



FAQ on R8A Lane Access and I-90 Negotiations

Updated: 18 November 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 negotiations with Sound Transit, as well as access to the new Interstate lanes.

To learn more, visit the City's webpages:

www.MercerGov.org/Rail and www.MercerGov.org/R8A

Q. What comes next after the City's November 9th Open House?

- *The City has offered the public several weeks to weigh in on the [I-90 Vehicle Access Alternatives](#), but encourages everyone to submit their ideas as soon as possible so that potential study topics receive due and proper consideration. Ideas that appear feasible to City staff and agency partners will be added to the Access Alternatives list and studied in the coming weeks.*
- *There will continue to be regular updates presented at Council Meetings, every two weeks. Council meetings are broadcast live on [MI-Tv Channel 21](#), and [webcast live](#) on the City's website. Archived footage [is also available](#).*
- *The City anticipates holding another community open house in approx. Jan 2017 to discuss access study outcomes.*
- *The City has grouped the most common Questions and prioritized them for response in this FAQ document; and supporting information will continue to be posted on the City website.*

Q. It seems like not everyone knows about the closure of the [Center Roadway](#) in 7 months – is the City planning additional outreach?

- *The City has been spreading information about the impending closure for the past three years via [news releases](#), [E-newsletter articles](#), and [social media](#). There is an extensive section of the City's website covering [light rail](#) and future [vehicle access to I-90](#), providing links to historic documents,*

legal agreements, and formal presentations. The City Council has received numerous presentations at Council meetings since 2013 which are broadcast live on TV and the City website.

- *Sound Transit has also been spreading public education information via community meetings, tabling at events, and all-Island mailers.*
- *The expansion of East Link light rail across Lake Washington has been covered extensively in the local MI-Reporter newspaper and the Seattle Times.*
- *In the past few months, the City has provided [in-person presentations](#) to various clubs, groups and associations around the Island, and held a [community open house](#) on Nov 9, 2016.*
- *In early 2017, Sound Transit will be intensifying its widespread community outreach efforts as it does for every community affected by light rail construction.*

Q. Are there Life/Safety access considerations with future narrowed lanes on the floating bridge?

- *Although all existing lanes are being narrowed to allow the addition of a new fourth lane in each direction of I-90, the total width of the roadway will be unchanged. Regional emergency service providers have weighed in.*

Q. What kinds of features would be in a mitigation package from Sound Transit?

- *Any package acceptable to the city would address all [6 community priorities](#), identified during the 2015 Listening tour.*

Q. What about light rail construction impacts (noise, dust, etc)?

- *Sound Transit has protocols in place to address these concerns at all of its construction projects, and has a 24-hour hotline for these matters. The topic is also covered in this [pre-construction brochure](#).*

Q. What does a successful Eastlink implementation look like for the City Council?

- *This would mean that Island SOV traffic has access to Westbound I-90 at the Island Crest Way entrance, as it does today. Traffic impacts around Town Center would be minimized and mitigated during and after construction. Residents would have preferential access to sufficient parking near the Park & Ride and future rail station. New forms of alternative transit services (such as small shuttles, or on-demand van-sharing) would convey Islanders to the station area. Regional bus operations arriving at the future rail station would not increase in numbers from current levels serving the Park & Ride. And the future rail station area should offer safe access for pedestrians and bicycles, not just vehicles.*

Q. When did the City Council begin proactively engaging with Sound Transit & WSDOT?

- *As far back as 2003 the City began communicating its preferences regarding the R8A Lanes. In 2004, an Amendment to the original 1976 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) stipulated “loss of mobility” mitigation measures. View these documents and others in the City’s [online I-90 archive](#).*
- *More recently, significant mitigation discussions began several years ago and led to the 2015 Listening Tour, where the [6 community negotiating priorities](#) were developed.*

Q. After leaving the Park & Ride area, how will westbound buses re-enter I-90 once the Center Roadway Express Lanes are closed?

- *A new bus lane will be added to the westbound on-ramp at 76th Avenue SE. Upon entering the freeway, buses will need to merge to the far left to reach the new R8A/HOV lane.*

Q. Will there be a new I-90 Eastbound off ramp to 77th Avenue SE from the new R8A/HOV Lane?

- *No. This was contemplated 7 years ago, but the traffic impacts to the Town Center area were deemed too significant. Instead, all parties focused on maintaining the Island Crest Way ramp for eastbound I-90 exiting purposes from the new R8A/HOV lane. [Note: the existing general purpose eastbound I-90 off-ramp at 77th Ave SE will remain unchanged].*

Q. Will there be preferential parking for MI commuters and residents?

- *The current MI Park & Ride represents the best free parking for off-Island commuters, but the ONLY option for residents; and it already fills by 7:30am. Therefore, preferred parking for MI residents is critical for their future use of mass transit, and parking is an important part of the mitigation discussions with Sound Transit.*

Q. What, if anything, can be done about the expected rise in cut-through traffic? What are other communities doing?

- *This is a challenging problem common to other communities along the I-90 corridor. City staff have conducted preliminary studies and are working on solutions.*

Q. What will traffic mitigation really look like in Town Center? (E.g. new traffic lights, one-way streets, roundabouts, support for impacted businesses, etc.)

- *This depends on the chosen solution to I-90 Access issues, and resulting traffic flow in Town Center.*

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