



The Honorable Raymond H. LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

Re: City of Seattle MERCER WEST TIGER IV application

Friday, March 09, 2012

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I am pleased to write in support of the City of Seattle's application for the US Department of Transportation TIGER grant. Funding from this grant will be dedicated to the Two-Way Mercer West project.

The Mercer Corridor is a critical transportation connection that carries more than 70,000 people a day. It has been a major traffic bottleneck in the Seattle area, limiting access to the growing South Lake Union area, the Seattle waterfront, the Seattle Center, and major federal and state highways. This project is vital because it supports four key sectors of the regional economy including: information technology, biotechnology, travel and tourism, and international trade.

Cornish College of the Arts began moving its campus to the South Lake Union ten years ago. We now own or lease more than a dozen properties in the neighborhood. Many of our programs utilize theater and gallery spaces in or near the Seattle Center. Traveling between our properties should not be as awkward as it is. Our current transportation infrastructures (one-way streets etc.) create barriers between neighborhoods. Improving the transportation structure will help to tie the city and neighborhoods together. It will make it easier for our students and staff to move from one building to another.

Economic competitiveness

- *Mercer West will help connect the Seattle Center and its many arts and cultural organizations to the City. These include Cornish College of the Arts, Seattle Opera, Seattle Reperatory Theater, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Seattle Children's Theater, Northwest Galleries, Intiman Theater and many more smaller organizations.*
- *This project will create over 500 direct jobs, providing an economic boost to our region.*
- *Mercer West will carry 55,000 vehicles daily, extending street, bicycle and sidewalk improvements from Ninth Avenue North to Queen Anne Avenue North.*
- *Mercer West is critical to the success of other major transportation projects. Mercer West links the Seattle Center, the Port of Seattle, and neighborhoods in northwest Seattle with the SR99 Bored*

- Tunnel replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct. All the planning around the downtown tunnel assumed that Mercer West would move forward. Without it, we can't take advantage of the investments we've already made.
- Mercer West continues the phenomenal success of South Lake Union. It is the second phase of the Mercer Corridor Project, serving the Gates Foundation, the University of Washington, PATH, Amazon, RealNetworks, Classmates.com, F5 Networks, the North Pacific Fishing Fleet and the maritime and manufacturing industries of InterBay and Ballard.
- Mercer West will provide badly needed pedestrian and bicycle connections between the Queen Anne and South Lake Union neighborhoods.
- Improves freight mobility and access to the passenger cruise ship industry, which has an economic impact of \$393 million.
- Mercer West allows public and private partners to take full advantage of the cultural amenities of the Seattle Center, including the iconic Space Needle.
- The project encourages development of a 90-acre parcel north of terminals 90 and 91.
- Reduces travel time from northwest Seattle to Sea-Tac International Airport by 4-12 minutes.

Partnership

- Completing Mercer West has been a priority for the city, the state and the region.
- An independent Mercer Corridor Stakeholder Committee comprised of 42 individuals met 15 times and reached consensus supporting the Mercer West project. In addition, over 50 events, or briefings between 2004 and 2009 have been held to present information and receive feedback.
- The Alaskan Way Viaduct Stakeholders Advisory Committee also held dozens of public meetings and supported Mercer West as an integral part of the downtown tunnel project.
- Seattle Center Master Plan calls for mixed-use redevelopment of the two-block Mercer Garage property and enhanced pedestrian connections to the surrounding neighborhood. Mercer West is key to these and other Seattle Center improvements.
- As part of its work for future development, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is excavating for the widening of Mercer Street and providing the undergrounding of transmission lines that serve the entire South Lake Union neighborhood.
- Mercer West is an important part of the Seattle Comprehensive Plan which calls for increased density in 38 urban centers, including South Lake Union and Uptown.
- Puget Sound Regional Council considers South Lake Union and Uptown regional growth centers.

Livability

- There is a significant senior population in the Queen Anne and Elliott Bay neighborhoods, and Mercer West will improve street crossings for pedestrians around transit stops.
- The Mercer West project will seismically upgrade the walls in the tunnel under Aurora Avenue.
- The railings at the tops of these walls will be revised to current code requirements, increasing pedestrian safety at these areas.
- By removing the center columns under Aurora, the project improves sight-distance and reduces collisions. It also creates a safer and more visually pleasing driving, biking and walking experience.

Pedestrians and Bicycles

- Improvements included in Mercer West project are recommended in both the Seattle Bicycle Master Plan and the Seattle Pedestrian Master Plan.
- The Mercer Underpass will go from four-foot sidewalks squeezed between a retaining wall and traffic with no buffer, to eight-foot sidewalks and a six-foot planting strip buffer in addition to a ten-foot bike path.

- *Creates a continuous east-west bikeway from the east side of South Lake Union to Lower Queen Anne.*
- *Connects bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure from South Lake Union and Cheshiahud Lake Union Loop to the Olympic Sculpture Park on Elliott Bay and Kinnear Park in Lower Queen Anne.*

Sustainability

- *Reduce 5,000 vehicle miles traveled in the downtown and South Lake Union neighborhood*
- *Stormwater improvements at a historic flooding spot where Mercer crosses under Aurora Avenue will eliminate high water that has occasionally closed the roadway.*
- *Provides transit connections to Bus Rapid Transit to Ballard*
- *Bus loading islands on Dexter Avenue that allow reliable transit service and separate bikes from buses.*
- *Mercer West will use concrete pavement for long -term durability. Concrete also has reduced rolling resistance, thereby increasing fuel economy.*
- *The reinforced wall along the north side of Mercer includes vine planters which will help to promote the project walls to become "green" walls, contributing to urban biomass, vegetation, and aesthetics.*

Sincerely,



Jeff Riddell

Vice President for Finance & Administration
Cornish College of the Arts

cc:

Senator Patty Murray
Senator Maria Cantwell
Governor Christine Gregoire
Congressman Jim McDermott
Mayor Mike McGinn, Seattle