



May 12, 2017

The Honorable Elaine Chao
U.S. Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590



Dear Secretary Chao:

The United States Department of Transportation is an important partner in Washington State's efforts to develop and maintain the critical infrastructure needed to support our growing population and economy. The Central Puget Sound region, one of the fastest growing regions in the country, has started construction of East Link, a critical transportation link between the economic and population centers of Seattle, Bellevue and Redmond. The issue of access to Interstate 90 for the City of Mercer Island, however, requires your attention.

For the past several months, the State of Washington, local governments and federal, state and local elected officials have been addressing the issues that have arisen following receipt of the August 5, 2016 letter from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regarding I-90 High Occupancy Vehicle Operations (HOV) on Mercer Island. As noted in that letter, the FHWA is "eager to find a solution that works for all users of the I-90 roadway and upcoming East Link Light Rail line." The signatories on this letter respectfully ask for your approval to allow single occupancy vehicle (SOV) traffic to use the Island Crest Way ramp to access westbound I-90 and then merge into the general purpose lanes, with adequate controls in place to minimize the impact to regional HOV operations.

Mercer Island's overall road plan has been developed over many decades and relies on Island Crest Way as the primary north-south arterial. Locals are understandably concerned that limiting this ramp to HOV-only traffic will potentially increase traffic on some roadways that are currently relatively low volume and that carry a mix of vehicle, pedestrian and bicycle traffic, including through one elementary school walk zone.

We supplement those local concerns with the summary results of the Washington State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT) latest analysis. That work analyzed four access options, which included a review of an access option whereby SOV traffic is allowed to use the Island Crest Way ramp to enter the westbound I-90 HOV lane, and then merge out of the lane further downstream. This option potentially would result in better Transit/HOV travel time within the HOV lane than an option where Island Crest Way SOV traffic was allowed to travel within the HOV lane into Seattle. The analysis conclusion did acknowledge this option increased risk and potential for

increased crashes in the vicinity of the ramp merge and within the merge area. To reduce these operational and safety concerns, WSDOT would control the ramp access by metering at a restricted rate, and would establish the merge area where SOV traffic can best merge out of the HOV lane. WSDOT would monitor the operation and safety performance, and make further changes if necessary to ensure safety and HOV performance expectations are met.

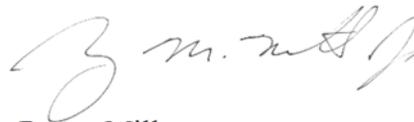
Finally, we note a nearby precedent for allowing SOV traffic to travel for a short distance within the northbound I-5 HOV lane approaching Exit 162 where SOV traffic must enter the HOV lane to access the left-side SOV ramp. Our research revealed another exception in California where SOV traffic is allowed to enter eastbound I-80 (milepost 148 vic.) from a left-side ramp and pass through a mainline HOV lane to enter the general purpose lanes. This ramp originates from a light rail station.

We would appreciate your consideration for allowing SOV traffic to access I-90 via the Island Crest Way ramp, with the requirement to merge out of the HOV lane a short distance downstream where the roadway features are more conducive. Thank you in advance for your timely consideration.

Sincerely,



Jay Inslee
Governor, State of Washington



Roger Millar
Secretary, WSDOT



Lisa Wellman
Senator, State of Washington



Judy Clibborn
Representative, State of Washington



Tana Senn
Representative, State of Washington



Dow Constantine
Executive, King County



Peter Rogoff
CEO, Sound Transit



Bruce Bassett
Mayor, City of Mercer Island