DATE: April 28, 2015
TO: City Council
FROM: City Council Town Center Sound Transit/Parking Subcommittee
(Mayor Bruce Bassett, Deputy Mayor Dan Grausz, Councilmember Debbie Bertlin)
RE: Bus Intercept and Sound Transit Funding Update

This is a follow-up to our prior report of March 26, 2015. Since that report, the City of Bellevue and Sound Transit have reached agreement on various issues involving East Link Light Rail. There are aspects of that agreement as well as the 2009 Agreement between Sound Transit and the University of Washington that may be relevant to further discussions between Mercer Island and Sound Transit.

In addition, on April 23 the Sound Transit Board of Directors approved the 60% Base Line budget for East Link. The budget assumes the construction of a Bus Intercept on Mercer Island. Sound Transit documentation acknowledges that progress would continue on the basis of concurrence with the City, and Sound Transit continuing discussions of funding additional commuter parking on Mercer Island. The Subcommittee has repeatedly made it clear to Sound Transit that Council has not approved Bus Intercept.

On April 20, 2015, members of the Subcommittee and City Manager met with Sound Transit and King County Metro staff to receive an update on the Bus Intercept project. The Subcommittee requested this meeting as we felt our community and Council had been dealing for too long with insufficient information and ambiguity on a number of fronts regarding the potential impacts of the proposed project. We acknowledge this meeting was held before Sound Transit and Metro had fully developed their proposal. The information provided, however, was sufficient to enable us to unanimously conclude that Bus Intercept, as presented by Sound Transit and Metro, is not a basis for further negotiations. The following paragraphs describe what was shown.

1. **The physical construct:** We were shown a computerized model still under development that Sound Transit and Metro have been working on for the purpose of providing Islanders an approximate representation. The model provided us with a visual depiction of the actual operations of Bus Intercept and included the flow of buses into, out of and within the facility as well as on City streets through Town Center and along North Mercer Way. Automobile traffic was also modeled. The representation, though incomplete, did convey a sufficient sense of the magnitude of the Bus Intercept’s physicality:
   a. Three lanes for buses on the west side of 80th Ave. with the western most lane having five spaces for loading/unloading, the eastern most lane having four layover spaces, and
the center lane used for buses to enter and exit the facility as well as go into and out of
the loading/unloading and layover spaces.

b. Two holding spaces on the 80th Ave. off-ramp from I-90 westbound that could be used
temporarily if for some reason it was not possible for an arriving bus to immediately
enter the facility.

c. Expansion of the bus pull-out area on the south side of North Mercer Way to
accommodate up to 4 buses.

The proposal would result in a substantial facility on 80th Ave. and a net increase of at least 12
bus spaces on Mercer Island.

2. **Operational Parameters:** Metro has not yet provided firm operational parameters or data that
would sufficiently inform us as to bus volumes, bus routes on Mercer Island, how many buses
would travel through the Town Center, or the number of buses parked or driving on Mercer
Island at different times of day. Consequently, we are unable to come to definitive conclusions
as to these issues. We have, however, made it clear to Sound Transit and Metro that under any
construct, an agreement acceptable to Council will include firm and enforceable limits on key
operational parameters such as these.

3. **Traffic flow:** There would be two general purpose traffic lanes on 80th Ave. (one in each
direction). Traffic flow through the area would be controlled by programmed traffic lights at
North Mercer Way and SE 27th that would enable buses to cross both lanes of general traffic
over 80th Ave. as needed, from and to I-90. Although the supplement to the FEIS is still not
released, it was communicated by Sound Transit that Level of Service C could be maintained at
both intersections. As traffic flow is a topic of keen concern to our citizens, we anticipate close
Council scrutiny of LOS assumptions and resulting data should new constructs be proposed.

4. **Pedestrian, bicycle flow and safety:** Sound Transit and Metro had not yet sufficiently
developed the model to show how the flow of pedestrians and bicycles would be handled
through the area. They did confirm there would be a pedestrian walkway of unspecified width
to the west of the loading/unloading lane. Assuming this would also serve as the place that
passengers use for purposes of getting on and off the buses, we can envision adverse impacts on
passenger and bicycle mobility on 80th Avenue.

We recognize and appreciate the diligent efforts of Sound Transit and Metro in developing a Bus
Intercept concept that they had hoped would be acceptable to the Council and Islanders. We further
appreciate that transit service is of regional importance, that Islanders have consistently supported light
rail at the ballot and that Islanders use existing bus service and will be significant users of light rail once
it becomes operational.

Based on what we were shown, however, we have serious doubts as to the viability of Bus Intercept on
Mercer Island as presented. There does not seem to be any combination of minor revisions and
mitigating efforts that could lead us to recommend its consideration or anticipate its approval by the
City Council.

The magnitude of the proposed facility and the operating flexibility that Sound Transit and Metro seem
to require make it more important than ever that these and all relevant agencies revisit other options to
locating Bus Intercept on Mercer Island. An operation and physical infrastructure of the scale that was
presented would not be compatible with the available physical area, existing road/pedestrian/bicycle network or surrounding uses, nor would it bring any obvious benefit to Islanders.

More broadly, Council and Subcommittee discussions with Sound Transit to date have considered both Bus Intercept and mitigation for loss of mobility. Since the Subcommittee believes the Bus Intercept as presented is not tenable, for the present we recommend the two issues should be separated for the purposes of negotiations. Negotiations regarding loss of mobility will necessarily involve both Sound Transit and WSDOT, be complex, and likely require retaining outside legal counsel and transportation experts to assist us in that effort. The Subcommittee recommends this effort be initiated immediately.

With the Council’s concurrence, we will communicate these two messages to Sound Transit and Metro:

1. The Bus Intercept as reflected in the simulation and discussions is untenable on the basis of its physicality; lack of acceptable operational limitations; and traffic, pedestrian, and bicycle impacts.

2. We propose negotiations regarding mitigation for loss of mobility for the present be a separate and distinct effort (apart from the proposed Bus Intercept).