



April 27, 2020

Ms. Jessi Bon, City Manager  
City of Mercer Island  
9611 SE 36th Street  
Mercer Island, WA 98040

Dear Ms. Bon,

I am writing to respond to the City’s October 16, 2019 letter outlining its objections to the proposed refinements regarding bus operations to the 77th Avenue SE Configuration referenced in the Settlement Agreement. These refinements are summarized in King County Metro’s May 10, 2019 letter, which Metro drafted at the request of the previous City Manager following the conclusion and publication of the *Mercer Island Transit Interchange Operation and Configuration Study* in March 2019 in which all three agencies had participated collaboratively. While a number of months have elapsed since Metro’s May letter and the City’s October letter, Sound Transit has continued to work these issues and I am appreciative of our ongoing conversations.

Within the larger community there remains some misunderstanding of the function of the transit interchange. A starting point towards greater clarity is to better define what layover is in the context of transit delivery. Layover for busses serves two primary objectives; one is to provide physical relief to the drivers of the bus routes and the other is to provide recovery time in the schedule. The recovery accounts for variables in traffic patterns, impacts of weather, and coordinating meets with other transit connections. In general a longer trip length for a bus will yield a longer layover time. As stated in section 4.1 of Metro’s May 10th letter, bus layovers are typically between 10 and 15 minutes in duration.

King County Metro cannot provide an absolute upper range for the duration of a layover as it remains an item for collective bargaining with their operators. As indicated in our meeting with Metro on April 6, 2020, Metro is willing to resubmit a copy of the most recent labor agreement to the City and that request is currently in the process of being filled. While it is implicit in the letter, Metro has clarified that any routes using the layover would under normal circumstances fall within the typical range.

Given the principal functions that layover serves, it is a necessary element of bus operations during the entire length of the service day. Layover is not used for storage of busses. Fueling, cleaning and dispatching of drivers is all performed at one of the bus bases located throughout King County. With the exception of circumstances such as a mechanical failure, extreme weather event or other impairment of the roadway network, busses would not exceed the typical layover duration.

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Sound Transit and the City entered into the Settlement Agreement in November 2017 without Metro and recognized that the 77th Avenue SE configuration “cannot be implemented without King County agreement”. As summarized in the March 2019 *Mercer Island Transit Interchange Operational and Configuration Study* and restated in Metro’s May 10th letter, Metro determined that both the north and south sides of North Mercer Way are necessary for pick-up/drop-off and layover. During development of the *Study*, Metro service planning staff raised concerns about restricting layover to only the south side of the North Mercer Way.

Use of the curb space on both sides of North Mercer Way provides for a minimum level of bus service both on and off island and eliminates the need for busses to loop through the Mercer Island Town Center, as would be required with a south-side only configuration. Even with this refinement, the addition of pick-up/drop-off and layover to both sides of North Mercer Way provides the minimum configuration necessary for bus service.

Design for the Mercer Island Transit Interchange has reached the 60% complete milestone and the design package is being routed for review by the City, Metro and WSDOT. Included within the packages is a memorandum that addresses specific safety concerns and non-motorized issues raised by City of Mercer Island staff. As we discussed in the April 6 meeting with Metro, nothing in the Mercer Island Transit Interchange civil construction work binds any agency to an operating plan. Sound Transit will continue to progress the Transit Interchange project to final design, permitting and construction. The next major design milestone will be completion of the 90% design package and permit application submittals currently anticipated in late September 2020.

While we proceed toward completion of this project, Sound Transit remains committed to working with the City and King County Metro to find reasonable solutions to the City’s objections.

Regards,

*Eric P Beckman*

Eric Beckman  
Deputy Executive Director