
From: Benson, Charles <charles.benson@soundtransit.org>
Sent: Tuesday, March 12, 2019 2:53 PM
To: Kirsten Taylor
Cc: Hoffman, Jemae; Lamon, Luke; Noll, Mark; Crosley, Stephen
Subject: Website FAQs from Sound Transit
Attachments: 20190312_Mercer Island Transit Interchange FAQ to Mercer Island.docx

Hello Kirsten,

Please find the website FAQs from Sound Transit attached; Metro will send theirs separately. Per our earlier conversation, please feel free to combine both ST and Metro FAQs as per your intended audience. The highlights in the attached document are for City of Mercer Island attention. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Charles

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Mercer Island Transit Interchange Consolidated FAQ and Responses

DRAFT—MARCH 11, 2019

PROPOSED OUTLINE FOR WEBSITE/ FAQ (Mercer Island to configure website flow)

CONTEXT and PURPOSE

WHAT IS THE PROPOSAL FOR THE BUS/TRAIL TRANSIT INTERCHANGE ON MERCER ISLAND?

- VISION
- OPERATIONS

WHY THIS OPTION

- STUDY GOALS
- SETTLEMENT
- METRO OPERATIONS

WHAT WILL TRANSIT LAYOVER BE LIKE

HOW SIMILAR TO SETTLEMENT

HOW DIFFERENT AND WHY

HOW WAS PROPOSED SELECTED

PROPERTY IMPACTS

GREENERY IMPACTS

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

80TH DESIGN

HISTORY AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

NEXT STEPS

MARCH 19TH, COUNCIL CONFIRMING IMPLEMENTATION OF SETTLEMENT

1. 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. **That is the focus of this interactive website.**

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.

2. How will the transit center on Mercer Island operate?

(link to visual)

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 requires private property acquisition for development of the roundabout.

3. **How was the proposed 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.

4. **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.

5. **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.

6. 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.

7. Will the community be able to weigh in on this project?

We want to give the community a chance to 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. In addition to this **Online Question and Answer session**, 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.

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 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.

8. 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, we 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 TOD site 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 Commissioner, Arts Council and the community will be gathered. As this area is located on a structure owned by WSDOT and is therefore subject to their review as well.

9. **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 of this work has been recently completed.

10. **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.*