



SOUNDTRANSIT

FROM: Media Response Team

DATE: Aug. 6, 2008

SUBJECT: Assertion that light rail will reduce the number of lanes on the I-90 bridge

Issue Summary

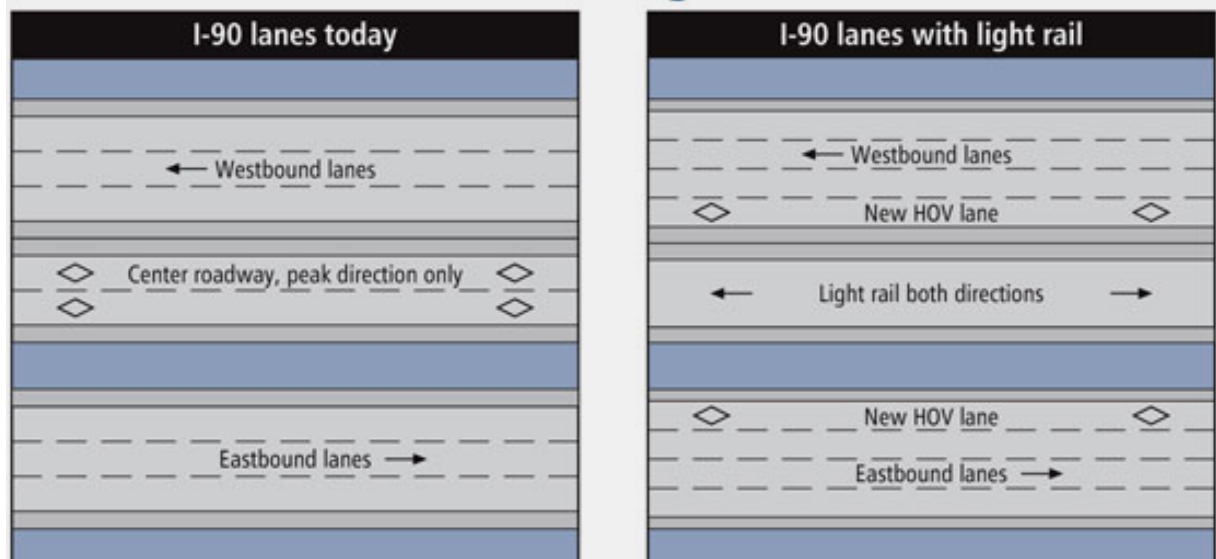
It was incorrectly suggested in a recent discussion on KIRO-AM and also by other parties that building light rail across Lake Washington on the I-90 bridge would reduce the number of traffic lanes on the bridge.

The Facts

There will be no loss of lanes on the I-90 between Seattle and Bellevue to accommodate Link light rail service. There are eight lanes now, and there will be eight lanes PLUS light rail when light rail is complete. With light rail the region will get added people-moving capacity of 12,000 per hour in each direction, plus the addition of a new HOV lane in each direction.

The current configuration of the I-90 roadway includes three eastbound lanes; two reversible center lanes for transit, carpools and Mercer Island traffic; and three eastbound lanes, for a total of eight lanes. Right now Sound Transit and the State Department of Transportation are working together to add new HOV lanes on the outer roadways of I-90 between Seattle and Bellevue to provide for reliable transit and HOV operation and prepare for conversion of the center roadway to light rail.

I-90 no net loss of lanes due to light rail



New HOV Lanes on I-90

Adding new lanes that will provide 24-hour HOV access in BOTH directions rather than just the peak direction represents a major improvement for the corridor. The effectiveness of the current reversible lanes is declining as the Eastside continues to grow as an economic center and the “peak direction” becomes a term of the past. Today, peak direction traffic (westbound in the AM and eastbound in the PM) represents 55% of the total traffic, and reverse-peak direction traffic represents 45%. In the future, this gap will continue to narrow.

In addition to gaining an HOV lane in the reverse-peak direction, capacity is maintained in the peak direction with the new HOV lane. That is because the capacity of the two center roadway lanes that operate in the peak direction today is in actuality similar to a single lane due to access constraints at each end of the bridge. Today, traffic studies show that the center roadway carries 1,800-1,900 cars per hour. This is less than the capacity of a typical highway lane, which is about 2,000 vehicles per hour.

Benefits of Light Rail

Light rail will offer fast, frequent and reliable transit service between the communities on each side of Lake Washington, no matter how much rising population growth increases congestion in future decades. As the region’s population grows, Sound Transit can serve the rising demand by increasing the frequency and length of light rail trains. Each light rail car can carry about 200 people when very full (although Sound Transit plans to add capacity on a schedule to keep loads within a more comfortable range of about 140 per car). At maximum capacity, running four-car trains every four minutes offers the ability to move 12,000 riders per hour in each direction, or 24,000 people per hour in both directions.

By 2030, daily transit trips across Lake Washington will increase by 54,000 – a growth rate of 150% over today. That is why Sound Transit’s adopted Long-Range Plan identified the I-90 cross-lake corridor as one of the important travel routes for reliable high capacity transit—light rail, operating in exclusive right of way. In addition, the recently adopted ST2 Plan includes the extension of light rail across I-90 between downtown Seattle and downtown Bellevue and continuing east to the Overlake Transit Center as a critical component of regional mobility.

Policy Framework

The 1976 Memorandum Agreement for I-90, signed by the cities of Seattle, Mercer Island and Bellevue; King County; Metro Transit and the State Highway Commission; included provisions for two lanes designed for and permanently committed to transit use and a requirement that the facility would be designed and constructed so that conversion of the center roadway to fixed guideway (light rail) is possible.

This agreement, which was amended in 2004 and approved by all the parties with the addition of Sound Transit, identified that Alternative R-8A (HOV lanes on the I-90 outer roadways) was the first step towards the ultimate configuration of the I-90 roadway with high capacity transit in the center roadway.

The HOV lanes will be in place before conversion of the center roadway to light rail across I-90 between downtown Seattle and downtown Bellevue begins.