



Todd Curtis Urbanist Questionnaire 2023

Port of Seattle, Seat 5

What would you point to as your biggest accomplishments during the current term? If not an incumbent, where do you think the current Port commission has fallen short?

The leadership of the Port commission has fallen short in its oversight of the International Arrival Facility in two ways. First, the project is far over budget and this has led to several problems, including ongoing legal proceedings involving one of the major contractors. Second, the terminal was supposed to have accommodated 20 wide-bodied jets, the kind of jets favored on international routes, but can only handle 16, and redesigning the facility to correct this mistake will likely take years and tens of millions of dollars. The Port has admitted that unexpected capacity issues could lead to damages to the Port's operations in the tens or hundreds of millions of dollars over the expected life of this project. This is the kind of mistake that an investment in better planning for the project and a better understanding of international air travel trends would have likely avoided most, and possibly all, of the major issues with this facility.

The Port has ambitious goals to shift users at SeaTac away from using a personal vehicle to access the airport. What immediate projects do you support to accelerate that shift?

I would support the Port's ongoing awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to inform travelers about alternative transportation options, including app based rideshare, carpooling, chartered bus services, public transit, hotel courtesy vehicles, and taxis. I would also support efforts to encourage alternative transit options such as more dedicated carpool lanes, agreements with regional transit agencies to provide more frequent public transit service, and more convenient pickup and drop off zones for rideshare and taxi vehicles.

Do you support adding congestion pricing to Airport roadways?

I support congestion pricing for airport roadways, but only if a system could be implemented without excessive up front and ongoing costs. Congestion pricing would be very difficult to implement without building a mechanism to collect tolls or fees for access to airport roadways. This would call for something like what currently exists for the Alaskan Way Tunnel, the 520 Bridge, and the 405 Express Toll Lanes. The fees or tolls charged would have to be high enough to reduce traffic congestion and pay for the cost of building and maintaining the congestion pricing system.

How do you reconcile the environmental impact of the cruise industry with the Port's role in accommodating it?

I can reconcile the environmental impact of the cruise industry if the Port does what it can to reduce or eliminate emissions, including greenhouse gasses, from cruise ship operations, as well as implement incentives for low and zero emission support equipment and vehicles. There are clearly opportunities for the Port, its partners, and King County to benefit from cruise industry customers.



There are also direct and indirect environmental impacts from cruise ships and the vehicles and support equipment for those ships. Requiring the use of sustainable fuel from renewable sources would reduce some negative impacts. Carbon offsets could be used to counter the remainder of the environmental impacts that can't be immediately addressed. However, as zero emission ship and ground vehicle propulsion technology becomes more widely available, I would insist that the Port either provide incentives or update regulations so that such technologies replace more environmentally unfriendly ones.

Currently the Port plays a big role in supporting roadway capacity projects to improve freight capacity. How do you envision the role of the Port in shaping the region's transportation system evolving as population rates continue to increase and impact freight delay?

Part of the Port's role in supporting roadway capacity projects should be to act as an advocate for projects that benefit the Port by increasing the capacity to transfer freight to and from shipping terminals while also improving traffic conditions in the region. The ongoing State of Washington funded project to expand SR 509 is one such example, allowing freight traffic to bypass congested parts of I-5 in South King County while making freight operations at Seattle's seaport facilities and Seatac airport more attractive to freight customers.

The recently completed Lander Street bridge project is another example of how the Port can improve the region's transportation system, in this case in cooperation with the city of Seattle. Avoiding delays at the Lander St. railroad crossing makes transferring freight to and from the Seattle port areas, including Port of Seattle facilities, and represents a long-term, permanent improvement to the area's freight transportation system.

What role do you see the Port of Seattle having in the immediate future to address the region's shortage of housing?

I see the Port having three kinds of roles in reducing the region's housing shortages. One would be to partner with local communities to determine if underutilized properties controlled by the Port or its key partners could be redeveloped into affordable housing options for residents and Port employees who earn wages that are below the median wages in the area. A second role would be to support efforts by local governments to increase the availability of affordable housing options, particularly in the South Sound area where many who work for the Port or its partner companies live. A model of the kind of efforts the Port should support is the Seattle Housing Levy that is up for renewal in 2023, which will fund the development of affordable housing. A third role would be helping its employees to secure affordable housing by enhancing employee support programs that provide their employees with access to financial counseling and financial services that can help those employees find and finance affordable housing options.

Does the Port Commission have enough resources to conduct proper oversight of Port-wide projects and initiatives?

The Port does not have enough staff assigned to the Commissioners to do oversight of very large projects, and neither does the Port as a whole. One recent example is the International Arrivals Terminal



(IAF), which has suffered from cost overruns and is currently the focus of legal actions against the Port that involves a major contractor for the project. A 2018 Executive Review Panel (ERP) Report that looked at the IAF project recommended a reorganization of Port program management and additional staff to get the IAF project back on schedule.

There will be additional large Port projects in the future, potentially much larger than the IAF, and given the problems uncovered in the ERP report about the IAF project, unless the appropriate expertise is brought onboard before the next large project starts, it is likely that similar problems, and associated delays and cost overruns, will occur in the future.

What do you think the Port has done well to invest in the economic and environmental health of South Sound communities, and what should it do better or differently?

The Port has done a good job of recognizing its influence on the environmental and economic health of South Sound communities and has taken steps to improve the environmental and economic health of these communities. Specific efforts include the Airport Community Ecology Fund that supports projects and programs to improve the environment and its Sustainable Airport Master Plan which outlines its long-term plans for sustainable growth and development near Seatac. The South King County Community Impact Fund is another program that helps historically underserved communities near the airport by addressing noise and sustainability issues, but it could have more of an impact if there was more funding beyond the \$10 million the Port planned to award between 2019 and 2023.

The Port's Economic Development Partnership Program that helps local governments, and contracting programs that aim to increase the number of women and minority owned contractors that work with the Port are well-intentioned efforts that should be expanded. These kinds of programs should be combined with existing job training and apprenticeship programs offered by schools, businesses, and labor unions to help address historical income and opportunity disparities that have disproportionately affected South Sound communities.