



Introductory Statement

On August 5, 2016, the City received a changed decision by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) regarding Mercer Island access to I-90 via the Island Crest Way Westbound HOV ramp. (See August 5, 2016 FHWA Letter here: www.mercergov.org/files/2016-08-05_FHWA_Letter_to_City_and_WSDOT.pdf)

The City immediately commissioned KPG to analyze the worst case impacts on local Mercer Island traffic based on the FHWA decision when the center roadway closes in June 2017 and when East Link becomes operational after 2023. (See KPG Traffic Analysis at: www.mercergov.org/files/KPG_Traffic_Analysis_7Nov2016.pdf)

At the same time that the KPG report was commissioned, City staff began meeting with Sound Transit, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), and FHWA staff to ensure discussion of alternative operational configurations of I-90 that will maintain Mercer Island access to I-90.

Over the last two months this interagency group identified a dozen alternatives that range from Mercer Island getting access of single occupancy vehicles to the new HOV lanes in the outer roadway (which was the Mercer Island understanding of the plan until August), to MI SOV traffic having no access to I-90 HOV lanes and HOV ramps other than the general purpose lanes open to all traffic (the FHWA decision). Each agency was unrestricted in submitting options, including the City. The City was able to submit options that better reflected the needs of the Island community.

An initial list of I-90 access alternatives was developed that included continued access to the R8A lanes in keeping with historic agreements. These were subsequently presented at a meeting with the Directors of these same agencies, including Mayor Bassett, at which more alternatives were added. The interagency staff were directed to scope engineering analyses, and develop a work plan and schedule to carry out technical evaluation of the alternatives.

Sound Transit is currently funding the analyses being performed by outside consultants. Some analyses are already underway, and some are yet to be commissioned. The results of these analyses will be made available when they are concluded. The City will monitor their progress. Decisions on which alternatives are viable and acceptable will be based on a number of factors including but not limited to compliance with federal and state laws; accordance with historical agreements; benefits to regional and local traffic; time to implement; and ability to sufficiently mitigate any adverse impacts.

These access alternatives were presented at the November 7, 2016 Mercer Island City Council meeting, and then presented again to the community at a public meeting on November 9. The City will be seeking community comments on these alternatives, and suggestions for any additional viable alternatives that meet the following goals established in the 2015 Listening Tour:

1. Secure access to new R8A lanes within the context of historic agreements.
2. Limit and mitigate traffic impacts in and around Town Center.
3. Increase commuter parking options for Mercer Island residents.
4. Improve "last mile" connections to light rail through innovative services and on-Island transit options.
5. Minimize impact of regional bus operations – no greater than current levels.
6. Require safe, convenient pedestrian and bicycle access to light rail.

The results of the KPG traffic analyses and the evaluation of the I-90 Access Alternatives will be used by Mercer Island in the continued negotiations with Sound Transit, WSDOT and FHWA to achieve the mobility goals of Mercer Island residents.

Terms:

SOV = Single Occupancy Vehicle
HOV = High Occupancy Vehicle
HOT = High Occupancy Toll Lane

Alternatives:

- 1. SOV access to HOV westbound on ramps at Island Crest Way and HOV lanes between Seattle and Mercer Island in both directions.**

This alternative replaces Mercer Island access to the center roadway once it is closed in June, 2017 by allowing Mercer Island traffic access to the new HOV lanes in the outer roadway.

- 2. Only vehicles meeting occupancy requirements allowed in the HOV lanes and direct ramps to the HOV lanes.**

This alternative results from the FHWA letter received in August, 2016 that states Mercer Island SOV access to the new HOV lanes and to the HOV Island Crest Way westbound on-ramp does not comply with federal law.

- 3. Open all lanes eastbound and westbound across I-90 between Mercer Island and Seattle to general purpose traffic until East Link (light rail) is operational in 2023 between Mercer Island to Seattle.**

*This alternative would delay limiting of the new lanes on the outer roadway to HOV during construction of East Link (light rail) by designating them as open to **all** traffic. Once light rail is operational, the new lanes in the outer roadway would be designated as HOV and the occupancy rules would apply, meaning that Mercer Island SOV traffic would not be able to use them post 2023.*

- 4. Construct a new general purpose on-ramp to westbound I-90 from Island Crest Way/North Mercer Way.**

This alternative assumes that when Mercer Island SOV traffic is excluded from access to the HOV facilities on I-90 that a new direct access westbound on-ramp would be constructed to replace the loss of the Island Crest Way ramp to SOV use.

- 5. The HOV lanes will be open to all drivers in the non-peak periods between Seattle and I-405. Currently I-90 HOV lanes east of I-405 are open to all between 7 pm and 5 am, some ramps are still restricted.**

This alternative would restrict Mercer Island SOV traffic as in #2 above except during the non-peak traffic hours.

- 6. Designate the westbound Island Crest Way on-ramp as a left hand general purpose ramp. Non-HOV drivers then must merge into the general purpose lane.**
This alternative retains Mercer Island SOV use of the westbound ramp onto I-90 as currently. However, this access would be into an HOV lane requiring SOV traffic to merge out of this lane within a reasonable distance.
- 7. Non HOV drivers pay a toll to enter the westbound I-90 HOV lane as Island Crest Way. Non-HOV drivers then must merge into the general purpose lane.**
This alternative is similar to #6 above but the Island Crest Way westbound on-ramp retains its HOV status. An SOV using it would have to pay a toll. Eastbound SOV drivers are not permitted to use HOV lane between Seattle and Island Crest Way.
- 8. Convert HOV lanes to HOV/Toll lanes or HOT lanes in both directions across the I-90 Floating Bridge. HOT lane access points restricted to ramps on Mercer Island.**
This alternative would replace the access that current Mercer Island SOV traffic has with the center roadway, to toll access to and from Seattle. HOT ramps would be restricted to westbound and eastbound Island Crest Way.
- 9. Convert HOV lanes to HOV/Toll or HOT lanes in both directions between I-5 and I-405. HOT access points restricted to ramps on Mercer Island.**
This alternative includes #8 above, but also adds toll access eastbound for Mercer Island SOV traffic across the east channel bridge to I-405. HOT ramps would be restricted to Island Crest Way and 80th.
- 10. Convert HOV lanes to HOV/Toll or HOT lanes in both directions between I-5 and I-405.**
This alternative is the same as #9 but the HOT ramps to HOT lanes would not be limited to Mercer Island ramps only.
- 11. Convert HOV lanes to Transit only with expanded transit service between the Eastside and Seattle.**
This alternative would be similar to #2 above but exclude even HOV vehicles from the new lanes on the outer roadway.
- 12. Permanently open all lanes to general purpose traffic between Island Crest Way on Mercer Island and Seattle.**
This alternative would make all lanes and on-ramps westbound from Mercer Island and all lanes and off-ramps to Mercer Island general purpose and therefore open to all traffic.

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