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King County Council, District 4

Would you vote to put a countywide transportation benefit district geared at boosting Metro transit service on the ballot, as had been proposed in 2020?

Yes, on day one of my campaign, I publicly supported a countywide transportation benefit district and stated it in my platform. I was the first candidate in this race to do so. We need a dedicated funding source to support service expansion and frequency, workforce compensation, ridership experience improvements, safety, and electrification. If riders are not prioritized, then the system cannot compete with single occupancy vehicles on the road. If workers are not prioritized, the system will not work. A transportation benefit district will ensure we have a transit system that serves our economy, fulfills the values of our community, and tackles the climate crisis for the next generation.

As a King County Councilmember, there's a chance you'd be tapped to be on the Sound Transit Board of Directors. Would you seek such an assignment and how would you use such authority to improve outcomes?

Yes, I would seek to be one of the King County Councilmembers that serve on the Sound Transit Board. It is critical that King County Metro and Sound Transit plan together for an integrated transit system for our region. Most board members are fighting for suburban communities, where their constituents live, rather than planning how to build a regional system. I will come to the board with a "we" not "me" mindset. Because the Sound Transit Board serves three counties and multiple cities, everyone on the board has to make a sacrifice to serve everyone. I will have a rider focused mandate instead of prioritizing the region that elected me. I will plan a system that works for riders and communities, instead of political priorities.

What do you view as the top priorities for King County Metro over the next five years? How would you work to solve Metro's bus operator shortage?

My top priorities include:



- Bringing people back to riding buses with better service, reliability, safety, and affordability;
- Bringing people back to driving buses with better pay, benefits, workforce development, and safety;
- Electrifying the bus and vehicle fleet alongside having coordinated electric charging infrastructure; and
- Identifying a sustainable funding source to meet the needs of today and tomorrow.

Our buses are a microcosm of what is happening in our larger society and, right now, too many of our neighbors are in crisis and having episodes on buses completely unsupported. To bring people back to buses, and to keep bus operators safe, we need to improve the transportation experience. We need an on-demand, unarmed non-gun crisis responder team to support community members on our buses when they need that assistance. Operators should be able to flag a care team to meet them en-route and provide supportive services to riders who are experiencing mental health crises, homelessness, or substance abuse disorders.

There are few jobs more challenging than driving a bus—my neighbor is a bus operator and he's one of the toughest people I know. We can't expect bus operators and transit personnel to support the safety and behavioral health needs that emerge on public transit. We have to work with ATU, both mechanics and drivers, to continually increase the workforce, and to continue to connect with a new generation of metro operators. In addition to providing better compensation to workers, I will also focus on improving workforce health, workforce development, and training opportunities.

Currently, Metro uses tiered income based passes. To provide more subsidized passes for lower income households we need to increase the number of business accounts that utilize Metro. Historically, Metro has had contracts with businesses that have employees that work 9-5, M-F. But there are a lot of other businesses outside of that model with employees that rely on transit too, such as grocery stores and hospitals. I will work with Metro to increase business accounts.

I would also encourage my colleagues at the county to set our sights on another ambitious and worthy goal: securing free fare for transit riders. The county spends



millions of dollars on fare enforcement and farebox maintenance, which could instead be put toward filling in for foregone revenue, along with a small payroll tax.

King County Metro's commitment to electrifying its fleet by 2035 is a very ambitious goal that will require success around delivering on capital projects to electrify the metro bases, and success in getting enough electric vehicles from the supply chain. As one of the largest transit agencies in the country, the County has the ability to drive innovation in the market, and the County has already started making South Base its first all-electric base.

In my role overseeing King County's capital (i.e. construction) budgets, I've seen firsthand the importance of our capital design and construction work. The faster we move capital projects, the more jobs we create and sustain, and the faster we get value into our communities. I've already been working to break down barriers to delivering on these initiatives and make sure that projects meet the intended goals through union staffing and apprenticeship programs.

Do you support redeveloping King County's campus in Downtown Seattle as proposed by County Executive Dow Constantine? What would be your primary goals in such a redevelopment?

I do support redeveloping King County's downtown campus. My primary goals reflect the pillars of my platform:

(1) Environmental sustainability:

- By minimizing the carbon footprint of redevelopment, reusing existing structures, and by integrating green spaces and prioritizing alternative modes of transportation, we will build cities that are not only beautiful but also sustainable, fostering a harmonious relationship between humans and nature.
- Designing the space with metro access, walkability, and other low-carbon transportation options (e.g. electric scooters) in mind.

(2) Advancing Equity:

- We need to make sure every member of the public can access government services. Wayfinding in multiple languages, self-service and integrated customer service hubs are key.



-- There are huge opportunities to foster a strong sense of place and pride, where residents from diverse backgrounds can come together and forge lasting connections. This includes creating gathering spaces that are ADA accessible, pedestrian-friendly, and culturally relevant.

-- It will also be critical that we do not displace people and businesses who currently call the campus area home. Unhoused neighbors must be met with services, and community engagement throughout the entirety of the process is critical.

(3) Stimulating the Economy:

-- I will prioritize creating bustling hubs of entrepreneurial activity, attracting investments and generating quality jobs for our residents. Our community is founded on innovation and by creating incubator spaces for small businesses AND nonprofits, we can spur economic growth and prosperity, ultimately benefiting the entire community.

-- The county is also an employer of over 15,000 people. We need to make sure the campus is designed with workers in mind.

Recent state legislation will substantially impact residential zoning in much of King County. What role if any should the county have in supporting and shaping equitable development?

I firmly believe that the county has a crucial role to play in shaping equitable zoning in Unincorporated King County and in leading the rest of the state in doing this work well.

We need to adopt a "yes-and" approach to create more housing that is affordable to more people. This includes investments in different types of housing to accommodate diverse family structures. It involves building mother-in-law apartments, accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and detached accessory dwelling units (DADUs), fourplexes (and up), alongside market-rate, middle-income, affordable, and permanent supportive housing for individuals with specific needs.

Furthermore, the county should actively engage with communities to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are met in the development process. This means conducting thorough community impact assessments, hosting public forums, and collaborating with community organizations to gather input and



feedback from those who will be directly affected by zoning changes. As a county councilmember, I will make sure these connection points aren't only accessible to wealthy homeowners, who have the time and privilege to engage. I will make sure interpreter services, meeting locations, and meeting hours are designed to be accessible to as many people as possible. By involving residents in decision-making processes, we can create development plans that reflect community desires and aspirations, while considering the social, economic, and environmental impacts.

Equitable development also involves addressing transportation and infrastructure disparities. The county should invest in accessible and sustainable transportation options, expand public transit networks, and improve pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. By doing so, mobility for all residents can be enhanced while reducing reliance on cars and mitigating environmental impacts. Furthermore, the county should prioritize investments in social services, community amenities, and economic opportunities. Funding for parks, healthcare facilities, and job training programs can foster a vibrant and inclusive community, reducing disparities and ensuring that the benefits of development are shared by all residents.

Historically, King County has often opted to contract with community-based organizations to provide social services (such as rental assistance, diversion services, etc). What do you think of this approach?

If we are going to expect nonprofits to continue subsidizing work that governments would normally do, the county needs to be willing to pay more for its contracts so that organizations can appropriately compensate their professionals. Right now, it is clear that organizations are unable to recruit, retain, and adequately take care of their workers.

UW research shows that social service staff are underpaid by 37%, and these wage gaps affect women – women of color most significantly. Service providers in our behavioral health and homelessness fields already face trauma and hardship in their daily work; they shouldn't have to worry about falling into homelessness themselves.

I volunteer for YouthCare working to end youth homelessness and it's our frontline staff who make all the difference for our unhoused young people. I've advocated for wage increases because it's the right thing to do AND because the bottom line is: if we don't take care of our people, we lose them and we lose the vital, individual



connections that make the work matter. To take care of our community, we need to take care of people.

In addition, there are underlying inequities in King County's RFP process that make it challenging for some CBO's without a wealth of knowledge and experience to participate. The County needs to diversify its pipeline of CBO's and think about how to make it more accessible and center organizations with lived experiences.

Seattle remains the primary funder of the King County Regional Homelessness Authority (KCRHA) while other cities in the region do not contribute directly. Do you support increasing funding to the KCRHA and, if so, how?

This issue hits home for me. A dear friend of mine was living out of their car in King County not that long ago, and I think about them when I think about the 50,000 people who were unhoused in King County last year. I've also been working to end youth homelessness as a volunteer boardmember for two nonprofits, including YouthCare working to end youth homelessness. Last year, King County saw the highest number of deaths among our unhoused neighbors in recorded history. This is unacceptable.

I support finding ways for KCRHA to receive more money, but given the constraints the state places on county taxing authority, I support finding ways to involve state and federal partnership, as well as using data to convince the remaining 33 cities in King County to start paying into the authority.

In addition, we need more accountability for KCRHA and need KCRHA to prioritize fulfilling contracts and getting money out the door. While the concept of the Authority holds value, and there are incredible individuals working hard within it, I am deeply concerned about the predicament faced by organizations that rely on the resources channeled through KCRHA. These organizations are being placed in an exceedingly difficult situation.

Many organizations operate with very limited resources and even a slight delay in contract disbursement can lead to destabilization, and put the very existence of these organizations—not to mention the people who rely on those organizations for employment—in jeopardy.



In 2018, the King County Affordable Housing Task Force [reported](#) that the County needs about a quarter million net new affordable homes by 2040 to address the housing affordability crisis. Since then we're nowhere near that trajectory. How can the County boost affordable housing production?

What you're going to get from me is an understanding of the full life cycle of affordable housing production and how to improve the process and break down barriers at each step, including:

- Using creative and progressive funding strategies,
- Making it easier to acquire the land and properties,
- Building capacity in the community to do these projects,
- Streamlining and improving equity in construction through permitting, design review, and procurement processes,
- Making sure green building features are part of the planning and funding from the start, and
- Creating and sustaining good union jobs not just for construction, but for maintenance and operations.

In a lot of ways, affordable housing projects should be hard. We're creating housing that needs to be affordable for 50 years, and that's tricky. It takes time to learn how to navigate complex processes and we need to cultivate diverse people gaining experience in these spaces. As an example, I helped get funding and approval for the White Center Community Hub. To make that project happen, a group with less housing experience is partnering with an experienced group. This is simultaneously building capacity and improving cultural relevance and opportunities.

We also need to make sure that existing affordable housing projects start to age out of their affordability covenants, or as ownership structures are changing, that we re-up those covenants so that we don't lose affordable units in the process of trying to create new capacity. We need to avoid taking steps backwards.

In terms of funding, we can expand and use the County's transfer of development rights (TDR) program to not only improve density, but to incentivize affordable housing with green building features, with built-in childcare facilities, and with units that aren't just tiny. We need different shapes and sizes for the different shapes and sizes of families in our communities.



Further, we can, and should, get more aggressive with our bonding strategy.

Social housing is another important aspect that deserves attention. I am proud to be the only candidate who publicly supported and actively campaigned for I-135, which aimed to address social housing. We need to think big and make significant investments in this area.

What are your top public health priorities for your potential term?

Addressing the fentanyl crisis is a top priority. The death rate year by year is growing. In fact, at the end of March, we had already exceeded 2022 totals in King County. We can't prosecute our way out of the problem. We need to prioritize prevention, treatment, and long-term care and support. I also support a healthcare for homeless team, as this issue hits people experiencing homelessness particularly hard. Contingency management has been used effectively in various substance abuse treatment settings, including outpatient programs, residential treatment centers, and methadone maintenance programs. We should look at scaling up this approach at the County and making sure that whatever approach we use, it is rooted in data and informed by lived experience.

Behavioral health is another critical public health priority for me. Before I got into public policy, I worked in mental health research for Stanford University, specifically looking at mood and anxiety disorders, which disproportionately impact members of the BIPOC community and people who identify as transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming. Like many of us, I've also had my own challenges with mental health, so this issue is near and dear. I'm very glad that voters approved Prop 1 – the Crisis Care Levy. This is a great step in the right direction, and much work will need to be done to truly address the scope of the issue. For example, we need to make sure we are appropriately compensating those doing the work, and make sure this levy does not come at the expense of other critical (and complementary) levies like VSHSL.

Gun violence is another top public health priority and we need to find public-health style solutions for this, which include root cause analysis, finding workable solutions that fit the community, and creating violence interruption services. Hiring people with lived experience is also critical to have credible voices in resolution and prevention efforts.



I will also prioritize protecting women's health and reproductive rights, and the public health crisis of climate change.

In all of these priorities, sharing data and coordinating with the interconnected systems (law enforcement, community services, etc.) is critical.

How would you work to eliminate jail deaths in King County facilities?

The behavioral health problem within our jails is a pressing issue that cannot be ignored. The distressing suicide numbers reflect the severity of the situation. Personally, I have a close family member who spent 15 years incarcerated, which has made the human experience in jails hit home for me. It is crucial that we prioritize the care of this population and take preventive measures to ensure individuals do not end up in jail unnecessarily.

When individuals are booked into jail, their lives often unravel, even if their stay is brief. They lose their jobs, and their children are left without proper care. This perpetuates a cycle of hardship that we cannot ignore. Instead of putting people behind bars, we should focus on connecting individuals with evidence-based services and practices that offer real solutions.

One approach that shows great promise is the implementation of community courts. These problem-solving courts provide low-level offenders with access to vital resources, treatment, and tangible solutions instead of resorting to incarceration. They have proven to be significantly more effective in reducing recidivism compared to traditional courts. However, we must consider expanding the eligibility of community courts to include misdemeanors.

For those who do find themselves behind bars, we must provide them with genuine, high-quality behavioral health support. I have engaged in meaningful discussions with individuals who possess both lived experience and employment expertise in this area, and their insights have deeply troubled me. We need to establish on-site treatment facilities and bolster the presence of social workers within our correctional system. Furthermore, exploring work release programs can offer individuals a path to rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society.



It is time to scale up equitable and human-centered strategies within our criminal legal system. Initiatives like community courts and community diversion programs deserve greater attention and resources. By keeping individuals out of jail and providing them with the necessary support, we can forge a more just and compassionate society.

I'm committed to championing the cause of behavioral health reform within our jails, to prioritizing care, prevention, and evidence-based practices to address the challenges faced by those in our custody.