

City Calls on Sound Transit to Fund More Transit, Republicans Abandon McCleary Plan

Council sends letter to Sound Transit, Republicans send message to Democrats, and Olympia not interested in rent control.

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1. The Seattle city council and mayor Ed Murray have sent [a letter to Sound Transit](#) outlining their priorities for the ST3 plan; Sound Transit is soliciting feedback from all local jurisdictions in the runup to a draft ST3 proposal due in March.

Most of Seattle's must-have list has been known for a while now. The letter, organized primarily by new city council member Rob Johnson and the mayor's office, calls for: a second downtown transit tunnel, light rail from downtown to West Seattle and downtown to Ballard, new light rail stations on the existing voter-approved lines at Graham Street in Southeast Seattle and 130th Street in North Seattle, and specific stations in South Lake Union and Interbay on the new lines. The letter also flags well-known Seattle priorities like bus rapid transit on Madison Street and land use planning that promotes "transit oriented development"—planning speak for dense, residential and commercial hubs wrapped around transit stations.

However, there's a new bullet point (and the first one in the letter) that the mayor added and Johnson amended with specifics: "Early Transit Deliverables."

"There's no question people want light rail in the region," Johnson says about ST3's vision to build light rail out to Everett and Tacoma, "but there's also no question people are feeling the pinch from missing transit on the pending light rail corridors [in Seattle]."

Johnson says Seattle is asking the ST3 plan to add rapid bus lines along the Downtown-to-West Seattle and Downtwon-to-Ballard routes that light rail won't serve for another decade (if voters pass ST3 this November.)

"In the past five years alone," the letter says, "Seattle added 70,000 residents and 63,000 jobs. ... We face a reality that even under the best circumstances most of these light rail connections are more than a decade or two away, and there is a growing disconnect between the long-range vision of ST3 and the immediate transportation needs Seattle and our region face today. ...With this in mind, the City of Seattle requests that ST3 fund near-term transit..." Specifically, the letter goes on to call for, "Funding operation costs of bus rapid transit lines on future light rail corridors to a Link [light rail train] level of service frequency until light rail can be constructed in the corridor."

Asked how much this would cost, Johnson referenced the current Madison Street BRT plan, one line, which is estimated to cost about \$150 million. Johnson says funding for stop-gap BRT along future light rail corridors should be funded by a combo of the city, the feds, Metro, and Sound Transit.

"Excessive spending on parking disproportionately benefits white people" the advocates letter states flat out.

Johnson's former transit advocacy group, Transportation Choices Coalition, along with a list of other transit, social justice, and green groups also sent [a letter to Sound Transit](#). The letter, signed by OneAmerica, the Cascade Bicycle Club, Puget Sound Sage, and TCC among others, calls for TOD focused on affordable housing, demands attention to multimodal access to stations (not just park and ride access for cars... "excessive spending on parking disproportionately benefits white people" the letter states flat out), and alternatives to building new parking garages (like utilizing existing parking garages in a shared, managed parking model.) [Sound Transit is currently considering nearly \\$1 billion in new parking investments to build as many as 18,000 new stalls.](#)

2. The Washington legislature might fall even farther behind its order to comply with the 2012 Washington state supreme court *McCleary* mandate to fund K–12 schools.

The senate GOP told the House Democrats Friday, it won't vote for a house bill that sets a 2017 deadline to finish the work to meet the requirements of the order. House Majority Leader Pat Sullivan (D-47, Covington), said Monday. The Legislature has already taken flak for delaying the hard work until 2017

Sullivan and representative Kristine Lytton (D-40, Anacortes) said Republican education leader state senator Steve Litzow (R-41, Mercer Island) phoned Lytton Friday to say none of the Senate GOP caucus members will vote for Lytton's bipartisan bill; her bill passed the House 64-34 Monday. Litzow could not be reached for comment Monday.

Lytton's bill and its senate companion bill are the result of a months-long, [tortured bipartisan house-senate working group that met with governor Jay Inslee](#) to work out a schedule for mapping out the *McCleary* fixes. Sullivan and Lytton said Litzow told them that the Senate GOP caucus's objections related to two things: how the bill's capital budget for schools was set up and nailing down 2017 as the year to pass the *McCleary* overhauls.

Negotiations fixed the capital budget dispute over the past weekend, Democrat leaders said in a Monday press session.

But failing to set a 2017 compliance date is nonnegotiable to Democrats, said senator Christine Rolfes (D-23, Bainbridge Island). Rolfes is one of the leaders in the bipartisan working group on this bill. "It's one of the biggest pieces in the bill," Sullivan said.

Rolfes noted the Democratic House and the Republican-dominated Senate have to reach an agreement on this matter, or nothing happens. "Neither party can pass this bill without the other party," she said.

The *McCleary* decision is a Supreme Court ruling that found state leaders failed to meet their constitutional obligations to fully fund basic education. So far, the Legislature has dragged its feet in response—so much so that the court, holding the state in contempt, is now fining the state \$100,000 a day until it complies. The court said full funding must be in place by budget biennium, which actually means the 2017 session, when the heavy biennium budget lifting occurs.

While the state has already put an extra \$2.5 billion into K–12 education since the 2012 *McCleary* ruling and is on track to fully funding transportation costs, basic maintenance, all-day kindergarten, and shrinking K–3 class sizes, two big pieces outlined in *McCleary* remain unmet: teacher compensation, which is estimated at another \$5 billion, and taking local districts off the hook—to the tune of \$3.6 billion per biennium.

Complicating matters, there's also 2014's voter-approved initiative demanding that the state shrink class sizes up through the 12th grade, not just K–3. That policy change is estimated to cost another \$5 billion, though, that piece isn't on the *McCleary* work plan.

Both sides have examined the major shift in the property tax collections from local school districts to the state. But the complications of making such a move fair across 295 school districts with 295 different property tax rates has baffled the Legislature so far. (And despite Seattle voters' belief in progressive taxation, there's plenty of Democratic resistance to a so-called "levy swap" equation that subs-in state property taxes for local levies and result in wealthier liberal counties paying a disproportionate amount to cover the state schools bill.)

For the past three years, Republicans opposed closing tax breaks and levying new taxes for the *McCleary* obligations, saying existing revenue sources are sufficient. Democrats argue the exact opposite.

3. Last week, the city's lobbying staff informed council member Kshama Sawant that her 2015 campaign bumper sticker, rent control, wasn't in play in Olympia. Sawant pressed the lobbying team to talk to legislators who had voiced support for the idea such as state senator Pramila Jayapal (D-37, Southeast Seattle).

At this week's legislative update, though Sawant wasn't there, the lobbying staff told council that Jayapal told them she was not working on rent control.

John Stang contributed to this report from Olympia