“Ride for Safe Streets” calls attention to Seattle’s slow progress on bike, pedestrian, and transit commitments

Seattle residents and families joined the Move All Seattle Sustainably (MASS) Coalition and allies in calling on City leaders to fast-track transportation improvements

SEATTLE – Six months into the Seattle Squeeze, with carbon emissions rising and Vision Zero a still-distant dream, Seattle families and residents gathered at the Ride for Safe Streets on Sunday to urge City leaders to more decisive action.

Transportation is Seattle’s #1 contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, #1 factor for economic opportunity and mobility, and kills just as many people as homicides while seriously injuring hundreds more every year. These problems disproportionately affect people who are the most vulnerable, whether by having the least wealth, by racial inequality, by age, or by ability.

Over the past year, many Seattle residents have been frustrated by delays and cut-backs to plans for important biking, walking, transit, and safety projects. Compared with the 2014 Bicycle Master Plan, SDOT’s current pace of bikeway development is less than half of what’s needed, and 27% lower than what the Move Seattle Levy funded. At the same time, major transit projects have been shelved, pedestrians are being deprioritized at major intersections, and sidewalks and curb ramps aren’t being built nearly fast enough.

City Hall Plaza was packed to overflowing on Sunday afternoon as residents of neighborhoods throughout Seattle converged on downtown, bringing a message to Mayor Durkan and other city officials that they expect bold action. The MASS Coalition announced a Green Transportation Package that the coalition hopes to move forward this summer. Seattle City Councilmembers Lorena González and Mike O’Brien spoke at the event and voiced their support for the initiative; Councilmember Sally Bagshaw and a number of city council candidates were also in attendance.

“We’ve spent the last fifty years prioritizing and subsidizing driving,” said Jeanna Wheeler, a scientist and member of the Seattle chapter of 500 Women Scientists. “It’s time for us to join cities across the globe in rejecting this harmful dead end. Energy systems change; our energy future isn’t fossil fuel, in the same way that our energy future isn’t whale oil. Rather than building our city’s infrastructure around cars (or whaling ships), we must begin building them around people. No elected leader in Seattle denies the science of climate change publicly, and yet far too many deny that the public is ready to make hard choices to address it. This is the new face of climate denialism in our Emerald City.”

Rich Brown of Duwamish Valley Safe Streets and several other speakers pointed to historic underinvestment in South Seattle’s transportation infrastructure. The Rainier Ave Safety Corridor Project, which promises to transform Seattle’s most dangerous street, has seen years of delay. South Seattle lacks the connected network of bike lanes and paths that makes biking a safe and comfortable option for many in North Seattle. As Jennifer Grant of Familybike Seattle said, “Fathers shouldn’t have to drive across the city to teach their children to bike.”

“The fact that so many people are willing to spend a weekend day on the streets shows that people are dissatisfied,” said Vicky Clarke, Policy Director of Cascade Bicycle Club. “We’re one of the most economically prosperous cities in the nation; there is no reason we shouldn’t have safe infrastructure for all people, across the city, including for those who need or choose to bike. If the Mayor is serious wanting to achieve Vision Zero it’s
going to need more action than we have seen so far. We need to do better and we will continue to hold the city accountable to do just that."

"When commuting by public transit takes so much longer than commuting by car, it's no wonder people choose to drive," said Katie Wilson, General Secretary of the Transit Riders Union. "Buses carrying scores of people shouldn't get stuck in a sea of single-occupancy vehicles—and they don't have to. With commitment from City leaders, we can create a robust network of bus priority corridors connecting Seattle’s neighborhoods, allowing all residents to travel rapidly and reliably around our city by bus and train."

A common refrain at the event was that the City already has many good plans: Vision Zero to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2030; a Climate Action Plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050; and Transit, Bike, and Pedestrian Master Plans to build out our city’s multi-modal transportation infrastructure. But the City is not on track to fulfill the commitments outlined in any of these plans. The MASS Coalition has designed a Green Transportation Package to try to get the City back on track. Participants at the Ride for Safe Streets had a clear message on Sunday for the Mayor: Find the political will, use existing funding strategically, and seek new funding if needed. We can’t compromise on the safe, green transportation system that’s needed today and for future generations.

After listening to speeches the crowd poured into 4th Avenue. Fathers biking with their children, people with wheelchairs and others with canes, and parents with strollers, all proceeded down the street together to Westlake Park, where the event concluded with music and activities for kids.


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