

Statement by Mercer Island Mayor Jim Pearman
to the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee
at the Nov. 17, 2008 Open House

The City of Mercer Island appreciates the excellent work the Committee and its staff have done. It's enormously helpful to forecast the effects of nine different combinations of tolling rates and locations. Like you, Mercer Island is looking for the best way to fund the replacement of the 520 bridge, while maintaining the smoothest traffic flow to and from Seattle and the Eastside.

We know the Committee has received a great deal of input from citizens, businesses and elected officials, and quite a lot has come from us on Mercer Island. We've forwarded to you statements of our interests and a Resolution adopted by the City Council in early October. We understand you will be including our written input in your final report to the Legislature and the Governor in January. Some of my fellow Council members will also be speaking this evening on the points we want the Tolling Committee to consider.

In addition, you may recall that our letter of Sept. 11 requested three analyses that would benefit from the Traffic Forecasting Model you are using to test your tolling scenarios.

- We're gratified that you created and tested a scenario that assumes tolls only on 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 520 tolls averaging \$2.36 in 2010 and \$2.92 in 2016. In this scenario, the impacts on I-90 are only very slight during peak hour travel. This is good news.
- We also suggested a scenario that includes tolling on I-5 and I-405 not only to generate revenue for the 520 project, but to address diversion across the I-90 bridge 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 is not tolled in each of the scenarios that impose tolls on I-90. We requested this analysis because our policy position – stated in our October Resolution – is that "Tolls must not be imposed on travel to and from Mercer Island on I-90 . . ." We feel it is our responsibility to know whether that policy position would have an adverse effect on funding for the 520 bridge project, and whether it would somehow negatively affect transportation within the corridor.

We understand that the Committee has not been able to include this variable in the scenarios tested so far. However, the answer is very important to Mercer Island.

I asked our City Manager if our own staff would be able to determine what the results would be – at least regarding the revenue question – if travel to and from the Island is not tolled in the scenarios that assume tolls on I-90.

Although the City of Mercer Island doesn't have access to the PSRC model directly, our staff are conversant with how it works and have talked with your staff who operate the model. They estimate that of all the trips across the lake on I-90, about 20% are trips to or from Mercer Island. Our staff believe that may be a little high, but because in order to generate a "worst case" estimate, we used the 20% figure.

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 520 bridge project filled or exceeded the funding gap of \$1.5 to \$2 billion.

Admittedly, without actually using the model we can't be fully confident that our proposal still generates the needed funds. But every way we tested this, the result was just that – funding for

the 520 bridge replacement comes in at the top of the range of the funding needed or, in one case, above that range.

We still would encourage the Committee to check our conclusion. We acknowledge it will take more of your staff time to do that. But we believe knowing the answer with certainty will strengthen your final report and provide useful information to the Legislature.

I want to leave the Committee with the position we took in our Resolution 1402: Even if I-90 must be tolled to reach the funding needed for 520, travel to and from Mercer Island should not and need not be tolled.