

MUNICIPAL LEAGUE OF KING COUNTY
SUPPORTS
City of Seattle Referendum 1: Relating to the Deep-Bore Tunnel
August 16, 2011 Primary Election

SUMMARY AND BACKGROUND

The Seattle City Council passed Ordinance Number 123542 entering into agreements related to the Alaskan Way Viaduct (Viaduct) replacement. Section 6 of that ordinance has been referred to the voters for approval or rejection. Section 6 states: "The City Council is authorized to decide whether to issue the notice referenced in Section 2.3 of each Agreement. That decision shall be made at an open public meeting held after issuance of the Final Environmental Impact Statement."

If a majority of voters casting ballots in this referendum approve Section 6, City Council may proceed with agreements beyond the preliminary design phase of the project. If a majority of voters reject Section 6, the Ordinance will not become law. However, City Council may be able to proceed with the agreements beyond preliminary design by enacting another ordinance. Also, the Washington State Department of Transportation may be able to proceed without City approval.

While there is considerable confusion about the meaning of the Referendum language and the possible legal interpretations if it passes or fails, voters should know that the Referendum was initiated by opponents of the current deep-bore tunnel plan in the hopes that it will cause the City Council to revisit the question. Thus, a "Yes" vote indicates support for continuing with the current agreements, while a "No" vote signals that the deep-bore tunnel plan should be reconsidered.

ARGUMENTS FOR REFERENDUM 1

- A vote "Yes" will keep the replacement of the Viaduct moving forward and will help prevent costly delays. The state has agreed to fund and is already moving forward with the construction of the deep bored tunnel project – a compromise solution arrived at after a decade of planning, community process and environment study.
- The Alaskan Way Viaduct and the replacement tunnel are part of the state highway system and thus a responsibility of the State Department of Transportation. The City of Seattle is a partner with the state in the development of the project but has no funding responsibility and no decision authority for the project.
- The earthquake-damaged Viaduct is in need of replacement. The bored tunnel maintains a vital route for people and goods while improving the waterfront environment and opening it up for other public uses. The roadway plays a major role in sustaining the Puget Sound economy and maintaining citizens' ability to travel to and through Seattle.
- The tunnel will carry tens of thousands of cars and trucks every day, reducing congestion on I-5 and neighboring streets when compared to the surface street option. The surface street option demolishes the existing six-lane viaduct, diverts the traffic to city streets, and creates gridlock.
- The congestion created by a surface street option will hurt our economy. Our working waterfront depends upon safe and efficient routes for trucks and delivery vehicles.
- Critics often portray the bored tunnel as anti-environment, pro-auto, pro-highway, which ignores the fact that it is a highway construction project that is reducing auto capacity. The bored tunnel project would reduce auto lanes from six to four and provide more frequent bus service.
- The tunnel option includes the construction of new bike lanes to and from downtown.
- The tunnel option minimizes construction impacts to businesses and the traveling public since the current Viaduct would remain open to traffic during construction.
- Viaduct tunnel opponents placed this measure on the ballot to confuse voters and create delays.
- Tunnel opponents hope that their surface/transit option will prevail if the deep-bore tunnel is stalled, however, there is no state or local funding for the surface/transit option and legislative leadership has stated unequivocally that state funds will not be available for such an option.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST REFERENDUM 1:

- A vote “No” on this referendum will send city and state leaders an important message that citizens do not support the tunnel.
- It’s unaffordable. Funding for the tunnel’s base budget, without expected overruns, is short about \$700 million. The scheme to generate \$400 million from tolls doesn’t pencil out, and the Port’s \$300 million contribution may never materialize. Seattle citizens will be taxed to cover this shortfall – and worse, we are still liable for any further cost overruns.
- The public has not been given an adequate opportunity to fully review the deep bore tunnel option. Additional time, discussion and studies are necessary to understand the environmental, economic and historic consequences.
- Other major road projects are underfunded and the state can’t afford basic highway maintenance. This is the wrong time to build another megaproject.
- The tunnel will make it harder to get downtown because of the lack of city center exits. The tunnel would only be useful for about 1/3 of viaduct users.
- The tunnel will make traffic worse since it depends on a high (\$7-\$9) round-trip toll. 70,000 cars each day are expected to flood Pioneer Square and worsen congestion on city streets.
- The tunnel plan has no funding for transit service. In fact, it actually worsens transit because the proposed interchange in Pioneer Square would cause impenetrable congestion for West Seattle buses. Other options fund additional transit improvements.
- Freight traffic headed for downtown Seattle won’t benefit from the tunnel because of the lack of downtown exits.
- Cities and local jurisdictions should have a major voice in how major roadway projects are planned and designed.
- In Seattle we are not afraid to admit a mistake, to change course when new information casts doubt on former beliefs, to stand up for sensible solutions. The tunnel reflects outdated priorities. With government facing crushing deficits and high gas prices straining our household budgets, we must make smart decisions that align with our priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

The Municipal League of King County recommends voting “Yes” on Referendum 1. This procedural vote is an unnecessary and costly stalling tactic. The deep-bore tunnel is a compromise solution arrived at after a decade of planning, community process and environmental study and further delay will only continue to endanger lives and add costs to the project. Citizens of Seattle have shown through polling and through a previous ballot measure that there is no consensus on a Viaduct replacement solution. Thus, state and local elected leadership, with due input from stakeholders, has reached agreement on this option. It is funded, it minimizes disruption to the regional economy and to traffic during construction, it removes the eyesore that is the Viaduct and it opens the waterfront to downtown Seattle. As a community, we must now get behind the agreed-upon plan and move forward.