MASS coalition challenges city leaders to act decisively during upcoming “Seattle Squeeze”

With the multi-year “Seattle Squeeze” bearing down on city streets exactly one month from today, a recently-formed coalition of transportation and climate advocates called MASS (Move All Seattle Sustainably) is urging rapid city action to move more people by public transit, bicycling, and walking.

MASS has just announced shortlist of priorities that it believes Seattle must adopt for 2019 as the foundation of any adequate response to the traffic crunch that begins with the closure of the Alaskan Way Viaduct on January 11. During the ensuing, multi-year “period of maximum constraint,” a perfect storm of construction projects is expected to make downtown gridlock even worse and impact traffic flow throughout the city. The coalition worries that the city is not just unprepared, but missing a unique opportunity to move rapidly to a carbon-neutral, safe, and equitable transportation system that can keep pace with the city’s growth.

MASS’s priorities include fast-tracking speed and reliability improvements along many key bus corridors; expediting the city’s already-promised Basic Bike Network; and making downtown streets more walkable. MASS is asking Mayor Durkan to commit to these steps before the end of this year.

MASS formed in October due to shared concerns about the direction of city transportation policy. The coalition first wrote to the Mayor on October 16, outlining actions it believes are needed to meet Seattle’s transportation and climate goals. The Mayor’s office replied a week later, and the coalition sent a second letter on November 1. MASS is still awaiting a response to its second letter. While coalition members are pleased that several of their initial requests made it into the city budget through Council action, they remain concerned that the city is not moving with nearly enough urgency or leadership.

“We want to hear a commitment from Mayor Durkan to move forward with these priorities as fast as possible,” said Katie Wilson, general secretary of the Transit Riders Union. “Seattle’s population will continue to climb during and beyond the Seattle Squeeze. We’re never going to escape from this congestion quagmire until we make it far more convenient for people to walk, bike, and ride transit.”

“Bus lanes are the only way to keep transit moving when the rest of the system fails,” said Martin Duke from Seattle Transit Blog. “What we’re proposing for 2019 would be a first step towards a more comprehensive network of bus lanes for Seattle.”

“Seattle voted by a wide margin to fight climate change, despite the nearly $35 million oil industry campaign to defeat I-1631,” said Rebecca Monteleone from the Sierra Club. “Seattle is ready for bold action. Fighting climate change means making it easy for people to get around without driving. We expect Mayor Durkan to lead the fight and so do voters.”

“Mayor Durkan needs to demonstrate leadership by prioritizing transit reliability during the period of maximum constraint,” said Keith Kyle from Seattle Subway. “This is an achievable goal if she extends transit priority on Third Avenue, paints bus lanes ahead of RapidRide implementation, and finalizes the decision to move forward with the Center City Connector Streetcar. Failure by the Mayor’s office to act
now will result in an overwhelming majority of downtown commuters stuck in traffic without access to reliable alternatives."

"Seattle is running out of space. Every person biking, walking, or using transit is a person not taking a car," said Richard Smith, Executive Director of Cascade Bicycle Club. "To lead our city through the challenge at hand, it's going to take prioritization. It starts with building the approved and funded Basic Bike Network following the timeline laid out by City Council."

“Seattle voters clearly understand that we must take action to reduce carbon emissions, and transportation is the city’s single largest source of emissions,” said Sarah Shifley from 350 Seattle. “Creating a fast and reliable transit system in our city is the first step toward reducing transportation emissions.”

“Here is the thing about emissions; You reduce now or you pay later. And that payment will be in the lives and suffering of hundreds of millions of people,” said Sarah Myhre Ph.D. from Seattle 500 Women Scientists. “Seattle can be a model for cities around the country, but we must start right now.”

“8% of people are already walking downtown, and more will do so if we make it comfortable and convenient,” said Clara Cantor from Seattle Neighborhood Greenways. “The City needs to adopt stronger rules on sidewalk closures so that people are not forced to walk in dangerous streets next to speeding cars or resort to unsafe measures. And we need a new policy on pedestrian signals that make it easier to cross the street.”

"The Seattle Squeeze is going to be a critical test for our Mayor. It's going to make traffic a lot worse and we've known it's coming for years. We have plans that would get people out of traffic. We're just waiting on leadership," said Owen Pickford, Executive Director of The Urbanist. "The goals of MASS align with years of planning. They'll keep our buses running. They'll provide alternatives to driving, which causes more traffic. We need our elected leaders to commit to these goals."

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MASS has a new website! Check it out at masscoalition.org, and follow @MASScoalition on Twitter.

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