

Regional Transit Authority

August 26, 1994

**Puget Sound Regional Council, 6th Floor Board Room
1011 Western Avenue, Seattle**

The meeting was called to order at 12:15 p.m. by Chairman Laing. The Board Administrator called the roll and the following members were present:

Chair:

Bruce Laing, King County Councilmember

Vice Chairs:

Dave Earling, Edmonds Councilmember

Paul Miller, Tacoma Deputy Mayor

Pierce County:

Sharon Boekelman, Bonney Lake Councilmember

King County:

Martha Choe, Seattle Councilmember

Don Davidson, Bellevue Mayor

Mary Gates, Federal Way Mayor

Gary Locke, King County Executive

Greg Nickels, King County Councilmember

Snohomish County:

Ed Hansen, Everett Mayor

The following Board member arrived after roll call:

Doug Sutherland, Pierce County Executive

Report of the Chair:

Mr. Laing:

There is a conflict in our schedule for October 21. The Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce's Annual Leadership Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia is scheduled for this date. This meeting is designed to address the issue of transportation. My first reaction was to recognize it is a meeting we would like to attend, but that in order to make our decision by October 28, we needed to stay on our schedule.

I discussed this conflict with the Rules Committee yesterday and they had a different perspective. I would like to put this issue before the Board to consider whether it is reasonable to amend our meeting schedule. I will ask Ms. Walker, the Board Administrator, whether there has been an opportunity to distribute our calendar to Board members.

Ms. Walker:

The calendar was distributed today (copy on file).

Mr. Laing:

As you can see from the October calendar, this Chamber meeting is scheduled one week prior to the RTA Board's final decision. The question is, is it reasonable for the Board to look at setting alternative meeting dates? The issue of

scheduling additional Saturday meeting dates, regardless of changing the meeting on the 21st, came up. This would be done to be sure we have enough time to make our decision.

I also asked Ms. Walker to survey Board members and determine how many are currently planning to go to the Chamber meeting. Four Board members are planning to attend: Mr. Morrison, Mr. Nickels, Mr. Rice and Mr. Sutherland.

Let's address the question of whether Board members want to consider a change to the meeting on October 21 by adding a meeting on October 7. We would be deleting the meeting on the 21st and adding a meeting on October 7.

Mr. Hansen, Mr. Earling and Ms. Choe said they have a conflicting appointments on October 7.

Mr. Miller:

The other option was rather than having a meeting on October 7, we utilize two Saturday meetings, October 15 and 29. This would allow the initial discussion to occur, and allow two weeks to pass before the scheduled final decision.

Mr. Laing:

I understood these meetings would be scheduled in addition to the meeting proposed for October 7. I believe the two Saturday meeting dates are necessary.

(Board member Sutherland arrived at this time.)

Mr. Locke:

Perhaps the Board should consider holding a meeting on October 22 rather than the 21st. Perhaps it would be useful to have the feedback from those Board members attending the Chamber meeting. The Chamber's meeting usually concludes on Saturday so many people leave on Friday night.

Mr. Laing:

I think the meetings on October 15 and 29 are necessary regardless of meetings on October 21 and 7. I wonder if the Board would concur with me.

Mr. Hansen:

Isn't the Board scheduled to make its final decision on October 28?

Mr. Laing:

The Board is hoping to make its decision by October 28, but a meeting on October 29 could serve as a back-up.

Mr. Hansen:

Both Saturday dates mentioned are home games for the University of Washington Huskies, and there may be Board members who will be attending those games.

It was moved by Mr. Miller and seconded by Ms. Choe that additional Board meetings be scheduled for Saturdays, October 15 and 29.

Mr. Davidson:

Could these meetings be limited in time so that people could attend both the meetings and the Huskies games on those dates?

Mr. Miller:

We will not find a date where there are no conflicts.

Ms. Choe:

I am sympathetic to the scheduling conflicts, but we are getting very close to the wire. I think this is where we will be getting into some substantive discussions and negotiations. I think it would be important to have a timeline and recognize we will lose some Board members, but I think these will be the most critical meetings between now and the time the Board votes. I hope we will be as expeditious as possible, but the meetings could last several hours.

Mr. Hansen:

The Board's Friday meetings have traditionally started at 1:30 p.m.; perhaps these meetings could begin earlier in the day.

Mr. Laing:

This suggestion did not come up before the Rules Committee. Some members of the Board are involved in Friday morning meetings with their own jurisdictions.

Mr. Miller:

I think extending the Friday meetings an hour or two into the morning would be helpful.

Mr. Laing:

We will utilize those dates if necessary. If not, we will clear them from our calendar.

Mr. Miller:

It was my intent that the Saturday meetings be held from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

The motion setting Board meetings on October 15 and 29 was carried by the majority of all Board members present. Mr. Hansen abstained.

Mr. Laing:

The meeting scheduled for October 21 will remain as scheduled unless there is a motion to the contrary.

Ms. Gates:

I would like the Board to entertain Mr. Locke's proposal of moving this meeting to October 22 so we can take advantage of the information from the leadership conference. Would that be something you would see as helpful? Could Board members attending that conference return Friday night and be able to attend a Saturday Board meeting. I see this as being extremely valuable.

Mr. Nickels:

Is the intent for those Board members attending the leadership conference to attend a RTA meeting on Friday or Saturday? Having the RTA meeting on Saturday would be valuable.

It as moved by Ms. Gates and seconded by Mr. Hansen that the October 21 RTA meeting be changed to October 22 at 9:00 a.m. for the purpose of obtaining information from the leadership conference.

Mr. Davidson:

If there is information available at that time, only one week prior to the Board's scheduled decision date, I am surprised at the conflict and the number of Board members who would have participated.

Ms. Gates:

I would suggest I am in the same position. I would like to attend that conference also. I think that it may add to our decision-making. I think also it indicates we are taking the opportunity to hear what the citizens in the region want. I think we have made that our mission, and this is consistent with that.

Mr. Sutherland:

Part of the program we will be involved in for the leadership conference will be held Saturday morning, involving Mr. Locke, Bob and myself. Maybe the Chamber could change its schedule.

Mr. Laing:

Perhaps the Chamber would be willing to reciprocate and schedule that session for Friday.

Mr. Miller:

I understand the program will be held Saturday morning, which means we are not solving anything by changing our Board meeting to the 22nd. I am concerned about whether having a meeting on Saturday would affect attendance. My preference would be to cancel the meeting on October 21. I believe with meetings on October 14 and 15 we can cover a lot of preliminary discussion. This would allow a two week period for discussion among Board members prior to the final decision.

The motion to schedule a meeting on October 22 failed by a vote of six opposed and five in favor.

It was moved by Mr. Miller, seconded by Ms. Boekelman and carried by the majority vote of six in favor and five opposed that the RTA Board meeting of October 21 be cancelled.

Mr. Laing:

Ms. Walker was to contact Board members to determine their availability for a meeting on October 7.

Ms. Walker:

Thirteen of the 18 Board members indicated their calendars were free to allow attendance at a meeting on October 7.

It was moved by Mr. Miller, seconded by Ms. Boekelman and carried by the majority vote of 10 in favor and one opposed that the RTA Board hold a meeting on October 7 beginning at 1:30 p.m.

Mr. Miller said it would be possible to begin the Board's Friday meetings earlier, perhaps at 12:30 p.m.

Public Comment:

Ms. Walker:

No one from the public submitted a sign-in sheet to address the Board.

Rules Committee Report:

PSRC/RTA Interlocal Agreement

Mr. Laing:

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)/RTA Interlocal Agreement has been before the Board twice. It is presented for action today.

Mr. Matsuoka:

This item as discussed by the Rules Committee Wednesday. Yesterday it was taken to the PSRC Executive Board. There was one word change made. This is shown on page seven of the Memorandum of Understanding on Section 6A2. The change is from the word "employ" to "consider." The small cities were concerned their spaces on the committee could be in jeopardy so they wanted to soften that language. Otherwise, the agreement is the same as was previously presented to the Board.

Mr. Laing:

Frankly, I do not believe this word change is significant. Having the agreement is significant to the RTA.

It as moved by Mr. Sutherland, seconded by Mr. Earling and carried by the unanimous vote of all Board members present that Resolution No. 34 be approved as presented.

Executive Director Report:

Public Opinion Survey - Information

Mr. Bob Hartley:

For approximately two months now, the strategic consulting group has been working on a public opinion survey. We have some initial findings to present today. You should have, in your packet (copy on file), a document that has been prepared for you.

I would like to introduce Mr. Paul Goodwin, who has lead the effort in this regard. Mr. Goodwin has tremendous credentials and he is prepared to present, with overhead viewfoils, a portion of the material provided in the booklet.

Mr. Goodwin:

Thank you for allowing me to present the results today. The purpose of the research is 1) to evaluate the public support, at the current time, for the proposed high capacity rail transit system and its financing mechanism; and 2) to evaluate the public support for various modes, routes and financing alternatives.

I will share the key highlights of the study. There is additional information contained in the report. There is one "Freudian" slip on the cover of the report: it states the county councils must "modify" the plan; it should say the county councils must "ratify" the plan. This correction will be made.

Methodology: We talked to 1,200 registered voters, or 240 per RTA zone. The zones are Pierce County, Snohomish County, King North, King South and King East. The margin of error is +/-4%; the margin of error per zone is +/-8%.

Level of support for a financing measure: We asked voters whether they would vote yes or no for a .4% sales tax increase and a 1/4% Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) increase. The support is nearly two to one at the present time for this financing measure. Sixty-two percent said they would vote for this proposal, 33% were opposed and five percent were undecided.

Mr. Hansen:

Do you have a breakdown for the five zones?

Mr. Goodwin:

There is very little variation by area in the response to this question and virtually all of the questions. Given the +/-8% error by area, it has to be a big variation to statistically alter the figures. There is relatively little variation in the responses by area.

There are four key reasons there is this two to one support for the financing of the system at this time. First, there is a strong recognition of the need for a transit system. This open ended question was asked: "What is the most important problem you want elected officials to address?" Crime was the number one response. The concern over crime has skyrocketed for years. Transportation has held on as the number two concern.

These charts are also contained in the written report. In Pierce County there is a higher level of concern about crime, overshadowing concerns about transportation. With that exception, the response to this question was fairly close.

Respondents were asked whether traffic congestion has been "getting worse over the last few years." This is the most dramatic finding. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents agreed with this statement, including fully 66% who said it was getting "much" worse. Only 5% said that traffic congestion was getting better, and just 5% said that the problem of traffic congestion had not changed over the last few years.

The next chart shows the percent who feel traffic congestion is getting worse by area. The intensity of the response is lower in King South but it is very even across all of the zones. Virtually nine of ten respondents say traffic congestion is getting worse.

There is a comparison of other issues of concern. Forty-two percent felt smog and air pollution were getting worse. Fifty-two percent said growth management as getting worse. Thirty-one percent felt the economy was getting worse and 31% said the economy was getting better. Forty-one percent said local government effectiveness is the same. Compare these statistics to those for traffic, where 88% of the people felt it was getting worse.

We asked the question a different way and gave people a choice between two statements. One statement was, "I know traffic is bad in this area, but as far as I am concerned personally, traffic congestion isn't one of the top two or three issues that bothers me a lot." The other was, "for me personally, traffic congestion is so frustrating that I would put it up with the top two or three things that bother me a lot." Forty-four percent said it is one of the issues they were most concerned about. This is a major portion of the respondents. Thirty-three percent said crime was their major concern and 18% said traffic was a major concern. Forty-four percent say traffic is one of the top two or three issues on their minds.

There was a little variation in these responses. King North and Snohomish Counties were more likely to say traffic is a top concern. King East's percentage was a little bit lower. This is within the margin of error for these responses.

There was support because people know there is a problem. The second reason it enjoys support is because people are sort of familiar with this and they like what they have heard about the new transit system. Three of four have heard something about this system. That is tremendous visibility. Eighteen percent have heard a great deal about the system, 34% have heard something, 23% have heard a little and only 24% have heard nothing.

Respondents were asked, "Do you favor or oppose building the transit system?" Three of four voters say they support building the new system. Of those who have not heard anything, 69% favor building the new transit system. That is the level of appeal this system has for voters.

The next chart shows the level of concern for traffic congestion by area. This ranges from a high of 79% in Pierce County to a low of 67% in King South and 70% in King East. There is very little difference in the levels of opposition. The opposition is higher in those areas with a higher level of people unsure.

The third reason for support is people think they personally will benefit from this system. We have here eight out of 10 people saying they will use this system. Fifty-eight percent say they will use the system frequency or occasionally. Three out of five people say they will ride the system. People personally think they will use it.

There is very little variation by area. King North had the highest percentage of people who believe they will use the system. Pierce and Snohomish Counties were slightly lower than the average usage, but it was still over 50%.

How effective would the new transit system be in a given area? People think it will work. Eighty-one percent say the system will be very or somewhat effective in reducing the traffic congestion growth. Seventy-nine percent believe the system will improve air pollution, 76% believe it will improve the quality of life. Sixty-three percent believe the transit system will help manage growth, and 56% believe the system will cause their personal commute to be quicker. Sixty-two percent of those who now drive alone to work, this will be effective in making their commute easier and quicker. If you look at those commuting, it is overwhelming. Those now taking the bus, it is overwhelming. All felt the system would help them. This is why there is support for the measure at this time.

Mr. Sutherland:

Would it be quicker for these people to commute because someone else is using this system, or because they themselves will use the system?

Mr. Goodwin:

This is a good question and the answer varies. Based on our experience in Los Angeles County in their effort to build the transit system there, there are some people who say I will get on the new system and ride it. Others say others will use the new system, which will make my ride easier. There is a strong sense in the survey that people are moving into the area; growth is inevitable and this system will help manage growth. People believe that cooperatively there is a chance the new system will improve their commute.

Mr. Sutherland:

Is there no breakdown of that in how this question was structured?

Mr. Goodwin:

No.

How should we pay for the system? We asked people whether they would prefer to pay for the system with a variety of tax alternatives. You can see that by far the preference is a combination of tax measures. I understand there are some legal issues associated with the gas tax. There is a preference for a combination of tax increases in each of those funding sources.

We tested a ballot measures at a .4% equivalent. You can see there is some decline at .5%. At that level only 36% would be more likely to vote for a ballot measure; 44% would be less likely to vote in favor of such a measure. It is our sense, based on this and other surveys, that a .4% to .5% range is best to hold your support.

Ms. Choe:

You asked if there would be a favorable reception to a .4% tax increase; is that a .5% equivalent?

Mr. Goodwin:

Yes, that is my understanding.

We asked people to make a choice between three options. They were a \$2.5 billion plan with expanded bus service, commuter rail and one light rail line. The next was a \$4.2 billion option with bus and commuter rail and three light rail lines, and a \$5.4 billion option, utilizing buses, commuter rail and four light rail lines. This is remarkable. The support did not decline at the higher levels. There is a large constituency that wants all the rail they can get. This does not imply they are not interested in bus service, but it is clear voters want rail along with their bus service.

Mr. Locke:

What are the tax equivalents required for the three systems described?

Mr. Matoff:

I do not have those figures with me, but the \$5.4 billion system could be accomplished with a .5% equivalent, with a combination of MVET and sales tax. It also assumed extensive state and federal participation. The two others were based on a .4% equivalency with mid-range and low level state and federal participation in the plan.

Mr. Locke:

The \$4.2 billion option is the equivalent of how much in sales tax?

Mr. Matoff:

This could be a .9% with no state or federal participation. A .1% equivalent is \$35 billion per year or \$350 billion in 10 years.

Mr. Locke:

The \$5.4 billion option could be done with a .5% equivalent sales tax assuming state and federal funding.

Mr. Matoff:

That would be true assuming \$1.3 billion in state and \$1.3 billion in federal participation plus a .5% local tax. I will obtain this information for Mr. Locke.

Mr. Goodwin:

You have 58% of the voters who are saying they prefer the middle or larger option. The only difference was the number of light rail lines included with each option. In the realm of interpretation, you might conclude the voters are saying, "If we are going to do this, we should do it completely."

Mr. Hansen:

Did the \$5.4 billion option point out it requires a higher sales tax or higher source of revenue?

Mr. Goodwin:

No. But we did ask voters to choose between the two alternatives. Should the RTA place before the voters a smaller transit system based solely on local funding sources it can count on or should it be a larger system including state and federal funds that are uncertain? The response was 56% said the RTA should pursue the larger system to keep its options open, even if the state funding is not certain. Thirty percent said go with the local money. In the realm of art, my interpretation is we are interested in the largest system we can afford that includes the features we find valuable.

Ms. Choe:

I didn't notice if the respondents were asked their threshold per month. Were they asked if they would be willing to pay \$100 per month, for example, in taxes for the system?

Mr. Goodwin:

There were questions about those numbers. They were inconclusive. Many said they didn't know. It is hard, typically, to ask voters questions about how much they would pay. Often they do not know. It is hard to make a recommendation from that information. It was clear when looking at the sales tax levels itself. There is more discussion of this in the report.

Mr. Davidson:

Did you test whether a .5% made a difference? Did you test the terminology being used? Five-tenths of a cent versus a 5% increase in sales tax?

Mr. Goodwin:

We did not ask that question. We could ask that in our tracking polls. We utilized the language that might appear before the voters on a ballot measure.

How high a priority should the following types of service be in the new transit system: suburbs to city, suburb to suburb, or service within local neighborhoods. You can see that a substantial number of people think the priority should be on commuting from suburbs to major cities. Forty-six percent favored suburb to suburb service and 27% believe service within local neighborhoods should be a priority. There was little variation by zone. The percentage of those favoring suburb to suburb service was lower in King East and Pierce Counties. Local neighborhood service was lower in King East and Snohomish and higher in King North and King South. These were very small variations.

Another question was whether they would favor using the taxes collected in the local area to pay for a region-wide system, or should their tax dollars be used locally? Sixty-eight percent said local taxes should be used for a region-wide system. Twenty percent preferred that those funds be used locally. There is a sense we are all in this together.

People were asked which of the following statements comes closer to your point of view? This was one of the dramatic findings and it is consistent with earlier research. 1) Trains are faster, more comfortable and more appealing than buses and should be part of our new transit system. 2) More buses and highway improvements can reduce traffic congestion growth at far less cost; we can't afford to have trains in our new transit system. We actually pushed people away from trains but 74% still wanted trains in the system because they are faster, more comfortable and appealing. The trains have a consistent appeal. Buses are important and voters are supportive of them, but they do want trains to be a part of the system.

There was very little difference in the results from the zones. I believe Mr. Miller was interested in the differences in the regions; they were not significant in this question.

Summary: There is strong support across all areas for the system. Voters are supporting it because they are familiar with it and they think it will be effective and help them personally. I cannot predict what will happen in the next eight to 10 months, but there is sufficient support for the system and its financing to proceed to the next step of the approval process.

Mr. Locke:

I would like to go back to Chart Q.16 regarding suburban to suburban cities service. This is on page 18. Please repeat the breakout of the response for suburb to city service.

Mr. Goodwin:

By next week I will have the summary charts for all questions in the summary. Please contact me for this information.

Those preferring suburb to city service was 66%. It was a little higher in King North and lower in Pierce County. I would reemphasize these are relatively small differences. Well over a majority in Pierce County said it was their top priority. Suburb to suburb service was highest in King South, lower in King East and Pierce County. Local service was higher in King North, King South and lower in King East and Snohomish County.

Mr. Locke:

Is it pretty close to those distributions?

Mr. Goodwin:

Yes, but I do not have the exact numbers. They will be included in the revised summary.

Mr. Hansen:

Will there be cross tabs available on the survey results?

Mr. Goodwin:

I will make available in this summary the cross tabs by area for all questions.

Mr. Miller:

Will this be done for all questions in the packet and not just the front summary?

Mr. Goodwin:

Yes. Many of them are included in the document.

Ms. Choe:

These results appear to be consistent with the earlier survey done by the JRPC. Have you looked at that for any significant differences?

Mr. Goodwin:

They are very similar results where you could compare questions. One area where there was a difference was in the open ended question. The reason for that difference is because of crime. You know the level of concern about crime. That has knocked everything else off the top rung of the ladder. That was the major difference. Otherwise the responses are very close.

Mr. Nickels:

Have you done cross tabs? How do senior citizen feel compared to the rest of the population. Has this been done for all categories?

Mr. Goodwin:

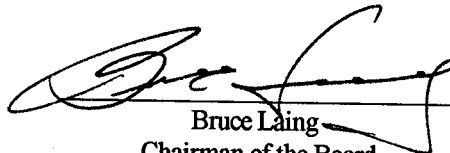
There is more than majority support for this proposal. Seniors are slightly less supportive but in fact they are more undecided about this until they learn how they will use the system. There is relatively little variation between the usual categories. The reason is because everyone feels this will benefit them. This system feels like it will address a problem that affects them. I can get that information.

Mr. Laing:

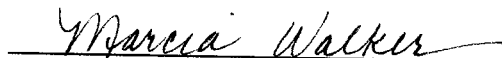
For the public, there are relatively limited numbers of these reports available. Additional copies will be available from the Board Administrator.

Other Business:

There was no other business, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:18 p.m. to attend the North Corridor Tour.


Bruce Laing
Chairman of the Board

ATTEST:



Marcia Walker
Board Administrator

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