



## FAQ on I-90 Access and I-90 Negotiations

Updated: 28 December 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 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](http://www.MercerGov.org/Rail) and [www.MercerGov.org/R8A](http://www.MercerGov.org/R8A)

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### Future Access to I-90 and HOV Lanes

#### Q. Is the Island Crest Way on-ramp TO Westbound I-90 closing?

- *No – WSDOT is not contemplating a complete and permanent closure of any Island Crest Way tunnel. Light rail construction is scheduled to begin in June 2017. If FHWA's August 5th (2016) letter stands, Single Occupant Vehicles (SOV's) will no longer have on-ramp access to Westbound I-90 via the Island Crest Way entrance. But High Occupancy Vehicles (HOV's) would be unaffected.*
- *If the City is successful in challenging the FHWA letter, SOV's will retain access to the ICW tunnels, under rules that have not yet been determined.*

#### Q. Is the Island Crest Way off-ramp FROM Eastbound I-90 closing?

- *No – WSDOT is not contemplating a complete and permanent closure of any Island Crest Way tunnel. Light rail construction is scheduled to begin in June 2017. If FHWA's August 5th (2016) letter stands, Single Occupant Vehicles (SOV's) will no longer have access to the Eastbound I-90 off-ramp exit at Island Crest Way, from the new R8A/HOV lane on the left side of the general purpose*

roadway. High Occupancy Vehicles (HOV's) would be unaffected. However, regardless of the FHWA decision, Eastbound SOV's on I-90 will continue to have access to ICW via the existing off-ramp that leaves the right-hand general purpose lane and enters the exit tunnel. [Note: clarifying underlined text added Jan 3, 2017]

- *If the City is successful in challenging the FHWA letter, SOV's will retain access to both ICW tunnels, under rules that have not yet been determined.*

**Q. What about future access to MI for School District (MISD) employees?**

- *Over 75% of MISD staff commute daily from off-Island, and the School Board has made its concerns known to the negotiating parties.*

**Q. How will Mercer Island Fire Department vehicles reach accidents or aid calls on the floating bridge if traffic is gridlocked?**

- *Similar to today's protocols, when MIFD vehicles respond to an incident, firefighters expect traffic to move over as much as possible to allow access. Although the shoulders of the westbound roadway will be narrowed to six-feet and two-feet, there will still be some space for cars to move aside. There are numerous locations in the region, such as much of I-5 through downtown Seattle, where there is either no shoulder, or not one wide enough for driving emergency vehicles.*
  - *In the rare case of an incident fully-blocking traffic all 4 future lanes of the westbound floating bridge, Police and Fire first responders from Seattle can access the scene by driving the "wrong way" along the westbound roadway, as has occurred in emergencies in downtown Seattle occasionally.*
  - *The eastbound roadway of the floating bridge will have one 8-foot shoulder and one 4-foot shoulder and is less space-constrained.*
  - *View a graphic of future lane alignment here:*  
[http://www.mercergov.org/files/Future\\_I-90\\_X-Section\\_Oct2015.pdf](http://www.mercergov.org/files/Future_I-90_X-Section_Oct2015.pdf)
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## **Park and Ride**

**Q. Who owns the Mercer Island Park and Ride, and why didn't the City ever try to buy it?**

- *The Park-and-Ride is owned and operated by Sound Transit, and the land has never been owned by the City. In 1987, the property was purchased directly from a private owner by WSDOT, and then sold directly to Sound Transit (for \$1.5M) in 2005. On both occasions, the City was not offered any opportunity to purchase the property.*

**Q. Where can I find the latest information on Park-and-Ride usage?**

- *Sound Transit's latest (2015) license-plate study can be viewed here:*  
[www.mercergov.org/files/ST\\_Park-and-Ride\\_UserSurvey\\_2015.pdf](http://www.mercergov.org/files/ST_Park-and-Ride_UserSurvey_2015.pdf)

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## Station and Landscaping

### Q. Is Sound Transit planning to build sound walls around the light rail station?

- *Sound Transit assessed future rail-related sound levels in the Final Environmental Impact Statement and no wayside noise impacts from light rail operations were identified, thus meeting the Federal Transit Agency's noise impact criteria. Today's existing noise levels are dominated by vehicle traffic noise from highway use. Sound Transit will be constructing sound walls to protect passengers at platform-level from vehicle noise originating on I-90.*

### Q. How tall are the future light rail station buildings?

- *Most of the station and platform will be out of sight down at highway-level, however two "headhouses" containing elevators, stairwells, ventilation, etc., will be located up at street level. Each headhouse, one on 77th Ave and one on 80th Ave SE, will be 20-25 feet tall, i.e. approx.. 2 stories.*

### Q. Who will maintain the landscaping around the future light rail station?

- *According to Sound Transit, the plantings along the station platform will be maintained by Sound Transit while the plantings along the 77th and 80<sup>th</sup> Avenue areas will be maintained jointly by the City of Mercer Island and WSDOT as they are today.*

### Q. Why is Sound Transit selecting Boston Ivy for platform-area landscaping?

- *According to Sound Transit, it selects plantings from a list of approved native or adaptive species that can survive in our climate and at its facilities. Boston Ivy has been planted and maintained successfully at stations along the Rainier Valley.*

### Q. What does the City do with I-90-related landscape maintenance payments received annually from WSDOT?

- *Under the 1987 Turnback and Landscape Maintenance Agreement, the City now receives approximately \$500,000/year from WSDOT for maintenance of 54 acres of WSDOT-owned land in the I-90 area parks. This reimbursement is no longer sufficient to cover the maintenance of City-owned I-90 parkland (an additional 26 acres), so the City has been seeking additional funding sources. More information is available on page I-75 of the 2017-18 budget at: [www.mercergov.org/files/17-18%20SEC-I.pdf](http://www.mercergov.org/files/17-18%20SEC-I.pdf)*

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