

From: [John Niles](#)
To: [Casey Moreau](#)
Cc: [Claudia Balducci](#); [Trask, Blake](#); [Gary Simonson](#); [Kelly McGourty](#)
Subject: Please distribute the attached pdf to the Transportation Policy Board members before today's meeting
Date: Thursday, April 14, 2022 7:47:50 AM
Attachments: [John Niles comment for PSRC Transportation Policy Board-April 14-2022.pdf](#)

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Please distribute the attached three page pdf to Transportation Policy Board members and any other interested parties you think would be interested, as a public comment from me, a Seattle resident and long time observer of PSRC's work.

Please acknowledge receipt of the email back to me.

I plan to attend the meeting in person and describe my submission verbally.

Thank you.

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John Niles
Seattle, WA USA

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] & all previous addresses still valid

Order *The End of Driving: Transportation Systems and Public Policy Planning for Autonomous Vehicles* textbook (Elsevier 2018) by Bern Grush and me from the publisher at best price with free delivery at <https://www.elsevier.com/books/the-end-of-driving/niles/978-0-12-815451-9>

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[REDACTED]

**Seattle citizen John Niles comment for the PSRC Transportation Policy Board Meeting on
a Needed Review of the New Regional Transportation Plan: Reconsider Fundamentals
April 14, 2022**

While Board members have been engaged in rushed deliberations to meet the allegedly immovable legal deadline in May for all the members of PSRC to vote approval of an updated Regional Transportation Plan, myself and a few colleagues have reflected on our experience examining the earlier PSRC plans named Vision 2020, Destination 2030, Vision 2040, Destination 2040, Growing Transit Communities, and the recent Vision 2050. As a result, we have major concerns and questions that PSRC staff should address before the TPB moves the updated RTP to the Executive Board.

1. Where is the documentation of the detailed analysis that supports forecasting that 65% of four-county population growth through 2050 will reside in the “region’s growth centers and fixed-route high-capacity transit station areas?”¹
2. How does that forecast comport with the last three decades of planning during which the centers accounted for at most twelve percent of the region’s population growth?² What is expected to cause a reversal of the population dispersal outside the centers documented in the 2018 Regional Growth Strategy Trends Report?³
3. In what ways have the U.S Census population counts of 2020 and the small area population estimates for 2021 been analyzed in assessing progress with the regional growth centers strategy to date?
4. How do you justify your hope that the post-pandemic “new normal” will be like the pre-pandemic normal? The draft RTP documents reveal PSRC is attempting to forecast the post-pandemic world of 2030, 2040, and 2050 from a pre-pandemic baseline of 2018. Big permanent shifts in residential preferences and commuting behavior may be coming, including acceleration of earlier trends. How does the forecast for the post-pandemic era (that has not begun yet) take into account that light rail ridership flat-lined in pre-pandemic 2018-19, prior to the well-known ridership collapse after the pandemic hit us in 2020.⁴
5. Where is the plain language justifying how PSRC and partner agencies accept a plan to spend 37% of our total regional transportation resources for Sound Transit when, according to published numbers, light rail will support only three percent of trips in 2050?⁵

¹ I asked for this detail in testimony to a public hearing of the Growth Management Policy Board on September 5, 2019, and never received a response. <https://1drv.ms/b/s!AqjgUKKgcrkoisUlseJguNsJcJTU-g?e=hkvvuq>

² "Between 2010 and 2017, 12 percent of the region's population growth occurred in centers."

<https://www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/v2050-dseis-execsummary.pdf>

³ <https://www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/rgs-presentation.pdf> dated March, 2018

⁴ National Transit Database of the Federal Transit Administration. Plot at https://1drv.ms/u/s!AqjgUKKgcrkoipIIW6PbEquZIP_PIQ?e=bMS1oK

⁵ Calculation by me based on PSRC data in Table 2 and Figure 4 in https://www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/appendix_h_system_performance_011222.pdf and Sound Transit ridership by its modes in <https://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/documents/2022-Financial-Plan-and-Adopted-Budget-Final.pdf>

6. Given reports of unfunded street, highway, and bridge upkeep,⁶ how will PSRC members explain to constituents that while Sound Transit receives full funding over the next 30 years, future funding of the other four county transit agencies is shown by PSRC staff to require \$13 billion in road user charges, a category currently dedicated to paying for maintenance and preservation of roads and bridges per the 18th amendment of the State Constitution?⁷
7. Since an important public policy strategy in response to the global climate emergency is to shift private driving to electric transit, why doesn't PSRC staff insist on a plan for 2050 with technology that could offer that shift in mobility for everybody in all locations? Have staff noticed visible work in progress aimed at providing universal mobility for all citizens in 2050 – regardless of age, physical condition, or income -- with affordable, all-electric small shuttle transit access at all urbanized locations,⁸ without having to ride a bike, a scooter, or impose on a neighbor for a car ride? This 2050 capability is part of what WSDOT would term “Cooperative Automated Transportation.”⁹
8. Is the PSRC staff aware that transit agencies worldwide are testing flexible microtransit, and private companies developing roboshuttles without drivers are testing them successfully on city streets in California, China, and Europe? Amazon is preparing for deployment of its versions of electric roboshuttles in the City of Seattle with early mapping and technology testing underway.¹⁰ What are the barriers to PSRC staff modeling universal electric mobility as a new form of subsidized public transit?¹¹
9. The earlier Destination 2040 Transportation Plan showed traffic delay reduced remarkably on freeways in the 2040s.¹² What happened that reversed this favorable outcome in the new Plan, even though congestion pricing of road use is still in the Plan?
10. Have PSRC staff or expert consultants examined the impact of the multi-year, ongoing strategy to nudge population growth into a limited number of policy-defined growth centers and thereby been able (or not able) to reject decisively the hypothesis that this land use strategy could be an important cause of rising housing costs, and of inequitable displacement of disadvantaged and vulnerable populations? As the RTP plan notes on page 34, “As housing costs in urban centers increase, many people with low incomes are moving or being displaced to areas outside of the urban core. When looking at data for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue Metropolitan area, the Urban Institute found that a lack of affordable

⁶ For example, PSRC RTP draft, page 111: “Important to note is that I-5 through Seattle is a high-cost corridor and currently unfunded.”

⁷ Calculation based on Figures 6 and 7 in the RTP Appendix J, Financial Strategy

⁸ Enter into a Google search: robotaxi universal mobility

⁹ <https://wsdot.wa.gov/construction-planning/statewide-plans/cooperative-automated-transportation>

¹⁰ <https://www.seattletimes.com/business/amazons-autonomous-cars-unit-zoox-expands-testing-to-seattle/>

¹¹ My 2018 textbook on this topic, *The End of Driving*, is in the PSRC Information Center Library.

¹² Congestion in 2040 compared to 2010, https://smartertransit.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/What_the_Data_Shows_6.4.15.pdf

housing in transit-rich areas has caused low-income people to live in areas that are far from employment/services and lack frequent transit.”¹³

Summary

Rather than a visionary long-range plan that takes advantage of emerging technologies to meet the region’s shifting needs, the PSRC RTP for 2050 continues a land use and mobility strategy begun over a quarter century ago. Over the last two years it can no longer be demonstrated as a risk-free, growing success for the region. Continuing to rely on the existing fixed-route transit model coordinated with zones of density is showing everybody who looks closely at the forecasts to see a small increment of mobility for a lot of money. In a world-class high-tech innovative urban region, we can and should be able to set out a plan to do much better.

PSRC plans since the 1990s are falling short of forecasts and hopes. Sprawl has not been constrained. Housing, both owned and rented, has become far less affordable, forcing many residents to live in outlying areas. Some experts would link housing affordability to the very apparent homelessness seen along our streets and in transit coaches. Transit mode share is shrinking as commute patterns change. Traffic congestion is back.

The RTP refinement process since end of the official comment period has amounted to tweaking, not a fundamental examination of what is going on. Until the questions above are answered, a pause and hard look outside the confines of planner groupthink is justified. In the meantime, the existing approved RTP from 2018 is completely adequate to support the usual well-exercised process of distributing Federal funds, as implied by the “no new impacts” conclusion of the April 7th SEIS covering this new RTP draft.¹⁴

A formal request for an extension of Plan preparation time by PSRC leadership to the State and Federal Government is appropriate. If granted, it would allow time for a deeper consideration of the issues brought up in this document and support a better opportunity for assessing the post-pandemic environment.

Questions or comments: [REDACTED]

¹³ This equity issue is discussed in this reference cited by PSRC: Urban Institute (October 2020). Access to Opportunity through Equitable Transportation: Lessons from Four Metropolitan Regions. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/access-opportunity-through-equitable-transportation>

¹⁴ <https://www.psrc.org/sites/default/files/rtp2022-seis-addendum.pdf>