

June 3, 2010

Dear Seattle City Council Members,

As you consider the terms of agreements for cost sharing and construction of the SR 99 deep bore tunnel project, we, the undersigned, encourage you to take actions to protect the interests of Seattle's most vulnerable populations. Low income residents, the elderly, children, and communities of color have little to gain from the proposed bored tunnel. They also have the most to lose in the unfortunate event of tunnel cost overruns. We ask that you take actions now to ensure that programs which serve the needs of these populations are not put at further risk if cost overruns occur. Specifically, we urge you **to ensure that the state will take full responsibility for tunnel cost overruns, or to develop clear and transparent policy that indicates exactly how the city will pay for any tunnel cost overruns that might occur should the city be responsible as the Legislature intends.**

As you are aware, there is ample evidence suggesting that the risk of cost overruns for bored tunnel projects is both real and significant. For instance, of the \$1.9 billion budgeted for the deep bore tunnel, only 21% is allocated to covering "risk and inflation". However, recently completed tunnel projects in the Seattle area have ranged from 30% to 56% over budget.¹ The expected final cost of the Brightwater sewage tunnel is now *double* the estimate at the time of its approval.² When asked to evaluate WSDOT's own budget and schedule for the tunnel, a panel of tunnel industry experts concluded the completion date (2015) is "very optimistic" and "the schedule to achieve that date carries significant risks of project delays".³ In short, while we can hope that delays and cost overruns do not occur, it is crucial that you take substantive actions to protect Seattle citizens from the potentially devastating financial implications of cost overruns.

The city's budget situation is already dire. The mayor is requesting budget cuts in all city departments. These cuts will make it increasingly difficult to maintain basic city services on which Seattle's most vulnerable populations depend. If tunnel cost overruns occur, and if the City of Seattle is forced to pay, these financial difficulties would be compounded, potentially burdening the city with debt for decades to come. We should learn from the example of Massachusetts, where the state government is faced with **\$7 billion in interest payments alone** due to 'Big Dig' cost overruns.⁴ Even a small fraction of these costs would significantly impair Seattle's ability to pay for essential programs like human services, affordable housing, beat cops, schools, libraries, and parks.

At risk as well are Seattle's plans for developing a more sustainable and equitable transportation system through investments in walking, biking, and transit service. Fully 15.3% of households in Seattle do not have access to a motor vehicle.⁵ Low income residents who cannot afford the luxury of automobile travel will be the most harmed by our continued lack of funding for sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit right-of-way. These residents are also most at risk of bearing the health and safety burdens of our continued reliance on an automobile-centered transportation system. Extensive pedestrian facilities and transit investments are shown to help achieve improved air quality and health⁶. If

Seattle is burdened with cost overruns, our ability to invest in non-motorized transportation modes and transit could be significantly diminished for decades to come. Therefore we urge you to ensure that moving forward with the tunnel project does not compromise our ability to create a transportation system that meets the needs of all Seattle residents.

In summary, we request that the Council clearly communicate their plans for protecting Seattle residents from the risk of tunnel cost overruns. If the Legislature is not willing to take responsibility for this risk, then the city needs its own plan for such contingencies. This plan must demonstrate that financial burdens of costs overruns will not detrimentally impact the city's most vulnerable residents. Members of our organizations would be pleased to work with you in developing such a plan.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Mohamed Hassan, Public Relation Director
United African Public Affairs Committee

Morgan Ahouse, Chair
Sierra Club, Cascade Chapter

K. Wyking Garrett, Exertive Director
UmojaFest P.E.A.C.E. Center
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David Bloom, Director Emeritus
InterFaith Task Force on Homelessness

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Richard L. Dyksterhuis
Committee to Improve Linden Avenue North

Tim Harris, Executive Director
Real Change

Rodney Rutherford, Steering Committee
Transit Riders Union

Keith Harris
People's Parking Lot

¹ http://www.sightline.org/research/sprawl/res_pubs/cost-overruns-for-seattle-area-tunnel-projects/tunnel_report.pdf

² http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2004316832_brightwaternew31m.html

³ http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/7A5216B4-3CA3-402A-98B7-BA02399BED0A/0/ConstructionStrategiesWorkshopReport_42709.pdf

⁴ http://www.boston.com/news/local/articles/2008/07/17/big_digs_red_ink_engulfs_state/

⁵ US Census American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates (2006-2008) <http://tinyurl.com/33t2dxm>

⁶ A Study of Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality, and Health (LUTAQH) in King County, WA <http://your.kingcounty.gov/exec/news/2006/pdf/lutaqhupdated.pdf> - 2005-09-27