



December 2, 2009

Mr. Craig Stone
Director, WSDOT Tolling Division
401 Second Avenue, Suite 300
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Mr. Stone:

Thank you for your work and the work of your staff on the Eastside Corridor Tolling Study. We appreciate the efforts that State Legislature and the Department of Transportation have made to further our region's understanding of how express tolling might work on I-405 and SR 167.

For some time the City of Kirkland has advocated tolling as an important strategy to fund transportation solutions and preserve system performance. In a spirit of continued support, we offer the following comments based on the results of the WSDOT's recently completed modeling of HOT lanes on I-405.

Because single occupant vehicles are allowed in the HOT lanes and because those lanes will be located on the inside of the freeway, there will be increased merging and weaving as vehicles both enter the lanes and leave them to access freeway exits. This merging and weaving will be concentrated near the openings in the HOT lanes and will likely be much greater than observed on the existing SR 167 HOT lanes. We are concerned that the operational impacts of this activity have not been thoroughly explored and would urge you to do so. A related topic is the use of direct access ramps. Will SOVs that are in the HOT lane be able to use the HOV direct access ramps? This important policy question has not yet been answered. It will affect operations and safety on the freeway as well as the interchanges and local arterials that connect to the direct access ramps.

An express tolling system will likely have benefits for transit speed and schedule reliability. Transit performance or benefits have not been reported in the materials that were available at the Kirkland open house or elsewhere. This leads us to question the extent to which the needs of transit providers have been considered or integrated into your process in a collaborative and meaningful manner. A primary interest of the City of Kirkland is to develop an operating environment where transit can have substantial travel time savings over single occupant vehicles.

A Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system is part of the I-405 Master Plan. However, the alternatives that were examined do not include any funding for improved transit service or facilities. Some of the revenue projected from tolling should support or accelerate the ability to implement BRT along the I-405 corridor. There should also be consideration under one or more of the alternatives for additional direct access ramps along the corridor and an evaluation of the benefits they may provide. Of particular interest to Kirkland is

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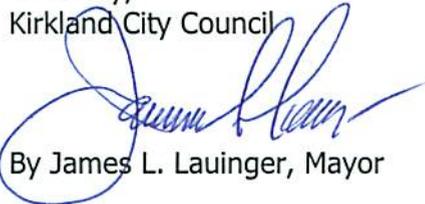
improved direct access in the vicinity of NE 85th Street as stated in the I-405 Master Plan and the draft PSRC 2040 Plan.

Tolling is scheduled to begin on SR 520 in less than 18 months. Technically, the SR 520 and I-405 tolling discussions are separate since they are fundamentally two very different systems. However we are concerned that in the eyes of the public, tolling on I-405 and SR 520 will be considered one system. WSDOT has done a good job of describing how the tolling infrastructure will be uniform across corridors but we encourage more discussion of how the projects will be better integrated.

Modeling shows that speed and throughput will improve for all users with an express toll lane system. It is possible, however that the modeling could be incorrect and there could be impacts on local streets due to the loss of one general purpose lane. While the City of Kirkland's position is that revenue collected in a corridor should be available for a wide range of uses throughout that corridor, it seems reasonable that a small amount of revenue should be preserved to monitor, quantify and address unexpected local impacts. It is important that as segments of the HOT lane corridor become operational, WSDOT commits the necessary resources to continue operating them at a high performance level before investing in new facilities. We request WSDOT work with local jurisdictions to define a program to monitor local arterial performance and address issues as they arise and which are directly related to implementation of tolling.

Thank you once again for your consideration of these comments as you prepare the report for the State Legislature.

Sincerely,
Kirkland City Council



By James L. Lauinger, Mayor

cc: State Legislators 45 and 48 districts
King County Councilmember Jane Hague
Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond