

From Denis Law To Sound Transit Board, October 2016, Unreleased

Dear Sound Board Members,

We are struggling with how to address our extreme disappointment over the last-minute word from Sound Transit staff that \$68 million committed to Renton 20 years ago from Sound Move, which we planned to use in the relocation of Renton's downtown transit center and a parking garage, was reallocated to another eastside project. This revelation came after months of discussions and negotiations to the contrary, and leaves us again wondering why Renton has never received any Sound Transit infrastructure investment to offset the hundreds of millions of local tax dollars paid to the transit agency over all these years.

The biggest disappointment is that I personally spent nine months discussing this proposal with County Executive Constantine, other county officials, and the East King County Subarea Board Members of Sound Transit. Each step of the way, I received enthusiastic and unanimous support for both the concept and the moving of the funds, which had been earmarked in the initial Sound Move for a freeway direct-access ramp at North 8th and Interstate 405. We also had discussions with Sound Transit staff during this time about plans for this project and never heard a word about the funds having been spent on other eastside projects.

To be informed in the eleventh hour by Sound Transit staff that no financial support for this project was available unless Sound Transit Phase 3 (ST3) is passed by voters this fall was not only an unreasonable condition, but totally unfair to the citizens of Renton and residents in the surrounding area of unincorporated King County. I appreciate that the Board has since approved reactivation of Renton's project in ST2, and the formal approval of moving funding that was earmarked for the North 8th direct-access ramp to a new transit center and garage, as it becomes available. But now we must wait to see if money becomes available from ST2 sources, or the passage of ST3.

Renton is the only city with a major population and work force that has received no physical infrastructure investment since the time Sound Move gained approval from the voters of our region. Our request to move the transit center and build a garage was a project that would benefit this community that could be funded with the only money directly earmarked for Renton since Sound Move. Instead, we're now told that these funds were distributed to other eastside projects. There is no positive way that I can think of to articulate this to our City Council, to our local residents, or to a business community that supports one of the most significant employment hubs in the region.

We are a city of over 101,000 people, with a workforce of approximately 50,000—18,000 of which work for the state's largest employer and the nation's largest exporter of products (The Boeing Co.). We are also one the most diverse communities in the regions, serving a population with significant need of public transportation options. In light of those facts, it seems unfathomable to us that Renton has not yet been connected to Sound Transit's regional high-capacity transit transportation system.

Worse for you, it simply adds fuel for the critics who contend that a community has to have a seat on the Sound Transit Board in order to receive investment and services. We now have council members urging us to make a public case for a seat on the ST Board.

From Denis Law To Sound Transit Board, October 2016, Unreleased

I have always assumed that the appointed board was making decisions to fund projects that best met the need of the entire county and region, not those of the more politically connected. I still feel this is the case, but we recently had one city administrator, from a jurisdiction receiving a significant ST3 investment, state to us that we have not received the same investment in Renton that other cities have because we have not advocated more for our specific needs.

As you'll recall, we did have to raise a stink in the final hours of establishing the ST3 plan to have Renton added back into the plan, arguing for a BRT Station on 405 at NE 44th. If we had not raised this issue, Renton, once again, would have been left out of the next major investment for high-capacity transit services.

Whether critics about the need to have board representation is valid or not, the region's high-capacity transit system should be built out based upon where the greatest needs are, where the population centers are, and what major employment hubs need to be served for regional connectivity. Based on those objective criteria, Renton should have one of the strongest cases in the entire region for light rail transit (LRT), park-and-ride facilities, and more express bus service. The fact that we have received no LRT and park-and-ride investment to date, and limited express bus service, reflects a major weakness in the system and seems to support the notion that you have to sit on the Board to receive those investments.

As you know, I have no interest in taking a public position to grab headlines and prefer to find a solution that is acceptable to everybody. I can't, however, ignore what we believe is a grossly unfair situation that could have been addressed or spoken to when I first proposed this project last fall. Our City Council and members of our community expect some answers..

I appreciate and value the relationship Renton has with each of you, and your support early on for my proposal to move the transit center and build a garage. I'm asking the Board to authorize ST staff to move forward with purchasing the former Sound Ford site, design a new transit center with a park and ride garage, and begin construction as additional ST2 funds become available.

Denis Law