



## CITY COUNCIL

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January 21, 2009

SR-520 Tolling Implementation Committee  
Bob Drewel, Executive Director, Puget Sound Regional Council  
Paula Hammond, Washington State Secretary of Transportation  
Richard Ford, Washington State Transportation Commission

RE: Comments on Draft Report

Dear Committee members,

We appreciate the work performed by the committee to develop the draft report in the last seven months. We feel that the committee has assembled a competent team of experts and done an excellent job of evaluating the options for tolling SR-520. We also appreciate the open houses and committee meetings that were held on Mercer Island. These events provided opportunities for our citizens to ask questions and voice their comments and concerns.

As was evidenced by the high level of participation and passion expressed by our citizens, it is clear that I-90 is of critical concern to Mercer Island residents. As you know, Interstate 90 is the only public facility providing access to and from the Island. Our residents depend on it exclusively to get to work, medical facilities, shopping, services, school and other events taking place in the greater metropolitan area. And, nearly all public school teachers and city employees commute to Mercer Island for work. Tolling I-90 would disproportionately impact these essential community workers. In short, the geography of Mercer Island renders its residents and workers totally dependent on the I-90 bridges and makes the City uniquely vulnerable.

From the 1940s when the original floating bridge was built to the recently approved construction of light rail in the center lanes of I-90, Mercer Islanders have been vigilant in protecting our access to the region. The 1976 Memorandum of Agreement and subsequent amendments and correspondences, established the framework to maintain the mobility of residents traveling to and from the Island. Any alterations to the design, lane configuration, and operations of I-90 shall be consistent with the above noted documents.

Mercer Island citizens and City Council members have been closely following the work of the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee. The City has corresponded on many occasions with the Tolling Committee to express our concerns, to seek clarifications on selection of alternatives and to make suggestions for new alternatives to be analyzed. We have also made our interests and policies clear by providing comments to the Committee each time it has released the findings from its modeling work. In October 2008, the City Council adopted



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Resolution #1402 that clearly re-asserts our understandings under the 1976 Memorandum of Agreement. In part, the resolution states:

- *Any proposal to toll I-90 across Lake Washington would constitute an action resulting in a major change in the operation and capacity of the I-90 facility and therefore would trigger the consultation and concurrence provisions contained in paragraph 14 of the memorandum of agreement.*
- *Both the continuous HOV lanes planned for construction between Seattle and Bellevue and across Mercer Island on I-90 (R8A) and the consultation and concurrence prerequisites of the MOA must be completed prior to implementation of tolling on I-90.*
- *Tolls must not be imposed on travel to and from Mercer Island on I-90, the only means of public access to and from the Island.*

The table on page 15 of the draft final report incorrectly states the City's position on the tolling of I-90. We ask that the final document state the City's adopted position (Resolution 1402) clearly opposing tolls for travel to and from Mercer Island on I-90.

The results of the financial capacity analysis for the five scenarios that assume tolling only for SR-520 indicate that only one of the scenarios meets the funding target of \$1.5 to \$2.0 billion. However, tolling both SR-520 and I-90 bridges would generate over \$2.0 billion.

The committee may recall that the City's letter of September of 11, 2008 requested three additional scenarios be evaluated. We believe evaluating these three new scenarios would have added value to the study by generating important information for decision-makers to consider. We appreciate that you created and tested a scenario that assumes tolls only on SR-520 at tolling rates that generate enough revenue to fill the funding gap projected by the Legislature. New Scenario #6 does indeed raise over \$1.5 billion with SR-520 tolls. The City also suggested a scenario that includes tolling on I-5 and I-405, not only to generate revenue for the SR-520 project, but also to address diversion across the I-90 bridges and around the lake to the north and south. We understand from your staff that such a scenario would have been outside the Committee's charter as laid out in House Bill 3096.

Our third request was for the Committee to test what would happen if travel to and from Mercer Island was not tolled in each of the scenarios that impose tolls on I-90. We requested this analysis because our policy position as stated above is that "***Tolls must not be imposed on travel to and from Mercer Island on I-90,...***" We believe it is important to know whether not tolling Mercer Island travel would have an adverse effect on funding for the SR-520 bridge project.

While we understand that the Committee was not able to include this variable in the scenarios tested thus far, nevertheless, this analysis is extremely important to Mercer Island. Even though the City of Mercer Island doesn't have access to the PSRC model, our staff is conversant with how it works and has spoken with PSRC staffs that operate the model. They

estimate that of all the trips across the lake on I-90, approximately 20% are trips to or from Mercer Island. When we calculated the amount of the tolls paid by 20% of the trips across I-90 in scenarios #3, #4, #8 and #9, and then removed that figure from your revenue projections, in every case the resulting funding for the SR-520 bridge project filled or met the funding gap of \$1.5 to \$2.0 billion. In fact, every one of the calculations yielded a revenue result above the median funding target of \$1.75 million. In short, our calculations indicate that funding for the SR-520 bridge replacement falls within the \$1.5 to \$2.0 billion range needed without tolling Mercer Island travel.

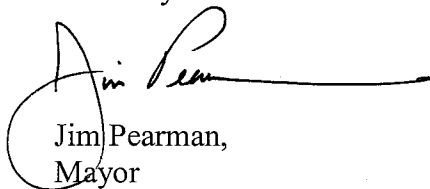
Mercer Islanders are clear that imposing tolls on their daily movements to and from the Island puts an unfair and inequitable burden on local residents, businesses and workers. This is the more disturbing since Mercer Island residents seldom if ever use the 520 bridge. If I-90 is tolled, Islanders will pay a substantial user fee every day without receiving any direct benefit.

To summarize, travel to and from Mercer Island should not be tolled because:

- ◆ The I-90 floating bridge is the only option local residents have to access the region for employment, medical services, educational and other services.
- ◆ Not tolling Islanders does not degrade the performance of I-90.
- ◆ Not tolling Islanders does not diminish financial capacities needed to fund replacement of SR 520.
- ◆ The 1976 MOA and the subsequent amendments and letters require consultation and concurrence from Mercer Island for any changes to the design and operation of I-90. The City of Mercer Island does not concur with imposing tolling on Mercer Island travel.

As the upcoming months unfold, the City of Mercer Island will continue to be engaged with the SR-520 tolling topic. Again, we wish to express our appreciation for the work the Committee has completed to date. We expect that our concerns and requests are included in the final report. Should you have any questions, please contact me or Mercer Island City Manager Rich Conrad.

Sincerely



Jim Pearman,  
Mayor

Cc: City Council  
Chris Gregoire, Governor  
Senator Fred Jarrett, 41<sup>st</sup> District  
Representative Judy Clibborn, 41<sup>st</sup> District  
Representative Marcie Maxwell, 41<sup>st</sup> District  
Rich Conrad City Manager