**UNIVERSITY PARK COMMUNITY CLUB (UPCC)**

**5215 19TH Ave NE, Seattle, 98105**

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**March 18, 2019**

Sam Zimbabwe, Director

Seattle Department of Transportation

P.O. Box 34996

Seattle, WA 98124-4996

RE: Endorsement of the U District Station Area Mobility Group’s Comment Letter Regarding NE 43rd Street.

Dear Director Zimbabwe:

The University Park Community Club (UPCC) has always been actively engaged through various organizations and through city government outreach opportunities, in supporting the livability of the entire University District. Recently, we participated in efforts led by the U District Mobility Group, to proactively design an infrastructure plan which will address the large population influxes soon to have a major impact on our transportation network: an increase in the student population; an increase in residents, resulting from the U District Up-Zone; and the anticipated large volume of riders who will enter the district via the U District Light Rail Station on Brooklyn Ave NE. This will suddenly and negatively impact NE 43rd Street, straining its resources through various competitive and conflicting forces: pedestrians vs. cyclists vs. buses/cars/trucks. The short distance between the U District Light Rail Station and the University of Washington’s main campus along NE 43rd Street may currently be viewed as a quiet, minor street; but soon it will become a major thoroughfare, bustling with traffic in all directions.

Regardless of the final decision, the goal of any proposal should therefore include flexibility, adaptability, accessibility, convenience, and safety. In light of these factors, and upon a detailed review of the four alternative options for NE 43rdStreet, the UPCC has voted to officially and actively support the U District Mobility Group, their bold, innovative Mobility Plan, and their official comment letter, dated March 11, 2019, in which they discussed the factors which led them to their preferred choice: Alternative #1.

Specifically, Alternative #1, the curb-less design which is restricted to pedestrian use, would best reflect our priorities, as stated above. It would also be most congruent with the goals officially expressed by the City of Seattle: *“The benefit of the NE 43rd Street Improvement Project is to create safe access to the new U District Light Rail station safe (sic) for all modes of travel, whether people are walking, biking, or taking transit to the station. It will also benefit the nearby businesses who will have more people passing by and patronizing their shops. The new streetscape design will also enhance the environment of this highly dense urban village.”*  However, should access to public transportation on this street become a necessity, even if only temporarily, we recommend a hybrid of Alternatives #1 and #2, retaining the curb-less design. The elimination of the curb will provide the easiest configuration to adapt the street, if needed, to potential short uses, such as westbound buses. It would also allow other local uses which could foster a most needed a sense of community, such as gathering places; one simple solution to a district that is presently lacking a “central public square”.

UPCC further believes that the City must not judge the alternatives on NE 43rd Street in isolation from the transportation issues confronting the Light Rail Station. Specifically, Sound Transit and Metro need to coordinate their efforts as part of the larger bus-train network, again addressing such factors as flexibility, accessibility, and safety. To that end, UPCC believes that the best solution is to redesign and widen the current traffic lanes on Brooklyn Ave. NE to 10 ½ feet so as to accommodate transit buses in both directions and to allow effective transfers directly in front of the Light Rail Station. As the City holds the power to streamline the review of any such minor changes, we direct you to discuss this concept with Council Member Rob Johnson post-haste and encourage him to reverse the present course, a change which should be possible without any significant impact to the overall project schedule and budget.

If the City of Seattle truly aspires to become “*the most walkable and accessible city in the nation”,* it must take on that challenge at both NE 43rd Street and Brooklyn Ave NE, especially in light of the most recent statistics on pedestrian deaths. The City must also envision the long horizon in anticipation of the unpredictable: the ripple effect of the U District Up-Zone and its strain on existing resources and infrastructure. If the city genuinely wants the increased densities from its up-zone to do more than address the current need for affordable housing, if it really wants to promote a sense of community that is alive, safe, and inviting, then to set aside these few blocks for pedestrians seems like a small first step in the right direction. These short blocks may be physically small in size, but their future impact will be massive and perhaps even irreversible, depending on the City’s choices**. Note that a ‘road’ provides a path through an area; whereas, a ‘sidewalk’ provides a path within a community.**

The entire University Park Neighborhood would like to thank you for taking on this challenge, for actively reaching out to the public for input, and for directing the energies of the City toward a greater good. We appreciate the opportunity to become involved in this most urgent situation, which should be viewed as an exciting opportunity to showcase the City’s own commitment to a walkable city.

Respectfully,

Aileen M. Langhans

UPCC board secretary

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**Cc: Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan**

**Seattle City Council Members**

**Seattle Department of Transportation**

**Mr. Cory Crocker**

**Mr. Matt Fox**