



SEATTLE CITY COUNCIL | DISTRICT 1

COUNCILMEMBER LISA HERBOLD

August 6, 2019

Mayor Durkan,

I am writing you about delays on buses that are currently routed from Downtown to West Seattle on 1st Avenue. I have heard complaints from numerous riders, who find the current service level unacceptable. I agree. Though Metro buses are under the jurisdiction of King County, I believe there's more that the City must do to help.

These buses formerly accessed Downtown on the Alaskan Way Viaduct. In early 2020, these bus routes will transition to a permanent route with a bus lane on Alaskan Way, and travel from 3rd Avenue on to Columbia, which will be much improved over the current use of 1st Avenue.

These buses travel on 3rd Avenue to Columbia, then travel to 1st Avenue, and enter SR99 at Dearborn. These buses have a [daily ridership of approximately 30,000](#), from West Seattle and adjacent communities (C Line, 21X, 37X, 55, 56, 57, 113, 120 121, 122, 123, 125).

Traffic conditions on 1st Avenue in Pioneer Square have been awful on a number of recent evenings, with buses backed up, not just on 1st Avenue, but onto Columbia and 3rd Avenue as well, and often not moving for extended periods of time. Two-hour commutes are not uncommon.

During the three weeks when SR 99 was closed, several buses from West Seattle to Downtown used 4th Avenue. Rider satisfaction was high.

While backups have tended to be especially bad on days when the Mariners are playing, last Friday, when they were not playing in Seattle, was extraordinarily bad. I have heard from numerous residents about their frustrations, and the impact on their lives.

I have been in touch with SDOT about the use of 1st Avenue since 2018, and recently asked SDOT Director Zimbabwe to take measures to address these delays. I'm eagerly waiting to learn more about the timeline for the implementation of these steps:

1. Revising signal timing at 1st Ave S & S Dearborn St and Alaskan Way S & S Dearborn St to further aid transit operation
2. Further optimizing the signal timing plan for the 1st Ave corridor through Pioneer Square while emphasizing the north and south movements
3. Implementing pre-game event timing to support the last two mid-day baseball game for the season
4. Working to ensure high priority for incident management during the morning and afternoon commute time

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I have asked on more than one occasion about going back to the use of 4th Avenue, at least during rush hour. West Seattle residents have asked with this as well. I remain concerned that the measures identified by SDOT may be insufficient.

King County [Metro's update](#) yesterday said, regarding the use of 4th Avenue,

"That pathway worked in January because many commuters changed their travel times and patterns for a month and also because of several temporary bus lanes and uniformed traffic control officers at key intersections. These measures would be difficult and costly to renew and maintain for an extended time."

By the way of this letter, I am asking, can you estimate the cost to renew and maintain the 4th Avenue pathway, until Alaskan Way opens with a dedicated bus lane in early 2020? If we are able to help address some of the costs identified by Metro, I hope they'd reconsider the request to reroute to 4th Ave.

I believe that we are at crisis levels for commuters on these buses. Here are some excerpts of messages that I have received:

- *"I'm currently sitting on a not-so-rapid C line bus wondering if I will be home in less than the typical 90 minutes the Friday evening commutes have been taking from 3rd & Pike downtown to the Alaska junction."*
- *"It seems the major culprit are drivers who block the intersection....Tonight it was so bad that when the bus didn't even move into traffic after 10 minutes due to the back up, I got off and walked down to the S Railroad Avenue stop. Along the way, I passed 3 other Cs and a 55 along with a driver of a pickup who got out to attack the driver in front of him for trying to make a left turn when there was no way he would clear the intersection. Pedestrians were filming the chaos."*
- *"It is painfully clear to anyone who drives or used the bus that this route is an example of bad planning and dysfunction."*
- *"Metro and the city have been silent during all this. I don't know how much longer the lid can be kept on the pot because tempers are flaring with increasing frequency. I read about the Metro driver who broke from the herd yesterday in order to actually get somewhere. I personally commend that driver. But what about any other driver or passenger trapped in this mess? Someone is going to get hurt. This surely has a negative impact on the bus drivers who are probably given minimal time at the end of each route to eat, stand, or use the facilities. The oft asked question why Metro doesn't route some, most, or all of the West Seattle buses through SoDo."*
- *"On my evening commute this evening, I stood for 50 minutes (buses to West Seattle are typically standing room only), while the bus navigated from 3rd and Columbia to the 99 entrance, which is less than one mile."*

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- *“To date, typical responses from both the city and KC Metro...have been inexcusable, unsatisfactory and in my opinion are merely attempts to absolve the city of any and all responsibility to effectively manage the problem.”*

In addition, I am very concerned about safety, and the ability of the Fire Department to provide fire life/safety services in Pioneer Square, with backups on 1st Avenue, and with intersections regularly blocked.

Could you ask Chief Scoggins whether these traffic conditions affect the ability of the Fire Department to provide timely fire life/safety services in Pioneer Square?

While the evening commute has been the most difficult, West Seattle riders are also facing extended delays during the morning commute as well.

Sincerely,



Lisa Herbold

Councilmember District 1

CC: Dow Constantine, King County Executive
Joe Mc Dermott, King County Council
Rob Gannon, King County Metro General Manager
Sam Zimbabwe, Seattle Department of Transportation Director
Mike O'Brien, City Council Transportation Committee Chair

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