



Stefan Sharkansky

Proposition One

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To: theshark

I am not investing political capital on this issue either way, and focusing on the King County Council race.

There are a lot of serious flaws in Prop 1, and I predict the voters will not approve it. If voters do approve it, they will do so because they feel Prop 1 is better than doing nothing, and the best that can be practically expected from their political leaders. That being said, if Prop 1 fails, we will need to work hard to present a credible alternative in the future. And if it does pass, there will be an even greater need for strong leadership to make sure projects are completed reasonably timely and reasonably close to budget, and that the serious problems in Prop 1 get corrected as best they can.

I want the governance of Sound Transit changed, so that it is responsive to the voters. Presently, there are 17 voting members -- all appointed by county executives. 10 from King, 4 from Pierce, and 3 from Snohomish. There is no direct responsibility to voters -- these may be elected officials, but their constituents don't judge them very much at all based on their ST service. Is ST a major factor on Connie Marshall being re-elected to Bellevue City Council, for example? And if a ST board member becomes too independent, the county executive can simply appoint someone else.

I would propose all of the county council members from King, Pierce and Snohomish instead comprise the ST board, with weighted vote in proportion to the population of their districts in the ST area. There may be some Pierce or Snohomish council members whose districts are not even in the ST area at all, and therefore would not be on the board at all. King council members from districts 3 and 9 will have smaller voters, for example, as major portions of these districts are outside the ST area.

I believe there is a Connie Rice/John Stanton plan for an elected transportation board to handle both regional roads and regional transit. I have not read this, so I don't know how they want this board comprised. If you elect a special transit board, it will be controlled by special interests. I believe an elected board should be comprised of the general purpose elected officials -- and these are the respective county council members.

I would propose the same solution for the Port of Seattle -- merge it into King County government. Eliminate the port commission, and place matters under the county executive and county council. Allow the \$70 million in port property tax to be spent for any general government purpose -- whether it be the Port, public safety or human services. You will soon see no more port subsidy -- perhaps even a profit, like Los Angeles and other ports enjoy. The \$70 million can be used for general government -- either benefiting King County as a whole, or the less fortunate in particular -- instead of subsidizing the considerably more fortunate. With any luck, we could actually manage a property tax reduction -- probably not the full \$70 million, but a large enough share to provide real property tax relief and please the public.

One of the biggest problems with Prop 1 is the proposal to basically destroy existing infrastructure -- converting two existing lanes of I-90 into light rail tracks. It would be much better to build new bridging for this, and not that much more expensive. The SR-520 bridge replacement would afford an excellent opportunity for this, without much more additional cost. The University of Washington station could be made into a practical transfer point -- or simply continue the train to the Eastside if not being built north of UW.

A bus rapid transit system could be run across the existing I-90 bridge for far less money. And we could probably convert the express lane system in such a way that both eastbound and westbound traffic had an HOV lane available all the way -- there is about the same level of eastbound AND westbound traffic at each rush hour anymore these days.

I don't like the idea of only partially funding the SR-520 bridge replacement at all. A similar approach was tried with the Alaskan Way viaduct replacement. What do we have? 27-1/2 months of gasoline taxes paid, and no intended plans whatsoever to do anything about the viaduct.

The Sound Transit plans on Prop 1 are especially worrisome. It has taken longer than promised to build the initial line -- although they say it will open in 2009 now. I would worry that the new taxes would be used for the existing promises -- nothing in the legalese seems to prevent that. If we have to build in stages, then new taxes should be enacted in stages as well. 20 years to finish light rail to the Eastside? People our age will be very close to retirement at that time!

Best wishes,
Richard
