



Legislative Building

Washington State Legislature

Olympia, WA 98504-0600

January 25, 2021

The Honorable Governor Inslee
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Governor Inslee,

We thank you for your service to our State. For the constituents and citizens of Pierce County, the passage of the *Connecting Washington* package offered the promise of accomplishing a 40-year dream—the completion of State Route 167. Yet, weeks before a key stage of the project was to go out to bid, you unilaterally decided to freeze it. We are writing to express our extreme disappointment and frustration with what we believe to be a short-sighted decision.

We are confident you are fully aware that the Puget Sound Gateway package was the keystone project in *Connecting Washington*, drawing support for the overall package from over 165 business, labor, agriculture, maritime, and local government organizations from around the state. They all recognized the central importance this project plays in supporting the competitiveness of our ports and their labor partners, growers, shippers, and manufacturers who seek access to the global marketplace. In fact, you led the cutting of the ribbon to start this project. Delaying it threatens the state's economic recovery, serves as a complete disregard to that coalition of project advocates, and does a disservice to all the working families that will benefit from this project. We are very disappointed in your decision.

The last year has highlighted the importance of a well-functioning supply chain. While there has been a reduction in transportation revenue across many categories of funding because of remote work and social distancing, diesel tax revenue has remained relatively stable. This is because freight is still moving—carrying essential goods, emergency supplies and products grown and manufactured around the state to market. This is a time to prioritize essential freight corridors of statewide significance, not to treat them like an afterthought.

Another important lesson learned over the last year has been the importance of equity and its important connection to our workforce – a cause that is admirably served by the SR 167 project. We would highlight two underserved communities in Washington served by the completion of State Route 167. The first is rural Washington. Farming communities throughout the Skagit and Yakima valleys, the Columbia Basin, and Central Washington rely on timely access to the ports. Time and time again they share their concerns that because of failed last-mile connections, traffic delays undermine the ability for trucks carrying their goods to access these facilities efficiently and affordably.

The second underserved community are the truck drivers themselves. The trucking fleet serving the ports is largely composed of immigrant and minority-owned businesses. As small businesses, they are paid by cargo owners for every delivery they make. Traffic congestion deprives them the ability to make that extra delivery and get that extra paycheck critical to their bottom lines and most importantly, to support themselves and their families.

Additionally, we note that the original 2015 *Connecting Washington* package, the follow-up legislation to accelerate the project, and the existing transportation budget presumes a balanced investment portfolio across the Puget Sound Gateway program. The Legislature specifically directed that the completion of state routes 167 in Pierce County and 509 in King County to be built in parallel. Your decision to delay the State Route 167 Stage 1B contract coincidentally came after the State Route 509 Stage 1B contract was awarded. From our point of view, it comes across once again, that the citizens of Pierce County are being told they must wait while King County projects are prioritized.

As you are aware, your action to delay threatens funds already committed from our federal and local government partners. These dollars are inextricably connected and critical to the project's overall success. We understand that the purported purpose of the freeze is to provide lawmakers the opportunity to consider delaying the overall project to a future biennium. But we already know that by doing so, the state would be unable to fulfill its obligations under the federal "INFRA" grant, putting even more pressure on the state transportation budget. We did not need the administration's project freeze to figure that out.

In sum, we the Pierce County legislative delegation, cannot emphasize enough our disappointment in your decision to freeze construction of State Route 167. It threatens the state's economic recovery, puts good paying jobs at risk and harms the project's ability to be completed on time and within budget. It harms the supply chain and underserved communities. It does a disservice to working families. It breaks faith with the citizens of Pierce County and the countless stakeholder groups from around the state and in Pierce County, including labor and agriculture supporters, who rallied in support of the project and *Connecting Washington*. And it threatens the financial integrity of the overall transportation budget.

We ask you to remove the pause button on this project and let it proceed as planned. Together, we are certain we can adopt a budget that meets both your and the Legislature's policy and project objectives. If we can do that on good faith, we will work with our colleagues to do so through the budget process. It is time to lift the freeze. It is time to complete State Route 167. It is time to finish what we started.

Sincerely,



Senator Chris Gildon
25th Legislative District



Representative Mari Leavitt
28th Legislative District



Representative Andrew Barkis
2nd Legislative District



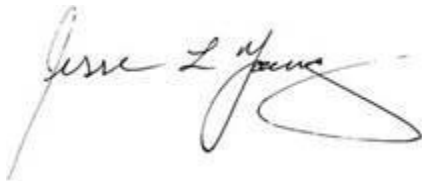
Representative Kelly Chambers
25th Legislative District



Representative Cyndy Jacobsen
25th Legislative District



Senator Emily Randall
26th Legislative District



Representative Jesse Young
26th Legislative District



Representative Michelle Caldier
26th Legislative District



Senator Jeannie Darneille
27th Legislative District



Speaker of the House Laurie Jinkins
27th Legislative District



Representative Jake Fey
27th Legislative District



Senator T'wina Nobles
28th Legislative District



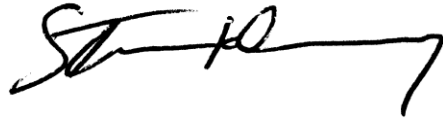
Representative Dan Bronoske
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Senator Steve Conway
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Representative Melanie Morgan
29th Legislative District



Representative Steve Kirby
29th Legislative District



Senator Claire Wilson
30th Legislative District



Representative Jamila Taylor
30th Legislative District



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