

December 3, 2024

Councilmember Strauss, Chair, Select Budget Committee
Councilmember Saka, Chair, Transportation Committee
Seattle City Council
600 4th Avenue
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Budget Proviso SDOT-002-A-1 on the Transportation Levy Fund

Dear Councilmembers Strauss and Saka,

As you know, last month a new transportation levy passed by 67%, with support from over 260,000 Seattle voters. As the oversight committee that has been monitoring the current levy, we could not be more happy with this overwhelming approval of the work SDOT has been doing and plans to do in the near future. The levy proposal which Seattle voters overwhelmingly approved was informed by the prioritizations and projects that are outlined in the recently adopted Seattle Transportation Plan (STP).

As you also know, the Seattle City Council (Council) deliberated, amended, and then unanimously approved both the levy proposal in July of this year and, previous to that, the STP in April. These documents outline priorities, funding buckets, and specific project lists for SDOT, and inform each year's spending plan.

That is why we are stunned by amendment SDOT-002 A-1 that is included in the final 2025 Seattle City Council budget and places a proviso of \$89 million on the Transportation Levy Fund, exactly half of the appropriations for 2025, to "prohibit spending until authorized by future Council action" with the intent being to "have SDOT proactively engage the Council in the development of detailed spending plans."

The Levy Oversight Committee (LOC), which includes the Council Transportation Chair, has ensured accountability by overseeing the development and implementation of detailed spending plans throughout the life of the current levy. We expect that the next oversight committee, which will also include the Council Transportation Chair, will continue to engage with SDOT around spending plans. There are many ways to engage in developing and monitoring spending plans without prohibiting spending.

While we appreciate that the intent of the proviso may be to ensure that spending is adequately planned for and allocated in line with voter intent, we are concerned that it usurps the work of the next oversight committee. In addition to including the Council Transportation Chair, the next oversight committee will include representatives from each council district, representatives from each Seattle modal board, and two Seattleites with auditing experience. Funds have been allocated for the new oversight committee to request audits of specific projects, ensuring a level of accountability never possible before. The new oversight committee will be well positioned to be proactively engaged in the development of detailed SDOT plans.

In addition, the LOC sees the potential for this proviso to be used in bad faith as its wording makes it possible for Councilmembers to hold levy funds hostage until they are spent on specific projects Councilmembers may see as a priority. SDOT developed the STP that is used to guide their work, including annual spending plans, with significant community input, leading to strong safety, equity, and mobility filters which guide how SDOT does project development work. It is important for community transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility that we respect the processes that went into developing these community plans. The plan is readily available to anyone who wants to read it and compare it to annual SDOT work plans and spending plans.

As the Move Seattle LOC, we urge the Council to not take advantage of the proviso to hinder implementation of levy projects or shift spending priorities away from voters' priorities. The Council should not be engaged with SDOT on the project management level. Questions about the Council's intent to review the scope of paving projects, including how the Complete Streets policy is implemented, and explore "how the council approves funding for projects" (as outlined in a May 31, 2024 memo to the Select Committee on the 2024 Transportation Levy from Calvin Chow, and shared by staff from Councilmember Saka's office) were raised at our [June LOC meeting](#) but never addressed. It was unclear then, as it is unclear now, what problem the Council is trying to fix by duplicating the work of an oversight committee and reviewing individual projects that are included in the STP.

Additionally, as the committee charged with monitoring revenues, expenditures, and program and project implementation, we are worried about the fiscal responsibility of this proviso. Projects that SDOT plans to deliver in 2025 are already in the planning process, and the more that spend plan is amended, the more of SDOT's time and energy will be wasted, and the more levy dollars will be spent on internal processes rather than on delivering projects.

We urge the Council to lift the proviso early in 2025, with minimal interference in SDOT's spend plan for 2025, so that SDOT may make plans for future years knowing that funding for projects outlined in the STP and included in the voter-approved levy will be available.

Sincerely,

On behalf of the Move Seattle Levy Oversight Committee

Geri Poor, Co-Chair

Kevin Werner, Co-Chair

Cc:

Mayor Harrell

Councilmember Hollingsworth

Councilmember Kettle

Councilmember Moore

Councilmember Morales

Council President Nelson

Councilmember Rinck

Councilmember Rivera