

BUS SERVICE PLANNING AND OPERATIONAL FAQS

1. What is the vision for Metro service from Mercer Island to Eastside cities?

Metro strives to provide the best regional service network to its customers, one that offers a convenient and competitive alternative to driving alone. Metro published METRO CONNECTS in 2016, laying out a preliminary plan for future regional service when East Link opens. This document was part of extensive public outreach process. To improve service when Link light rail opens, Metro will reinvest service hours that are currently used to run buses into Seattle from Eastside communities.

This reinvestment will restructure and enhance Eastside service to compliment the new light rail network. It will connect Eastside communities not served by East Link, including Issaquah, North Bend, and Sammamish, to light rail as well as jobs and services on Mercer Island. Specifically for Mercer Island, this service will aim to reduce vehicle trips and parking demand from the Eastside on Mercer Island streets and public parking facilities. It is anticipated that ST Express Bus routes currently serving Mercer Island will either be eliminated (ST 550) or terminate at South Bellevue (ST 554). There is no bus service envisioned between Mercer Island and Seattle.

For Metro service, Mercer Island was identified as the fastest and most logical westbound terminus and transfer point to light rail (i.e. the place where Metro service begins, ends, and pauses for required driver rest periods) due to its proximity and accessibility to the I-90 HOV lanes. There will be approximately 4 spaces on Mercer Island for buses to layover, which will limit non-local bus volumes to below existing levels that serve the island. In 2021, roughly 18-24 months before East Link opens, Metro will lead an extensive public engagement and planning process to make final decisions about the planned service outlined in METRO CONNECTS.

2. How will local intra-island bus service change on Mercer Island?

In 2021, roughly 18-24 months before East Link opens, Metro will lead an extensive public engagement and planning process to give Mercer Island residents and visitors the opportunity to provide input and feedback on transit services and routing when East Link opens. This process will guide Metro's decisions about the existing Route 204, Route 630, and other transit and mobility services on Mercer Island.

3. When will this new service plan be implemented?

Metro will restructure its service in conjunction with the opening of East Link in 2023. Planning and public outreach will begin in 2021, roughly 18-24 months before East Link opens.

4. How will buses coming from Eastside communities navigate on Mercer Island?

Westbound buses will exit I-90 from the HOV off-ramp onto northbound 80th Ave. Buses will take a left (westbound) on North Mercer Way and drop off customers at the existing bus stop of the north side of North Mercer Way. Buses will then make a 180-degree turn at the proposed roundabout at 77th Ave and travel back east to pick up customers at the existing bus stop on the south side of

North Mercer Way. Buses will then turn right (southbound) on 80th Ave to access the eastbound I-90 HOV on-ramp and return to the Eastside.

5. **How will the proposed layover spaces operate on Mercer Island?**

After dropping off passengers on the north side of North Mercer Way, buses will utilize the layover spaces on the north or south sides of North Mercer Way for operator rest periods and to maintain schedules. Buses will then pick-up passengers on the south side of North Mercer Way before accessing the eastbound I-90 HOV on-ramp to return to the Eastside.

Metro will need to utilize layover space on the north and south sides of North Mercer Way to meet King County Metro's operational needs. Average layover times refer to the time required for operator rest periods and are generally uniform, scheduled to be about 15 minutes. A reasonable range is 10-20 minutes. Metro has an incentive to minimize time not spent providing service.

6. **How was the passenger transfer experience incorporated into the transit interchange design?**

The existing bus stops on the north and south sides of North Mercer Way, located closest to 80th Avenue SE, will remain as each is within close proximity to the entrance to the future light rail station. In addition to siting the bus stops close to the light rail station entrance, the proximity of the proposed layover/flex space provides the best opportunity for coordinated light rail and bus service, resulting in quick and reliable transfers, as well as flexibility for future innovative mobility options.

7. **Will these plans impact the existing park and ride lot?**

No, there will be no changes to the existing park and ride lot.

8. **Will any buses navigate through the Mercer Island town center on 27th St?**

Only local, intra-island bus service will travel south of I-90.

9. **Why is Mercer Island a better connection point to Link light rail than South Bellevue for Eastside communities?**

To access South Bellevue, Metro customers would have to travel off I-90 onto Bellevue Way, north to the station, and then board Link and double back down Bellevue Way to I-90. Particularly eastbound, the merge from Bellevue Way to I-90 is extremely congested and presents safety and operational challenges for buses merging across several lanes to get from Bellevue Way into the center HOV lane. This travel time, assuming a 5-minute light rail trip from South Bellevue to Mercer Island, is 10 minutes longer during peak travel periods than traveling directly from Eastgate to Mercer Island.

In addition, direct service to Mercer Island avoids out-of-direction travel and provides safer, quicker connections to/from the I-90 HOV lanes, resulting in faster bus travel times and discouraging Eastside drivers from parking on Mercer Island to reach Link light rail. Finally, Metro has already planned to completely fill the capacity for bus transfers at South Bellevue Station and cannot plan for additional routes there.

10. How will bus volumes from other jurisdictions change along North Mercer Way when Link light rail opens?

Bus volumes from off-island locations will decrease when Link light rail opens. Today, there are over 30 buses per hour serving Mercer Island from off-island locations during peak commuter periods. When Link light rail opens, bus service from off-island locations is anticipated at about 20 buses per hour during peak commuter periods.

11. If bus volumes are decreasing, why is additional curb space needed for buses?

Expansion of curb space is related to layover needs. Layover is short-term parking spaces for buses that allow for mandated operator rest periods and schedule adherence. As indicated in Question 1, Mercer Island will be the westbound terminus for restructured routes, thus requiring space for short layover periods to allow for mandated driver rest periods. Some of the curb space will allow flexibility for the future as new and emerging services and technologies come into play that affect bus service as well as other modes of travel. Nearer to the opening of East Link, Metro will lead public outreach to fine-tune preliminary plans and develop a specific service plan.

12. What is impacted by allowing additional North Mercer Way layover space on the north side of the street?

The roundabout design and additional layover on the north side of N. Mercer Way is still in the conceptual design phase. As envisioned, the proposed layover may require the removal of up to five trees. The adjacent sidewalk width would be maintained or improved per the City of MI's design preference. This work would be completed in conjunction with the construction of the roundabout at 77th Avenue SE and N. Mercer Way.

13. Will there be a bus stop on the west side of 80th Ave?

A bus stop on 80th Ave would be south of the eastbound I-90 on-ramp and would be for local Mercer Island service only. This stop is optional and will only be implemented if desired by Mercer Island. If implemented, there will be no additional construction necessary for this local bus stop; Metro will install a flag (or route ID sign) at this location.

MI TRANSIT INTEGRATION OPERATIONAL AND CONFIGURATION STUDY FAQs

14. What is the context and purpose of the transit interchange project?

The City of Mercer Island (MI) and Sound Transit (ST) signed a legal Settlement Agreement in 2017. We have made a lot of progress implementing the Settlement Agreement for the East Link Project. We have:

- a. Implemented a pilot project for last mile solutions;
- b. Implemented bike and sidewalk improvements at the Mercer Island Park & Ride (P&R);
- c. Contributed to the Aubrey Davis Master Plan;
- d. Worked together on parking replacement at the future TOD (Tully's) site; and
- e. Worked collaboratively with King County Metro (Metro) to implement Bus/Rail Integration on Mercer Island.

Transit is important to Mercer Island, as evidenced by transit ridership and use of the Mercer Island P&R facility. Transit provides for:

- Valuable connections to jobs for MI residents and employees. Metro recently researched that even after East Link opens, 150-175 people a day on Mercer Island are using bus transit to and from Eastside destinations that won't be served by LINK.
- Less non-island traffic on Mercer Island, and
- Less MI Town Center employees looking for parking.
- In addition, support for transit service furthers the City's commitment to sustainability and livability by reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.

At each East Link station, similar to existing link light rail stations, efforts have been made to refine bus connections with the light rail system, creating efficiencies, enhancing transit reliability, and enabling future service expansion. Sound Transit has been coordinating with the City of Mercer Island, King County Metro (Metro), and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to refine a transit integration plan on Mercer Island.

15. How was the proposed operational configuration developed?

All three agencies (e.g., Sound Transit, City of Mercer Island, and Metro), with WSDOT consultation, collaborated in an effort to study and identify bus/rail integration opportunities on Mercer Island per the following eight goals/objectives:

- Creates a seamless transfer experience for the customer that is intuitive, safe, barrier-free, weather-protected, and efficient;
- Minimizes transfer walk distance and number of street crossings for bus/rail transfers;
- Ready for operation when the East Link light rail service begins in 2023;
- A cost-effective design that represents a transparent and appropriate use of public funds;
- Maximizes benefits to Mercer Island residents and local employers;
- Minimizes potential overall property impacts and local community access impacts and maintains through-vehicular traffic on the 80th Avenue SE bridge crossing;
- Provides excellent multi-modal access for customers while minimizing general pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicle mobility impacts near bus drop-off locations; and
- Limits diesel idling and limits regional bus circulation through the Town Center.

These joint goals and objectives, combined with meeting Metro operational needs, serve as the basis for evaluating refinements to the modified 77th Avenue SE Configuration as outlined in the Settlement Agreement.

16. What were the findings from the Mercer Island Transit Interchange Operational and Configuration Study? How is this similar to the legal Settlement Agreement?

The Operational and Configuration Study, conducted by David Evans and Associates, Inc. as contracted by Sound Transit, reviewed and evaluated how best to implement the Settlement Agreement and meet Metro's operational needs. In addition to a new roundabout at the intersection of 77th Avenue SE and North Mercer Way, the proposed configuration is consistent with key Settlement Agreement modifications to the 77th Avenue SE Configuration, including:

- Limiting future bus volumes to no greater than existing volumes;

- No routing of regional Metro buses through downtown Mercer Island;
- Limiting bus layovers to an average of fifteen (15) minutes; and
- No idling of buses.

The configuration that most closely represents the 77th Avenue SE Configuration from the *2017 SEPA Addendum*, received the highest (most desirable) score. The proposed configuration:

- Provides for the greatest amount of transit service and flexibility of transit service operations, which would result in fewer single-occupant vehicle trips on Mercer Island from non-Island commuters.
- Provides the best transfer experience in terms of immediacy and reliability, and the ability to best coordinate service between transit agencies with timed transfers.
- Provides most flexibility for future mobility options, including Metro, micro-transit opportunities, and rideshare.
- Provides the best ability to respond to future needs and an enhanced Eastside transit network.

The proposed configuration allows Metro to provide adequate transit service. Any less layover prevents effective Metro operations, and compromises joint goals identified by the City, Metro, and Sound Transit, to provide excellent multi-modal access for customers and achieve the greatest benefit for Mercer Island residents and local employers.

It is also important to note that the amount of pick-up, drop-off, and layover bays included as part of the proposed configuration would only allow for approximately half of the service levels preferred by Metro per METRO CONNECTS, an acknowledgement by Metro of the City's stated desire to limit regional transit service on Mercer Island.

17. How is the proposed configuration refined from the restrictions in Settlement Agreement? What is the Settlement Agreement's role in the design of the transit interchange?

As part of the Settlement Agreement between the City of Mercer Island and Sound Transit for the East Link Project, both parties agreed to work jointly in implementing a modified 77th Avenue SE Configuration—with Metro concurrence—of the proposed bus/rail transit integration facility as identified in the *2017 SEPA Addendum* to the *East Link FEIS*. These modifications included:

- No bus drop-off/pick-up or layover areas on 80th Avenue SE and that these areas will be located only on the south side of North Mercer Way;
- No regional bus circulation through the Town Center;
- Bus volumes will not exceed current bus volumes; and
- Bus layovers will be limited to no more than fifteen (15) minutes and then only during the afternoon peak period.

The Settlement Agreement states: “(t)o the extent the King County Metro buses are necessary to coordinate service, the Parties (e.g., Sound Transit and the City of Mercer Island) agree that the 77th Avenue SE Configuration cannot be implemented without King County Metro's agreement.” Metro has raised concerns regarding the 77th Avenue SE Configuration modifications as described in the Settlement Agreement that would create significant tradeoffs and **negatively impact current and**

future Metro operational needs and Mercer Island residents and businesses, including (but not limited to):

- Unpredictable and increased transfer times between bus and rail modes;
- Reduction in connectivity to Mercer Island, noting that an existing 150 to 175 daily trips originate or end at Mercer Island to/from areas that will not be served by East Link; and
- Additional non-island traffic on Mercer Island and non-island commuters at Mercer Island Park & Ride.

Importantly, layover limits have the most severe impact and could prohibit any level of service on Mercer Island, including local Mercer Island service. Metro would not be able to provide peak service to Mercer Island, or all-day on-island service, if layovers are limited to the afternoon peak period. Limiting bus layover to only during the afternoon peak period, would eliminate the opportunity to provide coordinated bus-rail transfers on Mercer Island, including services for the on-island Mercer Island routes. Metro cannot legally limit bus layover durations that conflict with labor contract requirements mandating operator rest periods. However, typical layover times are approximately 15 minutes or less so the majority of layovers would meet the intent of this restriction.

18. How will the final configuration be selected?

An Executive Committee, composed of staff from Sound Transit, Metro and the City of Mercer Island staff, reviewed the study findings and has recommended the highest scoring configuration for implementation. The project team will provide a project update to the Mercer Island City Council at a study session on Tuesday, March 19, 2019 at 5:30 pm at City Hall. This session serves to inform the City Council of how we are implementing the Settlement Agreement; no formal action is required from the City Council.

19. Will the community be able to ask questions and provide comments on this project?

The community can ask questions about the future King County Metro level of service and operation as they relate to transit integration and the City's current and future mobility goals through Let's Talk. In addition, the project team will provide a project update to the Mercer Island City Council at a study session on Tuesday, March 19, 2019 at 5:30 pm at City Hall. This session is open to the public and will be recorded.

During East Link's Final Design process, Sound Transit heard from the public that their preference was for the transit integration and roundabout to take place at 77th Ave. This was reflected in the 2017 Settlement Agreement between Sound Transit and Mercer Island. At this time, there are no decisions that require additional meaningful public engagement as the location of the roundabout has not changed from East Link Final Design and the proposed transit interchange implements the Settlement Agreement.

20. What about the design for the 80th Avenue station entrance plaza and landscaping?

During East Link final design, the 80th Avenue entrance was brought to 60% design. After the 2015 Mercer Island Listening Tour, where the public expressed concern for the 80th Avenue SE Transit Integration option, the design was paused as discussion continued between Sound Transit and the City of Mercer Island through the Settlement Agreement process.

By the 3rd Quarter of 2019, Sound Transit will engage the broader Mercer Island community about the landscape design in front of the station along 80th Avenue SE and its connection to the future Tully's site commuter parking and mixed-use project and Aubrey Davis Park (Master Plan).

The areas in front of station entrances are to conform to the Sound Transit Design Criteria Manual (DCM) and the design and construction of such facilities will be managed by Sound Transit. The design will not go through a formal Design Review. As with previous designs for the station components, input from the MI Design Commission, Arts Council and the community will be gathered. This area is located on a structure owned by WSDOT and is therefore subject to their review as well.

21. Has Sound Transit coordinated with the City of Mercer Island regarding the Aubrey Davis Park Master Plan?

Sound Transit is engaging with the City of Mercer Island regarding Aubrey Davis Park Master Plan as outlined in the Settlement Agreement, which will include providing safe access to the future light rail station and re-routing of the I-90 bicycle route to avoid conflicts with the Mercer Island Park & Ride. Some improvements adjacent to the MI Park & Ride have been recently completed.

22. What is the project's history? What Environmental Review has been conducted?

The transit interchange project (also known as "bus/rail integration") was first included in the *East Link Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS)* in 2011. Based on further study, community outreach, and consultation with the City of Mercer Island, WSDOT, and Metro, Sound Transit developed two additional configurations for transit integration on Mercer Island that differ from the plan evaluated in the original *East Link FEIS*. All three configurations were evaluated in the *2017 State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Addendum to the East Link FEIS*:

FEIS Configuration

The FEIS Configuration most resembles how buses currently operate on Mercer Island, with bus stops on both the north and south sides of North Mercer Way. Eastbound buses would exit I-90 via the 77th Avenue SE, pick-up/drop-off passengers on the south side of North Mercer Way, and continue to I-90 eastbound via the 80th Avenue SE HOV on-ramp; westbound buses would exit I-90 via the 80th Avenue SE HOV off-ramp, pick-up/drop-off passengers on the north side of North Mercer Way, and continue to I-90 westbound via the 76th Avenue SE on-ramp. Differing from current conditions, the FEIS Configuration would include a layover area on the south side of North Mercer Way and a bus pick-up/drop-off area along southbound 80th Avenue SE directly in front of the future light rail station entrance. The configuration assumes buses would operate between Mercer Island and Seattle.

77th Avenue SE Configuration

The 77th Avenue SE Configuration would include the construction of a new roundabout at the intersection of 77th Avenue SE and North Mercer Way, replacing the current three-way junction (or T intersection) at this location. This configuration would allow for westbound buses to enter the transit interchange I-90 at the 80th Avenue SE HOV off-ramp and exit on I-90 eastbound via the 80th Avenue SE HOV on-ramp via the proposed roundabout. The 77th Avenue SE Configuration

would preserve the existing bus stops along both the north and south sides of North Mercer Way, while adding additional bus layover space along North Mercer Way to the west of the existing bus stops and an additional bus stop along southbound 80th Avenue SE in front of the future light rail station. This configuration would prevent the need for regional buses from circulating through the Town Center and assumes buses would no longer operate between Mercer Island and Seattle (Seattle-bound bus riders would transfer to light rail at the future light rail station). This configuration would also require private property acquisition for development of the roundabout.

80th Avenue SE Configuration

The 80th Avenue SE Configuration would route buses in a counter-clockwise direction through a bus transfer area along southbound 80th Avenue SE in front of the future light rail station entrance. This configuration would allow for westbound buses to enter the transit interchange I-90 at the 80th Avenue SE HOV off-ramp and exit on I-90 eastbound via the 80th Avenue SE HOV on-ramp without having to travel outside of 80th Avenue SE (with the exception of layover routes). This configuration would include a layover space on the south side of North Mercer Way, and the existing bus stop along North Mercer Way would remain and serve local bus routes. Similar to the 77th Avenue SE Configuration, this configuration assumes buses would no longer operate between Mercer Island and Seattle and Seattle-bound bus riders would transfer to light rail at the future light rail station. *This configuration is no longer under consideration, per the Settlement Agreement.*