April 22, 2013

Bob Drewel
Executive Director
Puget Sound Regional Council
1011 Western Avenue, Suite 500
Seattle, WA 98104-1035

Secretary Lynn Peterson
Washington State Department of Transportation
310 Maple Park Avenue SE
P.O. Box 47300
Olympia, WA 98504-7300

Dear Mr. Drewel and Secretary Peterson:

We are writing to request that the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) convene a special task force to advance the review of a system-wide approach to tolling our region’s major highway facilities as an alternative to the current path of implementing tolling on a corridor by corridor basis.

In recent years, the State has imposed tolls on SR 520, SR 167 and the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. The Legislature has also directed that WSDOT study tolling of I-90, I-5, I-405, SR 509 and SR 99. The region’s transportation system suffers from serious traffic congestion and would benefit from a broad policy review and discussion on what is a reasonable vision and path for advancing tolling as both a mechanism to pay for infrastructure and a way to improve overall system performance and sustainability.

We are concerned that the State’s corridor by corridor approach to tolling is piecemeal. We believe that a system-wide study and public oversight should be considered to tackle the complex policy, financial and system reliability questions that must be answered to advance a regional vision for tolling. This is consistent with the communications coming forth from the SR 99 Advisory Committee on Tolling and Traffic Management and it is critical at this time
with cities along Lake Washington urging mitigation for the unanticipated traffic diversion caused by SR 520 tolling.

We believe PSRC is the appropriate organization to convene regional stakeholders including the State and local jurisdictions in a more comprehensive approach to toll implementation so we can avoid the unintended consequences of tolling one facility at a time. We recognize that the Washington State Department of Transportation’s participation in this effort is important for a successful outcome and we are hopeful that WSDOT will engage in and support the review.

The comprehensive review should include consideration of the following components:

- Ability to demonstrate the value to toll payers and the region at large;
- Equity for toll payers across the region and a fair distribution of costs and benefits;
- Analysis of the direct and external costs and benefits of relatively recent tolling on Tacoma Narrows Bridge, SR 520 and SR 167 and future facilities, including an assessment of overall system performance across modes, implementation and operational costs, greenhouse gas emissions, vehicle miles travelled, traffic diversion and potential mitigation measures, and experiences of the traveling public;
- Review the impact of tolling by income quintile, based on household car ownership and use;
- Review of the technology available to achieve a regional solution, the implementation challenges, and a proposed phasing plan with greater definition than that provided in the region’s Transportation 2040 Plan;
- A robust discussion of the uses of both near and long-term revenues for transit to maximize the efficiency and equity of the tolled corridors and the system as a whole;
- Timing and staging of tolling implementation in tandem with the availability of choices, such as transit, that provide alternatives to paying tolls to address inequitable impacts as well as system operations; and
- Review and comparison of alternative finance options.

We appreciate the work PSRC has done with Vision 2040 and recognize that it laid the groundwork for a regional approach to tolling and pricing. We now need to engage a wide composition of stakeholders to conduct the analysis in order to provide a deliberate and cohesive review in time to inform the 2014 legislative session.
We look forward to working with PSRC and WSDOT to further develop this request and to expeditiously seek approval for PSRC to undertake this study.

Sincerely,

Dow Constantine  
King County Executive

Conrad Lee  
Mayor, City of Bellevue

George S. Martin  
Mayor, City of Clyde Hill

Fred McConkey  
Mayor, Town of Hunts Point

David Baker  
Mayor, City of Kenmore

Mary Jane Goss  
Mayor, City of Lake Forest Park

Bruce Bassett  
Mayor, City of Mercer Island

Rich Crispo  
Mayor, City of Newcastle

John Marchione  
Mayor, City of Redmond

Denis Law  
Mayor, City of Renton

Mike McGinn  
Mayor, City of Seattle

David Cooper  
Mayor, Town of Yarrow Point