



March 18, 2020

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

On behalf of the millions of commuters in the Puget Sound region, I want to thank you for your leadership as the country faces this extreme public health and economic emergency. This is an unprecedented time in our country and the effects of the COVID-19 outbreak in our state and across the globe have resulted in significant impacts to Sound Transit. Many of these impacts arise from the need to do all we can to slow the spread of the virus while continuing to operate service for many of the most transit-dependent citizens of our region.

Prior to the outbreak, Sound Transit was providing record levels of service. In 2019, Sound Transit ridership was strong with about 35 million passengers across all of Sound Transit modes of service. COVID-19 has already caused ridership to fall 70 percent, and we expect ridership to fall even further. Given the public health requirements to reduce travel, our ridership will not recover until our region has recovered from COVID-19.

As you evaluate options to provide assistance to the transportation sector, I strongly urge you to focus on the catastrophic impact facing transit agencies, particularly those that, like us, are highly dependent on sales tax revenue. All of the transit agencies in the Sound Transit region are disproportionately dependent on sales tax revenue when compared to the transit industry at large. As such, we face disproportionate negative impacts to our ability to serve the commuters of this region in the face of the economic recession that COVID-19 is triggering.

As you are aware, Sound Transit is in the midst of the largest transit expansion in the nation. The region’s failure to make these investments in the past has resulted in the doubling of road congestion in our region in just the last six years. Just as we are confident that the demand for Sound Transit services will return rapidly when we rebound from this crisis, so too will our road congestion. Sound Transit is determined to fulfill the mandate given to us by voters in 2016, to build a regional transportation network that will allow easy transit access to 84 percent of Sound Transit district residents and 93 percent of jobs. As was the case during the recession of 2009 and 2010, construction of major new Sound Transit projects was a critically important employment engine when much of the construction industry was dormant. As we rebound and regain strength from the

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downturn we are about to experience, our ability to continue our capital expansion will be a critical part of recovery in the Puget Sound region.

To support our operations and expansion last year, 58 percent of Sound Transit revenue originated from the voter-approved dedicated sales tax. This need for special attention and separate categorical funding associated with the loss of sales tax makes up \$4.875 billion of the \$12.875 billion request submitted by the American Public Transit Association (APTA). APTA estimates that there will be a 75 percent loss of dedicated sales tax revenue over the next six months nationwide. As one of the hardest hit regions of the country thus far and with little sales tax generating activity occurring, it is possible that our loss will be greater than 75 percent. While we fully support the entire APTA request, **we ask that the delegation focus its efforts on addressing the challenges facing those agencies who are disproportionately dependent on sales tax revenue.**

To deliver assistance to where it's needed, we hope Congress will develop an approach that is sensitive to the particular areas of impact to transit authorities. The existing formula programs that apportion funding to transit agencies broadly do not address the specific impacts of COVID-19 on agencies like Sound Transit. Congress can design a program quickly that would help fill the gap in sales tax receipts we are already seeing in our region. I am more than willing to assist in that effort.

In closing, I want to assure you that as we continue operations and construction activities, we are focused on ensuring that we are doing everything we can to provide the necessary resource flexibility and protection to our employees, contractors and passengers.

Thank you for your assistance in ensuring that transit providers like Sound Transit be included in the recovery package. Our federal partnership is a critical part of our success. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Peter M. Rogoff
Chief Executive Officers

Cc: Sound Transit Board of Directors
Ann Snell McNeil, Chief Government and Community Relations Officer