



## **Claudia Balducci Urbanist Questionnaire 2025**

King County Executive

### **What are your top three priorities to achieve in your term?**

Our families, and our future, demand steadfast, purposeful action right now, centered on the people and communities that make this region strong. We need leadership that prioritizes affordability, sustainability, and safety. That's the foundation of my vision for King County. For that reason, affordability is at the heart of my vision. From child care to housing, we need to make this region livable for all families. Housing must be within reach for working families and young people. We've created thousands of homes—because public, private, and nonprofit sectors came together to make it happen. That's how we get results—not through empty promises, but through partnership, strategy, and perseverance. On sustainability, we've made incredible strides in transforming mobility across the region. Whether it's getting to work, school, or cultural events, our shared investment in transit is about more than convenience—it's a cornerstone of our climate strategy. And safety is a foundational requirement to meet all of our goals. I will bring a full-spectrum approach to safety, focusing on effective response and making strong investments in prevention like education, community-based programs and social and human services. As Executive, I'll build upon our progress on all of these interrelated issues to build healthy communities.

**What policies or initiatives are you most excited to carry forward and implement from the last administration? Looking at the actions of the county executive from the last four years, what would you as county executive have done differently?**



I share the outgoing Executive's focus on environmental preservation, promoting open space and protecting habitat (especially Kokanee salmon, native to my district); implementing and improving the major new Doors Open Program, which is expanding access to arts & culture; completing critical long range planning efforts like the Regional Wastewater Services Plan; and, of course, completing our light rail system and expanding our regional trail network.

As Executive, I will take more of a rider/user focus to our transit and transportation challenges - expanding service, improving rider experience, and designing a system that works best for those using it (e.g. a light rail hub). I also believe there is more we can do to address traffic safety, working with city partners in a regional approach to make our roads safer (see below).

Finally, I am proud of the effective regional leadership I have brought to tackle our toughest housing challenges and am excited about the potential to achieve even more as Executive.

**Do you support adding progressive revenue sources? Which ones would you support to fund your priorities? Or what cuts would you make to balance budgets facing increasing strain under Trump? How have federal funding cuts impacted your jurisdiction and how do you plan to address those impacts?**

As Executive, tax reform will be a high priority, because one of the greatest threats to providing essential services long-term is our limited funding options, which are primarily regressive sources like sales tax, property tax and fees/fares. I have long supported more progressive options but our ability to implement is limited by state law. I supported the capital gains tax and opposed I-2109 to protect an essential progressive revenue source for our kids and communities. But neither this funding source, nor any of the sources debated this session, were intended to support the



County budget. For that, we were relegated to debating raising property taxes or more sales tax authority. If elected, I will use the Executive's platform to work with legislators to try to craft a better path for the future.

As Chair of the Council's Committee of the Whole, I sponsored legislation in January to direct County government to stress test our funding sources and complete scenario planning to identify federal funding vulnerabilities. In June, I will be partnering with Seattle Councilmember Rinck to host a joint hearing on federal funding risks. I will take that same energy and desire for intergovernmental collaboration into my term as Executive.

**Governor Bob Ferguson has been resistant to lifting the 1% property tax lift cap, which has depleted King County resources over the past 25 years. How would you lobby to get this lid lifted or find alternative funding sources to overcome this limitation?**

Lifting the 1% property tax cap is a long-time priority County legislative agenda item with unanimous Council and Executive support, because a hard limit on revenue that is consistently lower than the rate of increase in costs causes systemic and worsening budget challenges. Along with our state's regressive tax system, I believe it's the biggest threat to providing critical, basic services long-term. I lobbied in Olympia this session to lift the lid. We were as close as ever to success, when Governor Ferguson indicated his opposition. In response, I held a Council discussion and obtained support to send a letter to the Governor asking for his support. Councilmembers Mosqueda, Barón, and Quinn signed on; our Council chair and budget chair did not. As County Executive, I will work with the Governor and use my existing relationships and influence, especially with East King County legislators, to build the support needed to cross the finish line. As a key input to this work, I'll require that our departments work on better public facing communication and



reporting about our county budget, how money is spent and how it benefits the public to build understanding and trust that tax dollars are being wisely spent.

**What do you think is the most important strategy King County can pursue make the region affordable to live in? How will you boost housing options, particularly for families of all incomes to live near where they work? How will you expand shelter space, emergency housing, and permanent supportive housing? How would you go about implementing that strategy?**

The most important part of pursuing affordability is through partnership and perseverance, not through empty promises. As Founder and Chair of the Regional Affordable Housing Committee and KCRHA Governing Board Member, I've brought together local government, employers, housing non-profits, and community advocates to make sure we plan for and fund adequate affordable housing to fill our housing shortage.

As Executive, I'll continue to pursue additional housing using all the strategies in the Affordable Housing Task Force, which has led to progress in building affordable housing and emergency shelter in areas of King County historically opposed to housing expansion and inclusivity. This contributed to the conception and passage of HB 1220, and the subsequent groundbreaking and historic work by all King County cities and the County to include specific, ambitious goals for housing affordability in each jurisdictions' comprehensive plan for the first time.

I'll continue to advocate for additional funding options to increase subsidized housing, and county-wide planning and zoning efforts to expand the availability of market-based housing of a variety of types and affordability levels (as opposed to the mostly luxury apartments we see going up in our county).



**How will you get the King County Regional Homelessness Authority on course?**

**How will you expand shelter space, emergency housing, and permanent supportive housing so that fewer people go unsheltered or unhoused?**

The KCRHA as currently structured presents real challenges because not all parties contribute. We must show the value of the approach to the suburban cities so that they truly buy in. The second major challenge has been setting up a fully functional organization, that can effectively perform its basic tasks and then start to move toward the system reform that the agency was set up to achieve -- and has not yet been able to get off the ground.

To be successful at addressing homelessness, we must set clear goals, and meet them. There are tools at hand we are not using (e.g., stranded tiny homes). We also must improve public accountability and reporting. Building public trust is job one at KCRHA and essential to its ability to continue and meet our goals.

I bring unmatched experience providing emergency shelter, pushing our cities in major, meaningful ways and partnering with municipalities, housing providers, housing advocates, major employers, and others to implement recommendations for expanding access to housing.

I will be very well positioned as Executive to build upon these results and relationships to ensure King County is a place where no one sleeps outside due to a lack of housing.

**What is your approach to improving public safety over the next five years? How will you actualize it?**



King County is responsible for most of the regional public safety tools we have, including Superior Court, District Court, Sheriff's Office, Prosecution, and Public Defense. As a former leader in this very system, I am best suited to improve coordination, information sharing, and a system-wide commitment to data driven results that honor the legal rights of all. I am committed to both improving law enforcement response and innovative early intervention strategies for addiction and mental/behavioral health crises, which are crucial to preventing crime and eliminating counterproductive responses that we know lead to recidivism and worse outcomes. Thanks to the Legislature, we will have resources to bring to bear to support these public safety approaches. We should implement them carefully and transparently, working with community and system partners, to make sure we are investing throughout the spectrum of responses. I am proud to have the support of the former, longtime leader of our county's Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC) for my advocacy on behalf of victims. I will continue that important work as Executive. Lastly, I will champion policies to ensure our students feel supported in school, free from gun violence and school shootings.

**How do you plan to improve public safety for transit operators and riders, and boost ridership and transit accessibility? What is your approach to making our streets safer for all users, especially with pedestrian traffic deaths rising?**

As Executive, I will make road and transit safety top priorities of my administration.

A fatality in Bellevue during my time as Mayor fueled my commitment to improving road safety. In the decade since, I've established stronger policies to reduce serious injuries and fatalities at the city, county, and regional levels. That includes Bellevue's Vision Zero policy and using a Safe System Approach at the Puget Sound Regional Council and King County. In response to the latter legislation, the previous Executive



produced a report outlining a proposed traffic safety strategic plan approach, and the next Executive needs to make it a higher priority.

I'm currently working closely with ATU and others to co-lead a transit safety task force that is homing in on specific proposals to improve transit safety. Solutions will include additional personnel resources to keep up with the growth our system has seen over the last decade, attention to coaches and stops/stations to create a safer overall environment, and continued focus on prevention and outreach strategies. Regional coordination and participation will be essential, as will continued focus and investment in prevention, including behavioral health, mental health and housing.

**Transit electrification plans are straining King County Metro's budget and could lead to fewer service hours and thus less ridership and more climate pollution overall as more residents drive or ride hail to work. How would you approach these tradeoffs?**

Since the County Council passed legislation committing to electrify Metro's fleet of buses by 2035, I've worked to ensure we balance climate goals with service needs. I firmly believe that "frequency is freedom"—frequent, reliable transit service is among the most effective climate strategies we have. As Executive, I will continue to evaluate tradeoffs through a data-driven lens to ensure we're maximizing climate benefits without undermining ridership. In 2019, I pushed for an analysis of the tradeoffs between electrification and maintaining robust service. In 2022, I sponsored a budget proviso directing the Auditor to assess our readiness for the significant capital projects electrification requires—including new and retrofitted bus bases and vehicle procurement. In 2024, I added a budget amendment requesting a comprehensive "maximizing climate benefits through transit" report, due in 2025, to provide cost-benefit analysis, emissions estimates, and project timelines. This work will inform our budget path. As The Urbanist reported, the 2025 budget process laid



bare the fiscal challenges Metro faces—including a looming 2028 funding cliff. I will bring the attention to detail, commitment to climate, and focus on riders to ensure Metro can deliver a sustainable, high-quality system that meets both our climate and mobility goals.

**King County has good policies and codes designed to protect agricultural, forest and rural lands, including our natural areas, waterways, and small rural communities. However, these policies and codes are too often not upheld and enforced. How will you ensure that rural lands are protected, and that violators are subject to enforcement?**

As an elected official, I've stood strong for protecting the urban growth boundary and holding the line on expanding uses outside the urban growth area so as to limit development pressures that may ultimately undermine protection of forests, farmlands and rural areas. I've also worked to balance this protection with a broken funding system that does not support rural roads as we should, nor allow in some cases appropriate and modest economic activity. In order to enforce policies, I've fought for funding for appropriate code enforcement to make sure our rules protecting these areas are observed. I've also ensured County departments have the staff, tools, and direction to investigate and act on violations—whether it's unpermitted construction, environmental degradation, or illegal land use. The best way to protect these areas is to have a strong commitment to urban infill development, expansion of housing opportunities in cities, and building a vision of liveable communities that are able to accommodate growth and provide affordable opportunities for future generations. As Executive, I will uphold a firm commitment to focusing growth within the Urban Growth boundary, resisting pressure to sprawl, and ensuring our policies are strong on paper and meaningfully enforced.





**What are your views on the SeaTac Sustainable Airport Master Plan and how will it impact the communities that live around the airport? What plans do you have to address those community concerns?**

As Executive, I look forward to engaging more in this issue, and I will hold to my record of independence and ability to navigate contentious issues. Through this I will maintain independence from the Port of Seattle and will be willing to look at the issue critically to ensure it meets our region's economic goals, while also achieving our environmental and sustainability goals, and protecting the health of frontline communities most impacted.

Additionally, as I noted during the development of PSRC's Regional Baseline Aviation Study, I believe we need to have a more thorough conversation about how to apply transportation demand management concepts for aviation growth at SeaTac. How can we begin to replace flights to Portland and Vancouver by establishing frequent and reliable regional rail service? What are other strategies to lessen the projected demand, which could balloon to 64 million annual passenger trips by 2037?

Finally, the Executive will lead the upcoming Boeing Field Master Plan Update. I've established relationships with stakeholders including KC International Airport Community Coalition, IAM District 751, aviation interests, and community and will ensure we are supporting economic development while working together to address concerns about health and environmental impacts.

**The King County Executive is the most influential seat on the Sound Transit Board of Directors, appointing members for half of the seats. How would you wield this power and your influence on Sound Transit decision making? What is your approach to keep light rail projects with ballooning budgets and drifting scope on course and relatively on time?**



One of my biggest accomplishments is helping to bring light rail to the Eastside. My leadership on the Board has shaped a more connected and accessible transit system for hundreds of thousands of riders. I've also fought tirelessly for the vision of a connected transit hub at Seattle's International District/Chinatown Station and worked to successfully get the Board to update University Station to Symphony Station. As the system grows, the agency work needs to broaden beyond building light rail, to one that also operates a safe, clean, reliable, and frequent mass transit system.

As Executive, appointing board members who share this commitment to transit, and ideally transit riders themselves, and working with our existing delegation to facilitate the reforms underway at the agency will be some of my first steps. I will continue to work in partnership with executives Mello and Somers to make structural recommendations and expand our transit system more quickly, while also improving reliability, cleanliness, access to transit, and safety for our riders and passengers.

We will be making hard choices in the coming 12-24 months and we need an Executive with experience, a commitment to accountability, and proven accomplishments at Sound Transit to make these difficult decisions.