

A G E N D A I T E M

BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
City of Des Moines, WA

SUBJECT: City Manager Report: Discussion of
City of Burien letter to Port of Seattle

FOR AGENDA OF: October 23, 2025

DEPT. OF ORIGIN: Administration

ATTACHMENTS:

DATE SUBMITTED: October 14, 2025

- 1. Letter from City of Burien

CLEARANCES:

- City Clerk _____
- Community Development _____
- Courts _____
- Finance _____
- Human Resources _____
- Legal /s/TG _____
- Marina _____
- Police _____
- Parks, Recreation & Senior Services _____
- Public Works _____

APPROVED BY CITY MANAGER

FOR SUBMITTAL: *Katherine Coffey*

Purpose and Recommendation

The purpose of this item is for the Council to discuss a letter the City of Burien recently sent to the Port of Seattle Commission regarding noise insulation packages, and to provide guidance to staff if the Council wishes to consider sending similar correspondence.

Suggested Motion

N/A

Background

At its October 6 meeting, the Burien City Council voted to send a letter to the Port of Seattle Commission expressing frustration with the Port’s failure to repair or replace residential noise insulation packages.

Similar insulation systems, commonly referred to as “Port packages,” were installed in a number of homes in Des Moines as part of the same airport noise mitigation efforts.

At the October 13, 2025, Des Moines Airport Committee meeting, members reviewed Burien’s letter and discussed whether the City of Des Moines should consider sending a similar communication. Committee members are willing to review and draft a recommendation for Council consideration, should the City Council wish to pursue this approach.

Discussion

Staff is seeking direction from the City Council on whether to move forward with a similar letter to the Port of Seattle Commission.

If the Council is interested, staff can work with the Airport Committee to prepare an initial draft for review and bring it back to Council for discussion and approval at a future meeting.



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October 9, 2025

Port of Seattle Commissioners
2711 Alaskan Way
Seattle, WA 98121

Dear Port Commissioners:

The City of Burien calls to your attention the Port of Seattle's multi-decade failure to repair or replace Port-installed noise insulation packages, commonly known as "Port packages," which have degraded or failed.

We believe it is time for the Port to abandon its current program, and to work with Burien and other airport cities to design—and fund with Port resources—a viable program that will provide our residents with long-awaited relief. Burien suggests you consider as a model the program at San Francisco International Airport, where proceeds from city-county property tax revenues are used to repair and replace failed sound insulation installations.

Starting in the mid-1980s, approximately 9,400 homes adjacent to Sea-Tac Airport were outfitted with Port packages. Exactly how many have failed is unclear, but there is evidence to suggest they number, at a minimum, in the hundreds. To the best of our knowledge, not one failed Port package has been repaired or replaced unless by property owners forced to use their own funds. To date, there has been no comprehensive effort to identify and analyze these failed packages.

In February 2024, the Port authorized the Port's Sound Insulation Repair and Replacement Pilot Program (SIRPP) to identify and evaluate failed packages. The Port contacted 3,000 homeowners where Port packages were previously installed—all within the 2014 SEA 65 DNL Noise Remedy Boundary, which delineates the noise zone where Federal financial support would theoretically be available.

Many homes with failed packages are now outside that boundary and, thus, ineligible for Federal financial assistance. This is patently unfair. It is our position that any home with a failed port package should be eligible for remediation.

Of those 3,000 homes initially contacted, 30 (only a one percent sample rate) were chosen for initial evaluation to determine if they qualified for repair/replacement. Notably, this evaluation was based only on the internal noise level in the home—the criterion that would allow for use of Federal funds. Other

problems—and there are many—were not considered. Of the 30 homes evaluated, not one qualified for replacement or repair.

We recommend you review the Port’s own “Sound Insulation Repair and Replacement Pilot Program: Assessment Technical Report” that describes the program and its results [That report can be found here. \(https://www.portseattle.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/SEA-SIPP%20Technical%20Report%20Assessment.pdf\)](https://www.portseattle.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/SEA-SIPP%20Technical%20Report%20Assessment.pdf). Causes of identified in the report include the age of the packages, poor installation, parts not being available, product quality, and issues with the manufacturer’s design. Please see Table 26 in the report for a specific breakdown of window problems.

We would also refer you to Table 24, which shows the breakdown of survey respondents by income and household size. Please note the high number of lower-income households.

It seems reasonable to suggest that if zero out of 30 homes within the 65 DNL boundary qualified, none of the properties outside the boundary will qualify for repair or replacement. While aircraft may have become quieter over the years, total noise and particle pollution has increased along with the sharp rise in annual aircraft operations—from 365,000 prior to the opening of the “third runway” (34L/16R) to 423,000 in 2024. This will intensify with the Port’s projected increase of 28 per cent, to 540,000 aircraft operations by 2034—which will certainly leading to a further reduction in the quality of life for thousands of Burien residents.

The Port of Seattle has only shown interest in repairing failed packages if it can obtain Federal or state funds to cover most of the costs. Especially under our current political and economic circumstances, that is unrealistic.

The City of Burien believes it is time to stop taking the same approach while expecting a different result. We ask the Port of Seattle to create a new and viable program that will actually provide relief to our residents, many of whom are of lesser means and many of whom have been waiting for decades for the Port to act. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Mayor Kevin Schilling



Deputy Mayor Sarah Moore



Councilmember Hugo Garcia



Councilmember Linda Akey



Councilmember Jimmy Matta



Councilmember Alex Andrade



Councilmember Stephanie Mora