**

The emerging and massive RTID/ST2 roads and transit investment package that is the direct and immediate result of the present Puget Sound regional transportation governance system illustrates what is wrong. The predetermined solutions in this package are not working, and furthermore are not forecast to work in the future.

As of today, \$38 billion is emerging as the sum to be sought in the RTID and Sound Transit package on November 6, 2007, an election date mandated by the Legislature. The \$38 billion is

¹ See <http://www.bettertransport.info/pitf/keyfinding.htm> for details.

the independently estimated sum of the RTID and Sound Transit spending request over 20 years expressed in year of expenditure dollars, including both capital spending and debt service -- \$14 billion for RTID, and \$24 billion for Sound Transit.

Unfortunately, both SB 5803 and HB 2101 imply that the November vote should go forward, SB5803 states that new governance system recommended by Rice-Stanton adopt this package as their own if it wins approval.

Here is the problem with this approach: **Computer modeling results released last summer by Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) of the complete implementation of all projects to be funded in the November 2007 election – plus further extension and expansion along the same lines – show that traffic congestion will become worse and worse in the decades ahead.** These computer modeling results are described in a draft EIS report chapter published by Puget Sound Regional Council.²

Specifically, this PSRC environmental impact analysis reveals the 2040 performance of the billions now planned to be voted on in November are as follows:

- Vehicle miles traveled on the freeway system are estimated to increase 43 – 53 percent.
- Vehicle miles traveled on the arterial system are estimated to increase 53 – 81 percent.
- Vehicle hours traveled on the freeway system are estimated to increase 48 – 99 percent.
- Vehicle hours traveled on the arterial system are estimated to increase 66 – 111 percent.
- Delay on the freeway system is estimated to increase 18 – 150 percent.
- Delay on the arterial system is estimated to increase 126 – 292 percent.

These published results describe a path of worsening regional transportation performance under the present governance system. In addition, the 2040 forecast shows that even with stronger growth management putting 80% of new population growth in the 32 largest cities of the region, the fraction of the regional workforce with 30-minute transit accessibility to work will be just 1.5%. This forecast result obtains despite full build-out of 125 miles of light rail.

As cogently described by former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta last May, "Congestion is not a scientific mystery, nor is it an uncontrollable force. Congestion results from poor policy choices and a failure to separate solutions that are effective from those that are not. We need a new approach, and we need it now."³

In support of a new approach, **I urge that the Legislature order the implementation of Puget Sound transportation governance reform to occur first, before authorizing a November tax election intended to give the broken system \$38 billion more to keep on doing what it is already doing so badly** – as shown by present day traffic congestion results and reinforced by forecasts of even worse congestion in the future, a direct outcome of the \$38 billion package.

² The chapter is <http://www.psrc.org/projects/vision/deis/ch5-3.pdf> posted at <http://www.psrc.org/projects/vision/deis/index.htm>.

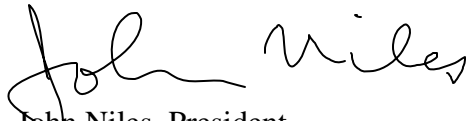
³ Speech from May 2006 in full text at <http://www.dot.gov/affairs/minetasp051606.htm>

Plenty of stop-gap transportation construction will be happening in the next two years with present levels of funding while the new transportation governance system recommended by RTC is fine-tuned and installed. Lots of road construction is underway already with the two WSDOT gas tax hikes voted since the turn of the century.

King County Metro has considerable funding for bus improvements under last November's Transit Now 1/10th cent sales tax hike, including five new Bus Rapid Transit lines. City of Seattle was also funded last November to make street improvements that help buses move faster.

Even Sound Transit still has plenty of money from the 1996 Sound Move tax. This agency has over two years of fully-funded construction and testing to go before opening its light rail line from downtown Seattle to SeaTac Airport.

A sensible next step for the present transportation planning mess around Puget Sound is this: **Fix the transportation governance system first before squandering tens of billions that demonstrate that the present planning system can make things even worse.**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Niles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Niles".

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I have placed additional information supporting this viewpoint on the Internet at www.globaltelematics.com/pitf/reform.htm.