March 21, 2019  Press Release

With Buses out of the Tunnel - It's Time to Make All of Third Avenue Bus Only

On Saturday, buses will permanently move out of the Downtown Seattle Transit Tunnel (DSTT) leading to 830 new bus trips on already crowded surface streets in Downtown Seattle. The city has made important improvements with the new 5th/6th Avenue bus lanes and implementation of all door boarding on 3rd Avenue. But given the need to further prioritize transit, today the MASS Coalition is calling on the City to extend bus priority on 3rd Avenue from Stewart Street to Denny Way. It works well south of Stewart, and should be extended the length of downtown.

Here is why: 3rd Avenue is the busiest bus corridor in the country. Even before coming additions from the DSTT, bus routes carrying more than 100,000 riders use 3rd Avenue every weekday between Stewart and Denny. Yet this section of 3rd Avenue still prioritizes single-occupant vehicles and parking -- even though it carries only 7300 cars a day. Slowing down the 100,000 commuters that use 3rd Avenue is needlessly costing their time and squandering King County Metro service hours.

This improvement may be the most impactful of the 20 specific bus priority projects that the MASS Coalition outlined in its plan for the Seattle Squeeze. By adopting this proposal the City can demonstrate that it is prepared to continually improve city streets for transit over the five years of the Seattle Squeeze.

“Extra transit priority on 3rd Avenue will speed up buses and reduce delays for riders, improve system reliability, and free up service hours to be reinvested throughout our bus system,” said Stephen Fesler of The Urbanist. “This is vitally important at a time when Metro is already stretched thin with available buses and operators.”

“For people working downtown who can’t afford downtown housing or parking, how about treating them like we really value their contribution to our city? Bus riders deserve a fast ride into downtown,” said Katie Wilson of the Transit Riders Union.

“Extending bus priority on 3rd Avenue is great for commuters, and it’s consistent with the need to make dramatic reductions in carbon emissions. With the bus tunnel closing to buses this is a great time to make the change,” said Rebecca Monteleone, chair of the Sierra Club’s Seattle Group.

“As phase two of the Seattle Squeeze begins, we have seen the city make some limited moves in the right direction by establishing transit pathways on 5th and 6th avenues and transitioning to all-door boarding on 3rd Avenue,” said Ken Anderson of Seattle
Subway. “But these steps fall woefully short without a dedicated bus lane and signal priority on the busiest bus corridor in the United States.”

Therefore MASS urges Mayor Durkan and the Seattle Department of Transportation to immediately implement temporary bus priority on the Belltown section of 3rd Avenue, evaluate its effectiveness, and then take this sense of urgency to improve bus priority throughout the city.

*From 2017 SDOT traffic report, showing car volumes downtown, highlighting the relatively low volume on 3rd between Stewart and Denny:*
Vision for Bus Priority in Seattle

- Market/45th
- Roosevelt
- Montlake
- Fairview
- Dexter
- Madison
- 12th
- Auburn
- 5th/6th
- Jackson
- Rainier
- Avalon
- Alaska
- Delridge