

A MAYORAL VIEW: THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND FUNDING

Mike McGinn¹

In the world of environmental law and the possibilities it has afforded us, this would seemingly be a time for progress. At the national level there has been a shift.

In Washington State, despite our status as one of the greener states, there is a basic contradiction between environmental law and action. In 2008, the Washington State legislature passed a law that aims for an 18 percent reduction in per capita vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 2020, 35 percent by 2035, and 50 percent by 2050. The goal, of course, is to decrease our reliance on automobiles and protect against climate change.

However, transportation megaprojects in our state regularly preclude transit and expand automobile capacity, and this is the opposite of what our law proclaims we should do. As we are seeing with current plans for the SR 520 bridge replacement across Lake Washington, auto-capacity is expanding. At the same time, the deep-bore tunnel that is being planned to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct also runs contrary to the state VMT law.

Our state will have no hope of meeting its goal of reducing VMT if we continue to ignore the laws we have put in place.

Words, even when codified into law, are never as strong as actions. We cannot mitigate the effects of climate change without meaningful actions to protect the environment. Real climate protection requires the broad application and enforcement of environmental law.

This is the challenge for our generation.

¹ Michael Patrick McGinn was elected the 52nd mayor of Seattle in November of 2009. Mayor McGinn has been active in politics, law, and environmental advocacy since graduating college. He received his bachelor's degree, in economics, from Williams College in Massachusetts and a law degree from the University of Washington.

A few of McGinn's victories include founding Great City - a Seattle nonprofit that brought together neighbors, environmentalists and business leaders advocating for smart and responsible urbanism as the solution to many local, economic and environmental challenges. In 2007 McGinn led a grass-roots campaign to defeat a "Roads and Transit" ballot measure that would have required Seattle to help pay for 180 miles of suburban highways. The following year he worked to help pass the Sound Transit ballot measure to expand light rail. In 2008 McGinn co-chaired the Seattle Parks for All campaign that resulted in voter approval of the city's parks levy.