



FAQ on I-90 Negotiations

Updated: 16 September 2016

The extension of voter-approved light rail to the Eastside will give Mercer Island residents a fast, frequent and reliable connection to both downtown Seattle and Bellevue, SeaTac Airport, and beyond, without traffic gridlock.

One of the most noticeable changes will be the permanent conversion of the center roadway bridge between Mercer Island and Seattle from express lanes to a light rail corridor.

In addition to ongoing negotiations with Sound Transit about the impacts of light rail construction itself, the City has also been in discussions with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) regarding future access for Islanders to new HOV lanes (known as the "R8A Project") that will replace the existing Center Roadway Express Lanes.

The following FAQ document addresses common concerns that have been voiced by residents about access to these lanes, and will be updated as new questions arise.

To learn more, visit the City's webpage: www.MercerGov.org/R8A

General Negotiations

Q. Can you be more specific about how the Council has advocated for Mercer Island residents and people who commute to the Island?

- *The Council's I-90 Steering Committee has been working steadily since last fall to obtain input from MI residents and commuters on the full range of issues related to mobility.*
- *We hosted a listening tour, several public meetings and met with groups and individuals to understand their needs, mobility priorities and concerns.*
- *We recognize that our community is in an integral piece of the regional transportation puzzle and have been working closely with Sound Transit and WSDOT to develop an agreement that meets the needs of our community.*
- *In the last three months we have had many meetings with federal, state and local government officials. These have reinforced necessary working relationships with Sound Transit. Ongoing discussions with WSDOT ensure they understand Mercer Island's concerns and suggestions. And our 41st District Legislators are important partners in our discussions with state officials. We also maintain constant contact with the King County Executive's office.*

Q. What role does the Federal Highway Administration have in the Loss of Mobility Negotiations w/Sound Transit?

FHWA is responsible for conformance of state highways to federal standards and allocates federal

funding to state projects. It must approve the changes to I-90 access that Sound Transit seeks for light rail operation.

Q. Can you talk a little more about the meetings held in Washington, DC?

We have been keeping our congressional delegation informed of the I-90 issues for several months. In late June 2016, the Mayor went to Washington DC to meet with the Deputy Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Members of Congress and their staff. FHWA did not provide any conclusive answers but assured us that Mercer Island's I-90 access issue was actively being considered within the agency. Later, on August 5, 2016, we received their response and it is not acceptable to the City at this time. We responded with substantive comments in our August 18 letter, and expect discussions to continue. All correspondence is [available here](#).

Q. What have the negotiations with WSDOT and Sound Transit covered so far?

Discussions and meetings occur almost weekly and they cover all aspects of the East Link light rail project, the changes being made to I-90, and future access for Islanders to I-90. Parking for Island residents and other mitigations are also being discussed.

Q. Has the City received a formal reply after sending its Aug 18 letter to FHWA?

Not at this time.

Q. What are the next steps for City and Council?

- *We continue to be in active conversations with Sound Transit to iron out specifics of a potential MOU. The MOU will set the terms for critical issues related to the operation of light rail and expanded transportation options for Mercer Island residents (on-island bus service, Uber-like services to Park & Ride, etc.).*
- *We expect to receive more information from FHWA, WSDOT and Sound Transit between now and winter on the I-90 access issue.*
- *The City is launching a series of planned outreach presentation to civic groups, clubs, etc., at various locations around the Island to explain the latest developments. Before winter 2016, we anticipate holding a public meeting open house when there is new information to share.*

Future Access to I-90 and HOV Lanes

Q. What is the plan for future bus access to westbound I-90 from Mercer Island Park-and-Ride?

Under the new configuration, there will be a bypass lane for buses added adjacent to the existing general purpose lane at 76th Ave SE on-ramp.

Q. What happens if, after the center roadway is closed to cars, traffic in the new HOV lanes does not meet the 45mph speed target?

One possible response is that the access rule to the HOV Lanes would be raised to a minimum of three people per vehicle. WSDOT is the agency that makes this decision.

Q. How will emergency vehicles access incidents on the outer roadways of the floating bridge if the shoulder is narrowed in each direction (due to an additional lane)?

The Washington State Patrol oversees the response plan for emergency incidents on the Interstate. The widest shoulder in the future design Westbound is 6 feet wide, and therefore larger vehicles using it will require traffic to move over, similar to other regional sections of constrained highway. In the Eastbound direction the widest shoulder is designed to be 8 feet wide (it is 10 feet today). There will also be a 10-foot wide dedicated access road next to the light rail tracks.

*View a diagram of the future I-90 lane layout at:
www.mercergov.org/files/Future_I-90_X-Section_Oct2015.pdf*

Q. What is the official rule on where Mercer Island SOV's can enter and exit the Center Roadway, as it stands today?

Regardless of any recent statements from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the City's perspective is that the status quo remains for now. The current signage installed by WSDOT still applies, and is what the State Patrol will enforce. This means that SOV's are allowed in the Center Roadway Express Lanes between Island Crest Way and Rainier Avenue in Seattle.

Q. What has the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) said in the past about Single Occupant Vehicle (SOV) access to I-90 at the Island Crest Way entrance?

In a [June 22, 2011 letter](#), the FHWA states that Island Crest Way ramp access to westbound I-90 is "considered acceptable" but is a safety issue that "should be monitored and closed to single occupant vehicles if significant collision frequency and severity begin to occur."

In the November, 2011 [Record of Decision](#), FHWA says (page 11): "The reversible center roadway and D2 Roadway would be closed during construction. As a result, all bus routes, HOVs, and Mercer Island drivers would be rerouted to the outer roadway HOV lanes."

In its [August 5, 2016, letter](#) to the City the FHWA reverse this earlier position and states: "FHWA has determined that the USDOT does not possess legal authority to grant either a temporary or permanent waiver to permit SOV access to HOW lanes."

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