



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.

General Negotiations

Q: What topics have the negotiations with ST and WSDOT covered so far?

Discussions have primarily focused on Mercer Island traffic access to the new R8A lanes being added to I-90 as a consequence of the closure of the Center Roadway, prioritizing use of the existing Mercer Island park and ride, creating a new Mercer Island park and ride, improving intra-Island transit, improvements to Mercer Island streets in order to address traffic impacts from the closure of the Center Roadway, whether or not buses from the Eastside will be coming to Mercer Island for use by train commuters and, if so, the conditions required for that to occur, bike trails, and pedestrian access to the Town Center from the new Light Rail station.

Q: I've read that Mercer Island received a letter recently from US Federal Highways (FHWA). What does the FHWA letter say?

The August 5, 2016 letter ([available here](#)) from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration responds to a May 16, 2016 [letter](#) from WSDOT and a May 31, 2016 [letter](#) from the City of Mercer Island. The letter answers WSDOT questions about allowing either permanent or temporary single occupant vehicle (SOV) access to new HOV lanes on I-90 for Mercer Island traffic. The letter includes statements regarding:

- 1. Federal Law on HOV Occupancy Requirements*
- 2. Observations on History (agreements and MI historic SOV use of Express Lanes in the center roadway of I-90)*
- 3. Possible Solutions*

Q: What is the City going to do in response to the FHWA letter?

While the City disagrees with the FHWA stance outlined in its letter, we believe it makes sense to enter discussions with WSDOT and other parties in an effort to find alternatives that WSDOT would support and that can work well for MI traffic. Read the City's [press release](#).

The City will continue to discuss access to the new R&A lanes before the center roadway closes to cars in mid-2017, in the context of historic agreements. The City will also work with its state and regional partners and FHWA to identify solutions that maximize Mercer Island mobility, while allowing for the timely development of light rail. The City will explore all options to protect the interests of residents and businesses, which may include a reexamination of the environmental impact statement, or a review of other Island mobility issues. The City sent a [formal response letter](#) to FHWA on August 18, 2016.

Q: Is the WA Congressional delegation helping? What are specific members doing for MI?

Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell, and Congressman Adam Smith are engaged in this issue, and they are playing a critical role in helping to elevate Mercer Island's issues and making this a priority issue to resolve within the U.S. Department of Transportation. We are very fortunate to have representatives in Congress that are so well positioned and that understand our region's transportation needs and challenges so well, including Mercer Island's unique situation. Like the City, they are looking for a resolution that allows the region to move forward to address its mobility and transportation needs; we appreciate their support.

Q: Why are we just finding out about FHWA's position now?

While the City has had regular contact with Sound Transit over the past several months, WSDOT has been reticent to engage. A few months ago, it became clear that WSDOT believed FHWA input was needed before WSDOT could begin substantive discussions. A WSDOT letter to FHWA on May 16, 2016 set that FHWA review in motion. Mercer Island weighed in with FHWA directly (via a May 31, 2016 letter and June 2016 trip to WA DC) and indirectly through our delegation. View all [related correspondence](#).

FHWA's August 5, 2016 letter to WSDOT and the City now sets the stage for serious negotiations with WSDOT.

Q: What has the City Council done so far to advocate for the residents of MI?

The City Council held a listening tour with Sound Transit in Fall 2015 to ensure that both the City and Sound Transit heard top mobility priorities directly from Mercer Island residents. Based on the listening tour and ongoing feedback from Island residents the City developed the [I-90 Loss of Mobility Negotiations Guiding Principles](#), which outlines priorities and goals.

To pursue those goals, the City Council has retained traffic, legal and political experts to provide advice and strategies throughout the negotiations. Numerous discussions involving Councilmembers have occurred with elected officials and executive personnel in State, regional and other local governments. Regular and ongoing meetings have been held at the staff level to discuss solutions to meet the City's goals. The City Council has repeatedly reviewed the City's positions and approach, making changes as necessary. Everything that has occurred to date has set the groundwork for an agreement to be in place before the Center Roadway is closed in mid-2017.

Q: Where can I read the supporting documents and historic agreements?

You can see all documents and letters on the City website here: [I-90 Agreements and Correspondence](#)

Q: How will you keep residents informed moving forward?

This is one step in a long process of government negotiations. The Congressional delegation has been helpful in making sure our concerns are heard and fully understood. The City is committed to advocating for the priorities set out by Mercer Island residents with a focus on maximizing mobility and minimizing the impacts that occur with large infrastructure projects.

As the negotiations progress, the City will update its website, add news items to MI-Weekly newsletter, and post new developments on Next Door and other social media sites. Updates will be given at City Council Meetings and other public outreach will be scheduled.

Future Access to I-90 and HOV Lanes

Q: How will I-90 on/off ramps change?

The four access ramps to and from the Center Roadway will be closed (westbound entry from 77th Ave. SE, eastbound exit at 77th Ave. SE, Island Crest Way westbound entry, and eastbound exit to Island Crest Way). A new exit ramp will be constructed from the westbound R8A (HOV) lane to Island Crest Way. The big unknown at this point is whether SOV (single occupancy vehicle) traffic will be allowed to enter I-90 westbound at Island Crest Way.

Q: How will my carpool access the new HOV lanes on the outer roadway to reach Seattle?

Vehicles with two or more occupants (i.e. HOV's) definitely will be able to access westbound I-90 at Island Crest Way. Other HOV access would be from the regular westbound entry points at East Mercer Way, North Mercer Way at 76th Ave. SE and West Mercer Way, but involve crossing all general purpose lanes to reach the new HOV lane.

Q: Will single-occupant vehicles (SOV) from MI be able to use the new HOV lanes on the floating bridge?

At this point, it is unclear whether westbound I-90 SOV (single occupancy vehicle) traffic from Mercer Island will also be allowed access at the Island Crest Way entry point [see above]. Although this access was previously agreed to by the State, County and Sound Transit, the federal government (Federal Highway Administration-FHWA) has recently objected to that agreement. This issue will now be the subject of negotiations with the FHWA, WSDOT, Sound Transit and others as the City of Mercer Island is committed to seeing the prior agreement upheld. Read the FHWA's August 5, 2016 response letter [here](#).

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