September 26, 2011

Craig Stone  
WSDOT Toll Division Director  
WSDOT  
401 2nd Avenue South, Ste. 200  
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: City of Mercer Island and the Tolling Study for I-90

Dear Craig:

As you will recall, the Mercer Island City Council met in June to receive a briefing regarding major WSDOT and Sound Transit projects in central King County. Among the topics was tolling scenarios on SR520, SR99 and, potentially, Interstate 90. Later that week, the City Council met at its summer planning session with Representative Clibborn and Senator Litzow to discuss State transportation matters further.

At that session, both legislators urged the City Council to express their interests regarding an upcoming WSDOT "high level" study of tolling the I-90 corridor between Seattle and Issaquah. This letter serves that purpose and is a follow up to the email exchanges between our City Manager and your staff in July and August.

First and foremost, the City Council continues to oppose tolling of any kind on I-90 between I-405 and I-5. The impact to Mercer Island mobility, particularly with the future loss of SOV access to I-90's center roadway, will be significant and costly. Unlike all other area communities, Mercer Island residents and workers have no other options. WSDOT provides our only vehicular access. With that in mind, the City Council adopted Resolution 1402 in 2008 opposing tolling of I-90. That position has not changed.

That said, the City Council wishes to suggest tolling concepts and analyses should the state take steps to design and construct a tolling configuration for I-90.

First, the WSDOT "high level" study should fully assess the impacts of tolling scenarios on Mercer Island travel times along I-90 east and west corridors as well as north and south on I-5 and I-405. If local residents are expected to pay for access to their only travel connection to the region, a significant improvement in congestion and travel times should follow.
Secondly, placement of tolling gantries should be thoroughly evaluated for Mercer Island traffic. Travel mode splits (SOV, HOV and transit) and origin-destination analysis of Mercer Island traffic should guide WSDOT in the placement of gantries. Specifically, the Council is interested in an evaluation of tolling gantries east of Mercer Island (east channel bridge or east of I-405). Maintaining un-tolled access east or west of Mercer Island will be a priority under any tolling configuration.

Lastly, the City Council has acknowledged the possibility of tolls being imposed on the future HOV/transit lanes being constructed between Seattle and Bellevue (R8a). That potential was documented in a letter dated December 22, 2006 and signed by the Secretary of Transportation and Governor’s Chief of Staff. As the letter establishes, Mercer Island SOV travelers will have access to the new lanes - without charge - up until a time when those lanes are operated as tolled (HOT) lanes. At that point, Mercer Island travelers would pay tolls in the same manner as other travelers. In studying tolling options, particularly across Mercer Island and the floating bridge, the City Council urges the State to evaluate multiple lanes in an un-tolled configuration. Mercer Island travelers should have an option to access and leave Mercer Island without a toll. Tolled HOT lanes can provide a reduced congestion alternative to Island residents but an un-tolled (and potentially slower) option should be maintained.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the I-90 Tolling Study scope of work. We look forward to meeting with WSDOT officials and consultants as the study scope and work progresses.

Sincerely,

Jim Pearman
Mayor

Cc: Mercer Island City Council
Representative Judy Clibborn
Senator Steve Litzow
Paula Hammond, Secretary of Transportation
Jennifer Ziegler, WSDOT
Patty Rubstello, WSDOT