CITY OF RENTON

Kathy Keolker, Mayor

Planning/Building/PublicWorks Department
Gregg Zimmerman P.E., Administrator

Briefing Paper

August 22, 2006

To: Regional Transportation Commission

Subject: Request for Submission of Comments from the Regional Transportation Commission

The City of Renton is pleased to submit some initial comments and observations related to the four topics outlined in the RTC's August 2, 2006 memorandum. These will be very brief at this time.

The four bullets are excerpted directly from RTC's memorandum.

Under the current systems of transportation governance, what works and what doesn't work for you? What regional governance structures should the RTC consider? What are the advantages and disadvantages of some of the more widely used governance structures?

Response: The present system for governance (or lack of a system) has been described, often critically, by many others including the Blue Ribbon Commission. As a city, a major concern is that the city's and sub region's transportation concerns are taken into account. We currently have many agencies responsible for sections of the full transportation "pie": Sound Transit for regional transit; WSDOT for regional highways and ferries; PSRC for regional transportation planning and distribution of federal SAFETEA LU and FTA grant funds for transportation projects including transit, roads, bridges, and trails; RTID to assemble and put on the ballot a list of major regional roadway projects, and a bevy of agencies responsible for obtaining and distributing various state transportation grants: FMSIB for freight mobility projects, TIB for a range of types of projects, CRAB for projects in rural areas, etc. And then there are the regional and local agencies responsible for transit service, roads, streets, and trails within the counties and cities. There are several upsides and downsides to this "many-headed" structure. An upside is the existence of agencies that focus on specific types of transportation systems, which assures that there will be a recognition and emphasis on this specific need. But this upside also presents a downside in that agencies can move in different directions and not complement each other or contribute to the larger plan or the greater good. Multiple agencies tend to form their own hierarchy of needs that do not always support the programs of other agencies. This can lead to helter-skelter improvements that use funding but do not contribute much to the operation of the overall transportation system. With so many agencies at work, there is no one entity

making the hard choices of how many resources should go to the different transportation modes in order to build a balanced, optimal multi-modal transportation system.

It has been Renton's experience that some of the above-named agencies are much more accessible than others. Some consider cities their "clients" or "customers" and provide excellent, responsive customer service, while others have a more closed-door approach and seem to ignore input from cities that make requests or recommendations contrary to the agency's preconceived notions of what is best for the region. In most cases, the larger the city or entity is, the more likely its voice will be heard under the current multi-agency governance system. However, the most severe, significant regional transportation problems do not always occur within the boundaries of the largest cities. These types of problems can be ignored or solutions delayed, which can be detrimental to the entire transportation network.

We are intrigued by the concept of merging or consolidating the functions of the many regional and grant funding agencies into one large governing agency that would be responsible for transportation planning, regional transit planning and service provision, regional roadway planning and funding, grant funding distribution, freight mobility, and other pieces of the transportation "pie". In order for such an agency to provide an improvement over the current system, superior customer services to the various cities, counties, and citizens would need to be part of the agency charter. Also the charter would need to assure that adequate attention is given to all the various transportation modes so that some critical needs don't get dropped by the wayside while others are being diligently pursued.

We think that the structure that would best be able to accomplish these goals would be the creation of several-county transportation districts, for this region covering King, Pierce, Snohomish and possibly Kitsap counties. The transportation districts would each be controlled by a board of directors consisting of officials specifically elected by the citizens to serve on this board from regions within the district. The regions would each contain an equal share of the district's population. This would assure that the citizens would be fairly represented. Equipped with a carefully crafted charter emphasizing customer service, accountability, accessibility to the cities and the citizens, and clearly establishing the agency responsibilities, we think that such a transportation district could improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our efforts to resolve our various transportation challenges.

What are likely to be the biggest challenges to effective regional governance in the Central Puget Sound? What criteria and impacts might the RTC use to evaluate potential governance structures?

Response: The criteria that Renton would believe to be important are ones that balance the "efficiency" of a new structure with some degree of accountability to local jurisdictions. We realize that this is a major challenge. The present system's oft related shortcomings of "endless process" and consensus building also foster a degree of trust. We believe that criteria for project selection and prioritization should be determined in a collaborative process. In some ways the present planning and project selection process for federal transportation projects through the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) does address the concerns of cities. It's a cumbersome process, particularly in King County, but cities have a considerable level of trust in it.

The criteria that the RTC should use to evaluate potential governance structures should ultimately boil down to the assessment of what works, based upon the opinions and experiences of the constituent cities, counties, and agencies, and also what works in other states. The definition of "what works" to us would be a governance structure that has proven elsewhere to effectively produce plans and build projects on time and within budget, and that has also managed to maintain the trust of its constituent agencies. For starters, some of the regional transportation organizations in the Puget Sound Region have been effective in delivering projects and in pleasing their constituents. Others have not been as effective. Inquiries as to what works and what does not should start right here.

What impacts do you predict for your agency if a new regional entity assumed some of the local transit and transportation responsibilities in the region?
Response: We are not sure to what extent local responsibilities would be shifted to a regional entity. One of Renton's main concerns would be the relationship of the local jurisdiction's land use legislation, budgetary roles, and business plans to the priorities established for regional transportation. It is far from obvious that there would be any advantage in ceding the local transportation role to a regional entity. Cities need to preserve some ability to effectuate their legislative priorities, and having control over local transportation planning and construction provides them with this. It would be best if the regional agency focused on regional transportation issues, and left the local issues to the local jurisdictions whose elected officials are immediately accountable to the voters.

How does your agency finance its transportation/transit activities? Please use visual representations to show how much of your revenue comes from state, federal, and local sources, and how that money is spent and on what program areas or major projects. What financial issues should the RTC consider in recommending a regional revenue plan for the Central Puget Sound to the Legislature?
Response: At this time, the scope of this question is too broad for a complete and thorough response. Besides, our funding sources change annually based upon our ability to secure grants or the decision to issue bonds. 2007 is not a typical year because of the fact that we are issuing bonds for transportation projects for the first time, and we did unusually well in acquiring competitive grants. Our program in 2007 will be about four times larger than our typical annual program. With this said the breakdown of our **transportation capital program for 2007** is as follows:

Vehicle Fuel Tax	$565,000	State
Business License Fee	$1,600,000	Local
Fund Balance	$4,537,972	Mix State/Local/Fed
Grants in hand	$8,808,914	Mix State/Fed
Mitigation in hand	$3,035,607	Local
Bonds/LIDs	$9,461,286	Local
Other in hand	$7,447,000	
Total	**$35,455,779**	

The above numbers are for our capital fund only, and do not include our street fund which we use for operation and maintenance as well as transportation planning efforts. These numbers could be provided at a later time if needed.

One observation Renton would make is that the transportation needs are both local and regional. The gas tax increase in 1990 provided funding for regional, state, and local needs. The 2003 and 2005 gas tax increases – which were very welcome – mainly addressed state projects. For a transportation system to work well all parts of the system need to be adequately funded.

If you have questions or would like to discuss our comments in greater detail, please contact either Gregg Zimmerman, Administrator, Planning/Building/Public Works at (425) 430-7311 or Peter Hahn, Deputy Administrator, Planning/Building/Public Works, Transportation Division at (425) 430-7242.

We thank you for this opportunity to provide some preliminary comments and we look forward to the results of your very challenging task.