

As Featured in **Seattle Business**



# Time to Focus on Seattle's Future

Challenging conditions provide opportunities to plan ahead.

In 2009, Seattle welcomed Link Light Rail, approved an Alaskan Way Viaduct replacement plan and celebrated decisions of PATH, Russell Investments and ShareBuilder to relocate downtown.

But even though recent reports show some promising indicators, many say recovery—particularly in the commercial and residential real estate markets—is still years away. This economic lull provides us with an opportunity to plan for better days ahead and ensures Seattle is well positioned when the economy recovers.

## Laying the Groundwork for Development

An important step toward the city's emergence from the economic doldrums was the extension of master-use permits, allowing currently permitted development projects that are on hold to avoid having to go back through the permitting process once economic conditions normalize. This extension positions Seattle to recover quickly from the recession, and provides stimulus for new construction critical to creating jobs and tax revenue for city services.

We can also make a difference by relaxing height and density limits for new construction projects. Land use and zoning policies have long been recognized as key components in encouraging investment and vitality, and now Seattle has the rare opportunity to take bold

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action for our future by re-examining these important strategies.

Repeal of the city's employee head tax also sends a positive message to businesses looking to grow and relocate here.

## A Clean and Safe Downtown

Fundamental to a healthy, vibrant urban core are clean, safe, attractive spaces. Reducing panhandling while continuing to provide social services to those in need, enhancing our streetscapes and public areas, and continuing to increase the police presence will help make downtown welcoming to all.

## Improving Infrastructure

We must also work to protect and grow key elements of our infrastructure. We cannot afford to lose momentum generated by

moving forward with replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct. We should set and meet goals to choose the appropriate configuration for the west side of the SR 520 bridge replacement. Aside from the project's critical importance to the system, Seattle's procrastination is damaging relations with its neighbors east of Lake Washington.

It is also essential to maintain and enhance transit service, which is important to the economy and for moving workers, residents and visitors around Seattle. Metro faces a \$500 million shortfall in sales tax revenue during the next four years, likely resulting in cuts to service. Under current policy, any service reductions are made in proportion to existing service levels. Seattle—with more than 60 percent of bus service—stands to lose the most.

To protect this critical component of our infrastructure, we must preserve service on routes with the highest ridership. We must also work to identify alternative funding sources and make sure that any reductions in service are treated as suspensions in service rather than permanent cuts.

## Convention Center Expansion

Finally, we must convince the state Legislature to authorize expansion of the Washington State Convention & Trade Center, which is currently the smallest of all its West Coast competitors. As a result, it has lost out on nearly \$2 billion in potential business during the past five years.

By essentially doubling capacity—paid for with existing hotel tax funds—the center will greatly enhance Seattle's ability to attract convention business, which generates significant revenues for businesses, the city and the state.

Based on the positive long-term impact of the opportunities described above, we cannot expect economic growth to rebound on its own. Rather than waiting for the economy to stabilize, we must take the initiative now to secure our future.

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