



City of Tacoma
Transportation Commission

August 4, 2023

Tacoma City Council
747 Market Street, RM 1200
Tacoma, WA 98402

Subject: Pierce Transit's Bus Rapid Transit Project – Stream Community Line

Dear Infrastructure, Planning, and Sustainability Council Committee:

The City of Tacoma Transportation Commission was frustrated to learn of dramatic proposed changes to the Pacific Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Project (BRT 1) at the July 10 Commissioners Meeting. We understand that project costs have gone far beyond the available funding sources and so the scope must change. However, we have concerns about the viability of the project with these changes. Even with a curtailed scope, we are skeptical that the project can be successful without a deliberate effort to improve stakeholder collaboration.

We are concerned that the presented plan at the July 10 meeting is not transformative and unworthy of replacing Route 1. The reduction in upgraded stations is concerning. The lack of separate lanes for any portion of the route is problematic. BRT 1 was supposed to set the stage and standard for additional BRT lines in Pierce County. However, if what is claimed as BRT is only a slightly better bus service that does not deliver on promises made, then the project will have failed the public.

Should Pacific Avenue BRT not be a substantially improved transit service, the public may become wary of approving additional tax dollars to build the transit infrastructure and service levels we need for a sustainable future. That means this project must provide an essential benefit to travelers along the corridor, even with a reduced budget and scope. If Pierce Transit cannot provide such a benefit at the budgeted levels, then Pierce Transit needs to re-evaluate the project to identify how to make that happen.

The Transportation Commission echoes a letter from *Downtown: On the Go!* calling for exploring Business Access & Transit Lanes (BAT Lanes). BAT lanes may allow Pierce Transit to meet the needs of transit riders in a significantly more cost effective manner. Most expectations of BRT from the general public are of stations designed for substantial comfort and convenience, level boarding, transit-prioritized intersections, and dedicated lanes or roadways. The version of BRT proposed on July 10 has greatly reduced or eliminated all of those features. Intelligently applied BAT lane treatments may allow the project to capture many of the benefits of the original BRT proposal. We urge the stakeholders to evaluate the BAT lane option.

The world is in a climate crisis; 44% of Tacoma's carbon emissions come from our transportation system. We need transformational change in how our transportation system works if we are going to provide future generations a livable world. The original BRT vision was critical to that change. A successful BRT should be built with the goal of better serving existing transit users and lowering single occupancy vehicle (SOV) travel by improving transit services and connections. If SOV travel times increase along the corridor while BRT is moving far more people more effectively, that would constitute a successful project. We need to evaluate transit projects not only on the number of riders that can be served, but also by how many vehicles it can remove from the road. Transit and transportation projects need to be framed in a net-carbon scenario, and a successful BRT operation that removes SOVs from Pacific Avenue and other streets would prove to be a net benefit.

Tacoma completed its Vision Zero Action Plan in 2022. The City identified the Pacific Avenue corridor as a High Risk Corridor. BRT was a clear pathway to increasing the safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. It does not appear that the alternative design options that Pierce Transit is considering will meaningfully change the physical characteristics of the corridor. We call on the City of Tacoma, Pierce County, Pierce Transit, and WSDOT to find ways to make the corridor safer for all.

The Home in Tacoma zoning reforms will most likely be completed in 2024. That work is expected to contribute to a densification of the corridor and new development, leading to an increase in people moving throughout the city and the region. A successful BRT line on Pacific Avenue is critical to the creation of livable urban communities in this part of Tacoma. The City of Tacoma is investing significant resources to ensure that Home in Tacoma is successful. It also must invest significant resources to ensure that BRT is successful as the two will interplay closely along the corridor.

The Transportation Commission is supportive of the Pacific Avenue Enhanced Bus Option—especially the 10 minute headways envisioned. This corridor is overloaded and critical to the economic well-being of our region. But the enhanced bus service will not provide all the benefits of a genuine BRT line. We should be careful not to identify Enhanced Bus Option as BRT. To mischaracterize a modest bus service upgrade as *BRT* would be a disservice to transit riders and the general public.

The Transportation Commission calls on the various stakeholders to ensure that any future BRT project is transformative for this corridor and for the region in general. While the Enhanced Bus Option is an acceptable alternative for now, BRT infrastructure and service on Pacific Avenue should be transformative and set the standard for Pierce Transit going forward. In the absence of funds or leadership to make that happen, it is time to re-evaluate the goals of the BRT project. This would allow for a critical rescoping as project partners identify the costs and funds needed to build a legitimate BRT system.

Respectfully,



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Transportation Commission Co-Chair



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