

## May 2024 Town Center and North Mercer Parking Counts Findings

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### Executive Summary

Parking counts were conducted in the Mercer Island Town Center and North Mercer Residential Parking Zone on Thursday, May 9, and Saturday, May 11. Town Center parking inventory has 2,750 parking spaces. This includes 2,500 off-street parking spaces and 250 on-street parking spaces. The North Mercer Residential Parking District has 127 on-street spaces and 455 off-street parking spaces, mostly at the Mercer Island Park & Ride.

- Peak parking demand for the study area occurred on Thursday, May 9, 2024, at 12:00pm.
- On-street occupancy in Town Center peaked at 81% system-wide on the weekday count and 76% system-wide during the weekend count.
- At the Mercer Island Park & Ride, occupancy peaked at 69%.

### Background

The City of Mercer Island has conducted annual parking counts of Town Center and surrounding areas since Spring 2022. The parking counts monitor parking utilization and help inform decision-making to redirect cars into the most suitable parking spaces for a driver's intended visit. It is still unknown how commuter parking demand may increase when the Sound Transit East Link Extension opens and the impact of adding a commuter parking facility at the former Tully's site; the parking counts provide a baseline comparison for future years.

### Methodology

IDAX collected parking inventory and usage data on Thursday, May 9, and Saturday, May 11, in and around Town Center. These dates were chosen to capture typical busy conditions and to avoid unusual traffic patterns around holidays. IDAX conducted duration counts for on-street parking spaces for on-street spaces, and occupancy counts for the off-street parking spaces (lots and garages). Moreover, IDAX collected data capturing the permits for the Town Center Parking Permit during the Thursday parking counts. Parking inventory/usage and permit data was collected through a combination of camera footage and in-person observation.

The Thursday parking counts had nine data collection times, starting at 6:00 am and ending at 8:00 pm. The Saturday parking counts had six data collection times, starting at 10:00 am and ending at 8:00 pm. These times were chosen to understand parking demand throughout the day in typical parking conditions.

Similarly, IDAX collected usage data for 24 bike racks, and bike screen line counts (total number of bikes traveling each direction per hour) at seven locations around Town Center. Bike rack usage and bike screen line counts were collected through camera footage.

### Town Center Parking Inventory

Town Center parking inventory has 2,750 parking spaces. This includes 2,500 off-street parking spaces and 250 on-street parking spaces. Several Town Center primary streets, including SE 27th Street, 77th Avenue SE, and 78<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, have significant stretches with no on-street parking. Off-street, privately owned parking is plentiful, with nearly every development, business, or commercial center having a

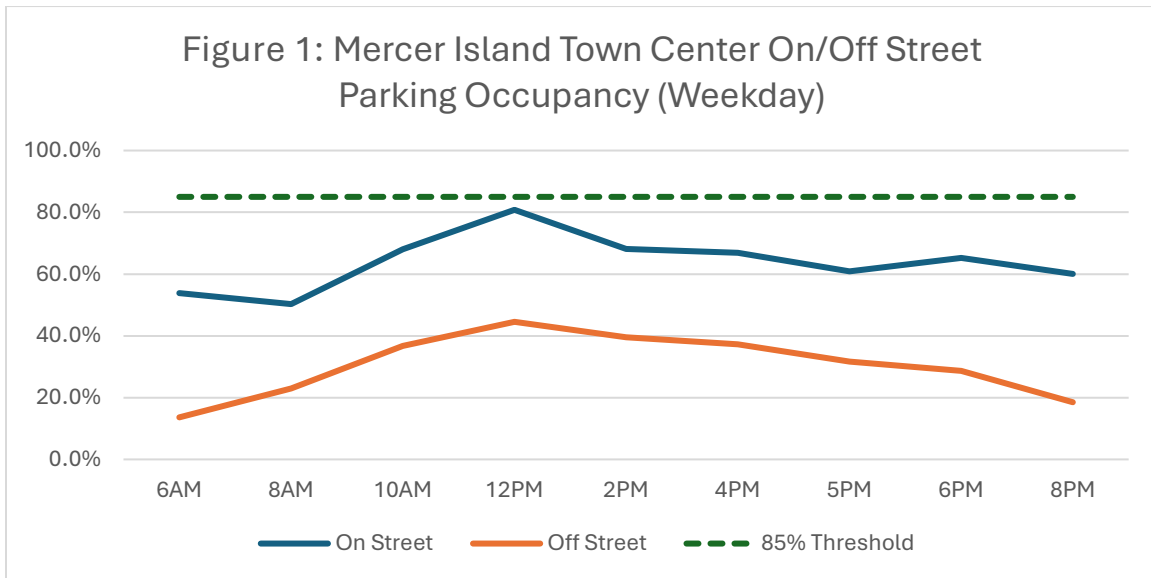
parking area. The North Mercer Residential Parking District has 127 on-street spaces and 455 off-street parking spaces, mostly at the Mercer Island Park and Ride.

### Parking Utilization

A widely recognized best practice in parking management is to compare actual parking utilization rates to an 85% occupancy threshold. When parking is 85% occupied, spaces are considered well-used; pricing (if used) is not needlessly deterring people from driving to the area, and it is still possible for drivers to find a space without cruising around waiting for another driver to leave, which results in increased emissions and traffic congestion.

### Town Center

Figure 1 summarizes the weekday parking system demand in Town Center compared to the 85% occupancy threshold. As shown in the figure, on-street parking was more highly utilized than off-street parking throughout the day. On-street occupancy had a system-wide average of 81%, nearing the 85% occupancy threshold. Both the on-street and off-street parking in the study area followed a similar pattern where occupancy peaked at 12:00pm and declined throughout the afternoon into the evening.



The turnover observations show considerable time limit infractions at the 30-minute and two-hour regulated on-street parking spaces. In the two-hour parking zones, 25% of cars overstayed the posted time-limit on the weekday count, with many vehicles parked all day.

Figure 2 summarizes the weekend parking demand in Town Center. Like the weekday, on-street parking was more highly utilized than off-street parking throughout the day system-wide. However, on-street occupancy over the weekend peaked at an average of 76%, system-wide. Both the on-street and off-street parking followed a similar pattern where occupancy peaked at 12:00 pm and declined throughout the afternoon into the evening.

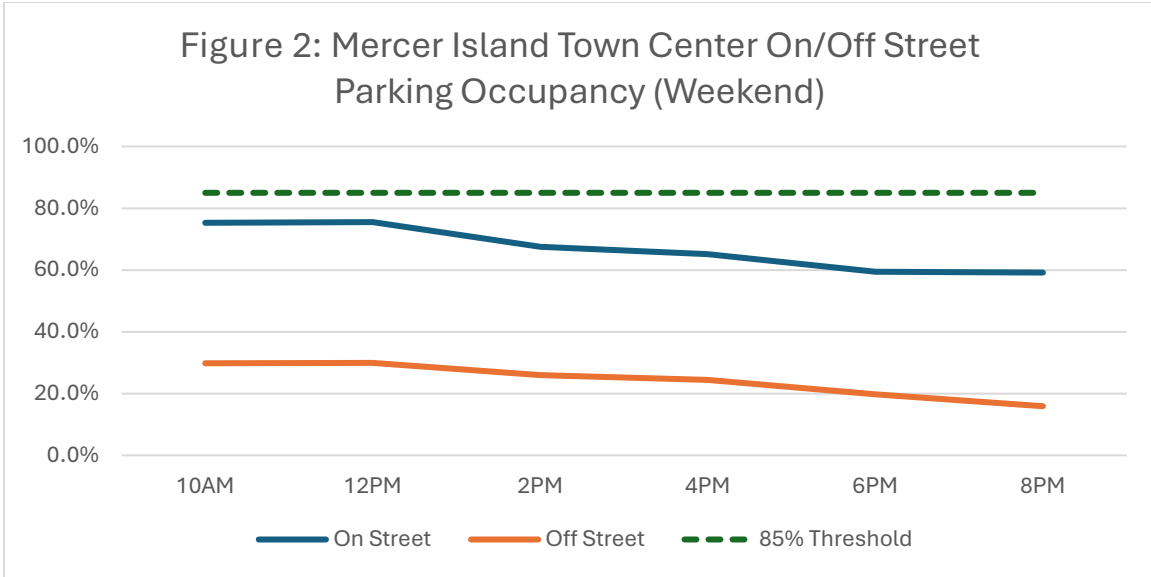
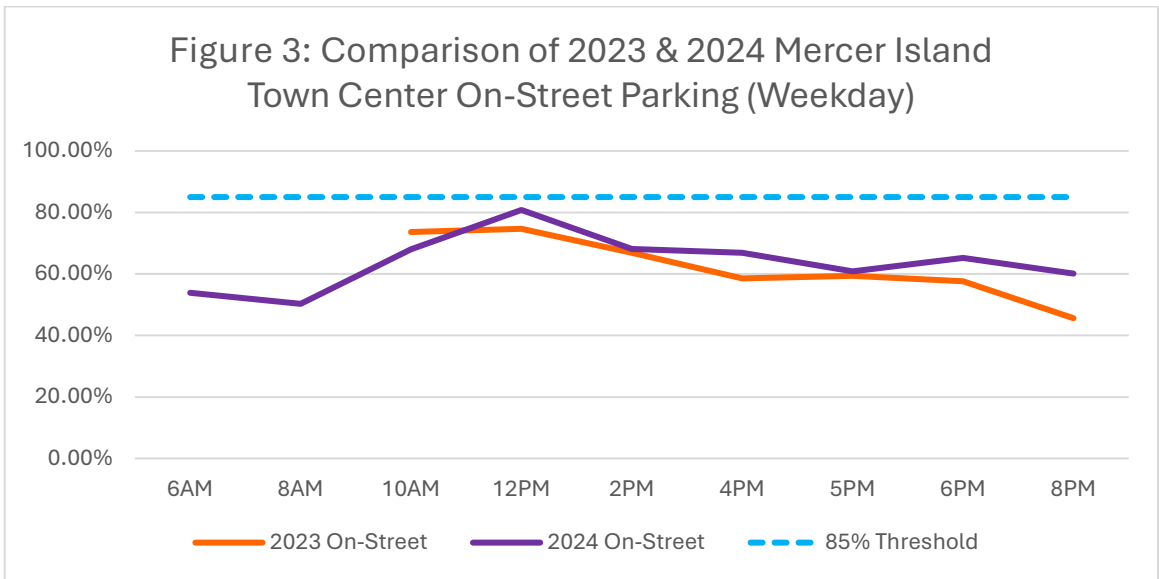


Figure 3 provides a comparison of parking count data collected in 2023 and 2024. The graph shows a comparison of the on-street parking conducted during the weekday count. The 2023 count shows that parking utilization peaked system-wide at 75% at 12:00 pm. It is important to note that the 2023 parking counts took place on Thursday, June 8, and Saturday, June 10; as such, the graph does not provide an exact comparison between 2023 and 2024. The dates for the 2024 parking counts were adjusted to avoid changes in traffic patterns due to major holidays and to the end of the school year.

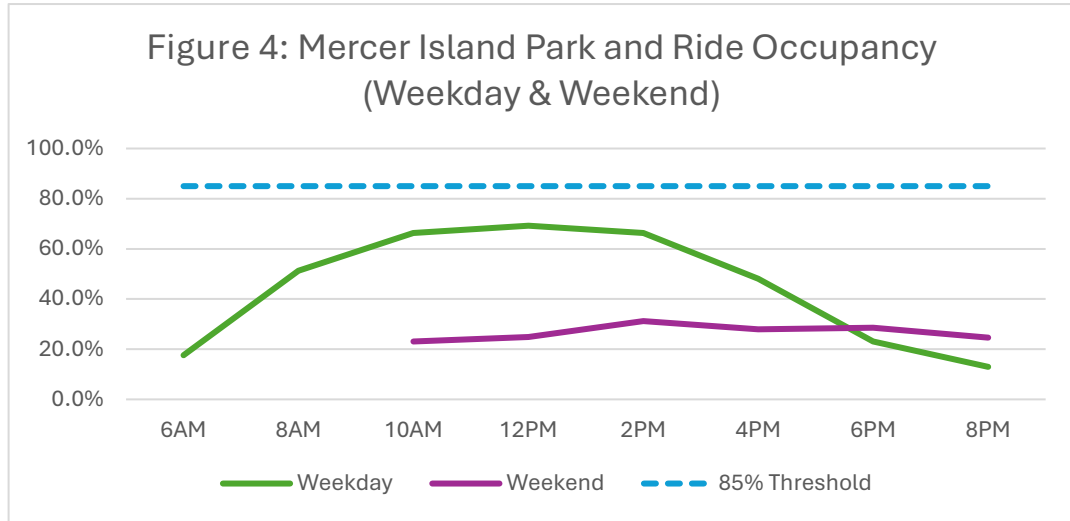


Mercer Island Park and Ride

Figure 4 summarizes the weekday and weekend parking demand for the Mercer Island Park and Ride as compared to the 85% occupancy threshold. The weekday count shows that occupancy peaked at 12:00 pm at 69% and declined throughout the afternoon into the evening. The weekend count peaked at

<sup>1</sup> Parking counts conducted in 2023 did not have runs at 6:00am or 8:00am.

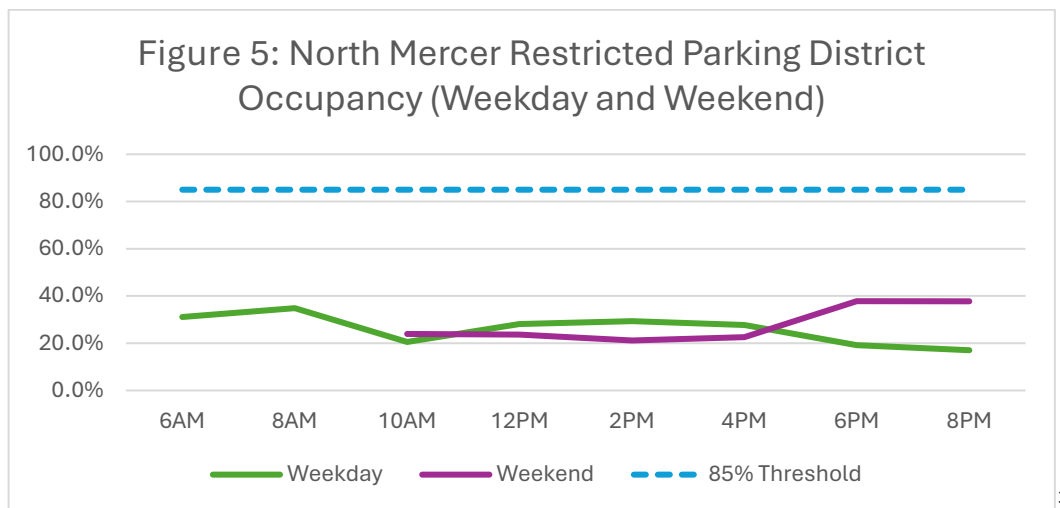
31% and maintained a similar level of occupancy throughout the day. It is important to note that on Saturday, May 11 – the date of the weekend parking count – there was a Seattle Mariners home baseball game at 6:00pm. The Park and Ride often serves as a parking and transportation center for people attending large events in Seattle’s downtown.



North Mercer Restricted Parking District

The North Mercer Restricted Parking District (RPD) Permit Program was created to prevent spillover of commuter users of the Mercer Island Park & Ride onto neighborhood streets when the Park & Ride is full. Permits cost \$5 per year for each vehicle legally registered to a resident in the RPD.

As of June 2024, the City had sold 51 parking permits for the RPD. The RPD parking spaces are not striped; the City has 71 parking spaces in the RPD. Figure 4 summarizes the weekday and weekend parking demand for the RPD as compared to the 85% occupancy threshold. RPD occupancy peaked at 35% on the weekday and 38% on the weekend, well below the occupancy threshold.



<sup>2</sup> The 5pm count on Thursday May 9 was excluded from this graph.

<sup>3</sup> The 5:00pm count on Thursday May 9 was excluded from this graph.

Town Center Commuter Parking Permit

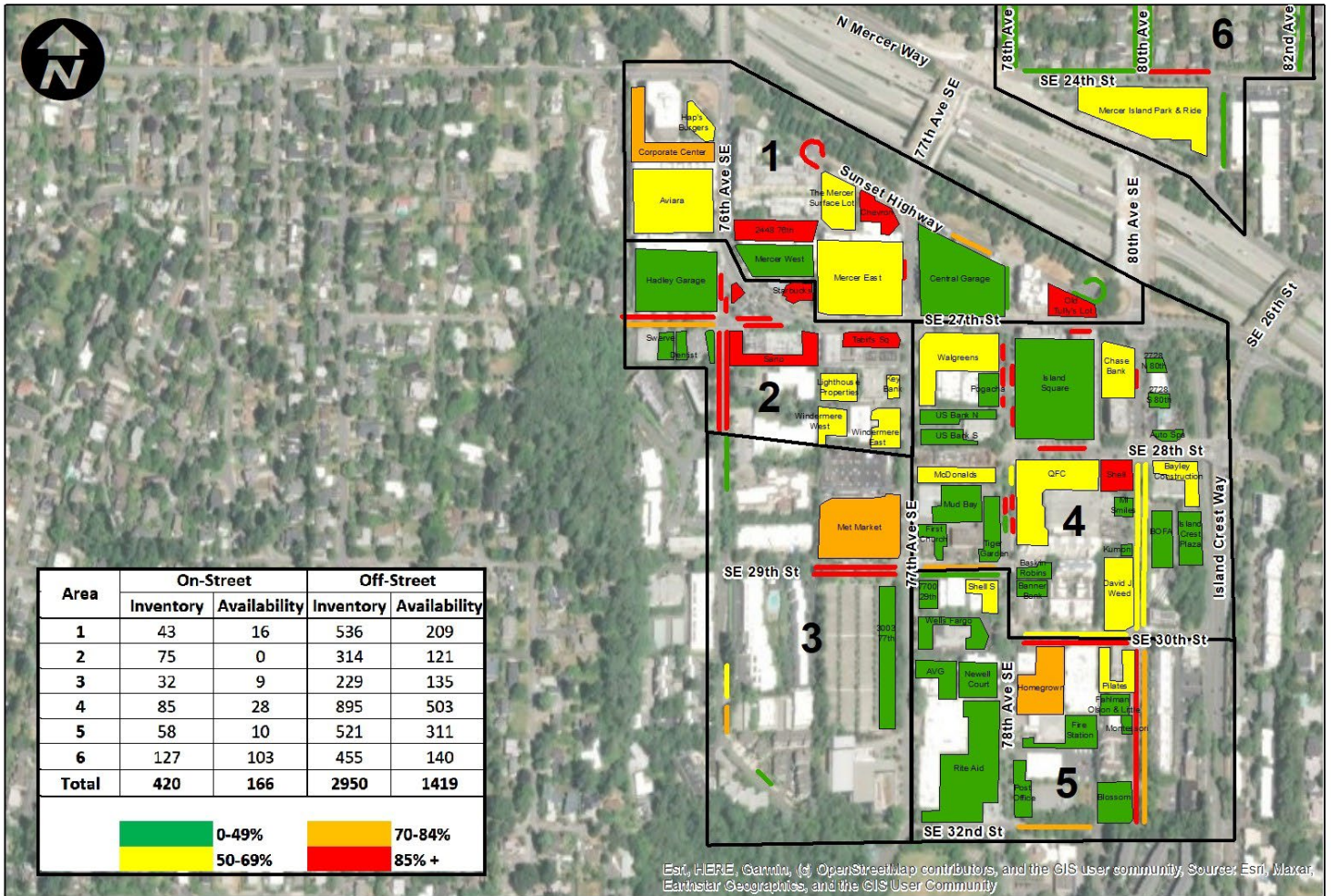
The Town Center Commuter Parking Permit was created for residents who wish to leave their car, walk to the Park & Ride, and catch a bus to off-Island destinations. Permits are available for Mercer Island residents as well as a limited number of Mercer Island businesses grandfathered into the permit program for \$5 per year. The permit allows users to park in designated spaces from 7:00 am-9:00 am on weekdays. After 9:00 am, the parking spaces are unrestricted. Table 1 shows the number of permits sold over time. As of June 2024, the City had sold 131 Town Center Commuter Parking Permits for FY2024.

| <b>Table 1: Permit Numbers</b> |             |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| 2022                           | 337 permits |
| 2023                           | 233 permits |
| 2024 (as of June)              | 131 permits |

In relation to the parking counts, 27 vehicles were parked in the spaces reserved for the Town Center Commuter Parking Permit at 8:00am on the weekday count. Only 2 vehicles, or 7% of vehicles parked in this area, had valid permits.

Peak Parking Utilization

The period of peak parking demand for the study area occurred on Thursday, May 9, 2024, at 12:00 pm. This weekday lunchtime peak period is typical of other commercial districts around the country. Figure 6 shows the parking utilization spatially during the weekday period of peak parking demand. Certain block faces and parking facilities exceeded the 85% occupancy threshold, while other block faces and facilities were less than 50% occupied.



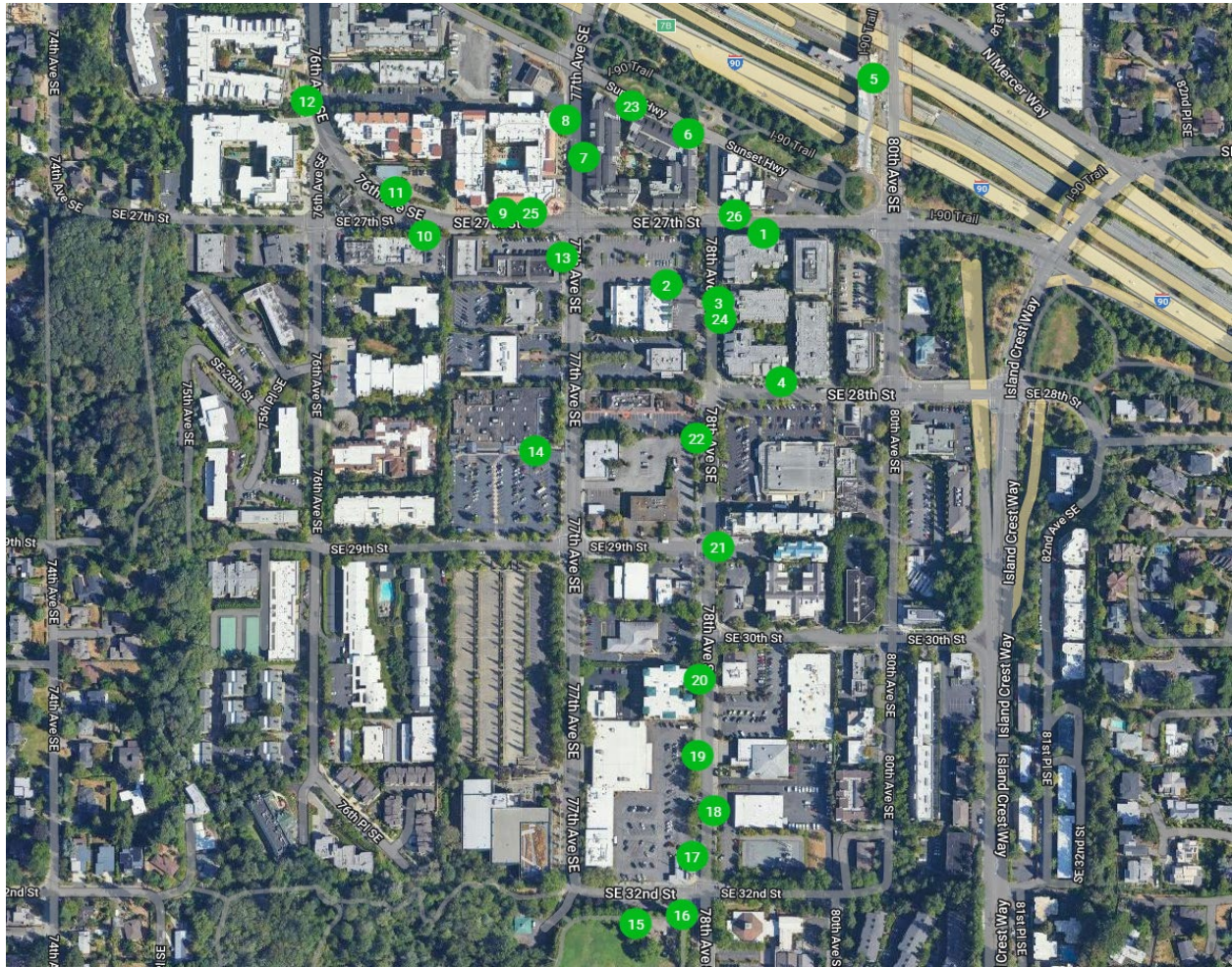
**Weekday Peak Hour Parking Utilization - 12PM**  
 City of Mercer Island Downtown Parking  
 May 9th, 2024

FIGURE  
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## Bicycle Parking Racks

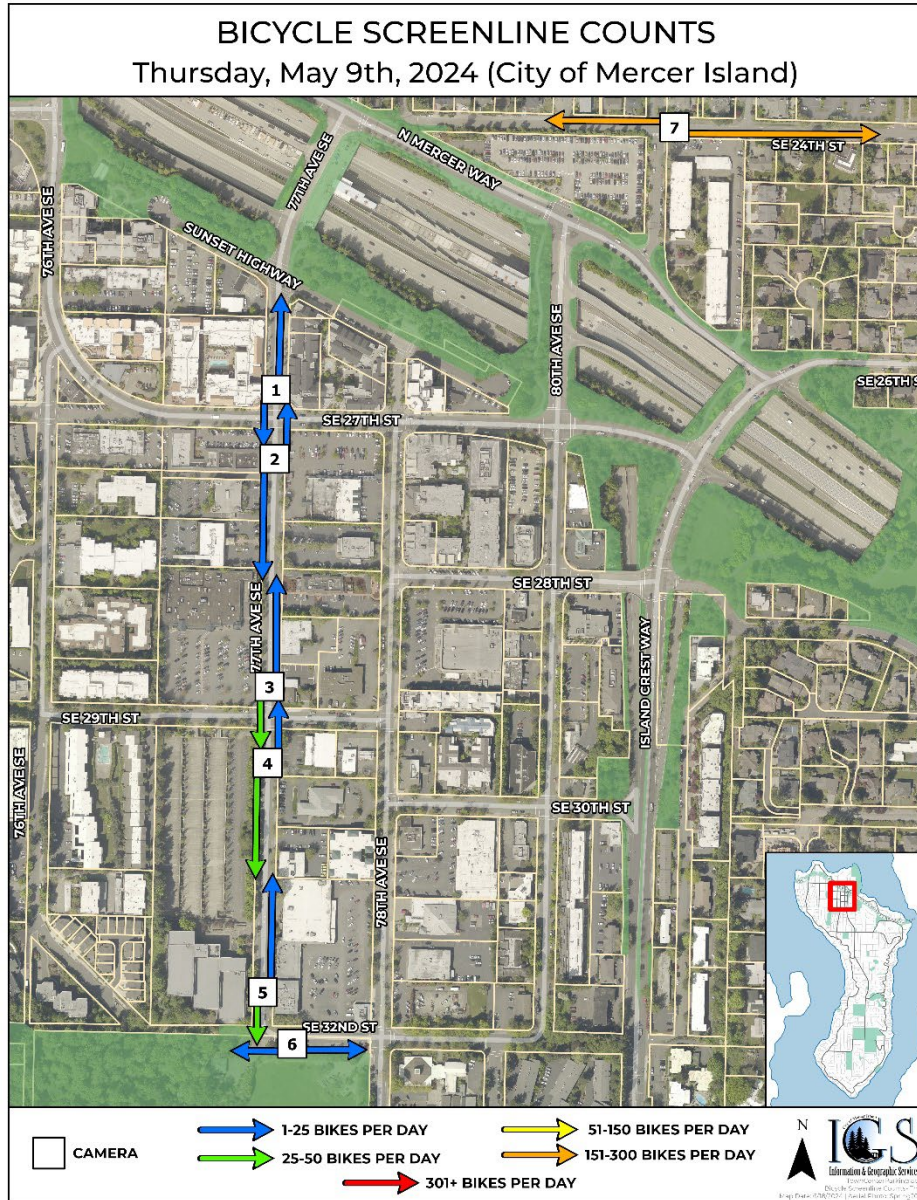
IDAX collected usage data for 24 bicycle racks in Town Center. Map 1 marks the locations of the bike racks that were observed during the parking counts. The data collected showed that the bike racks are currently underutilized. Two bicycles were parked between all bicycle racks on the weekday count and seven bicycles were parked between all racks on the weekend count. While these numbers are low, the bicycle parking rack counts provide a baseline for implementation of future bicycle infrastructure.



Map 7 Bicycle Rack Utilization Counts Map

## Bicycle Screen Line Counts

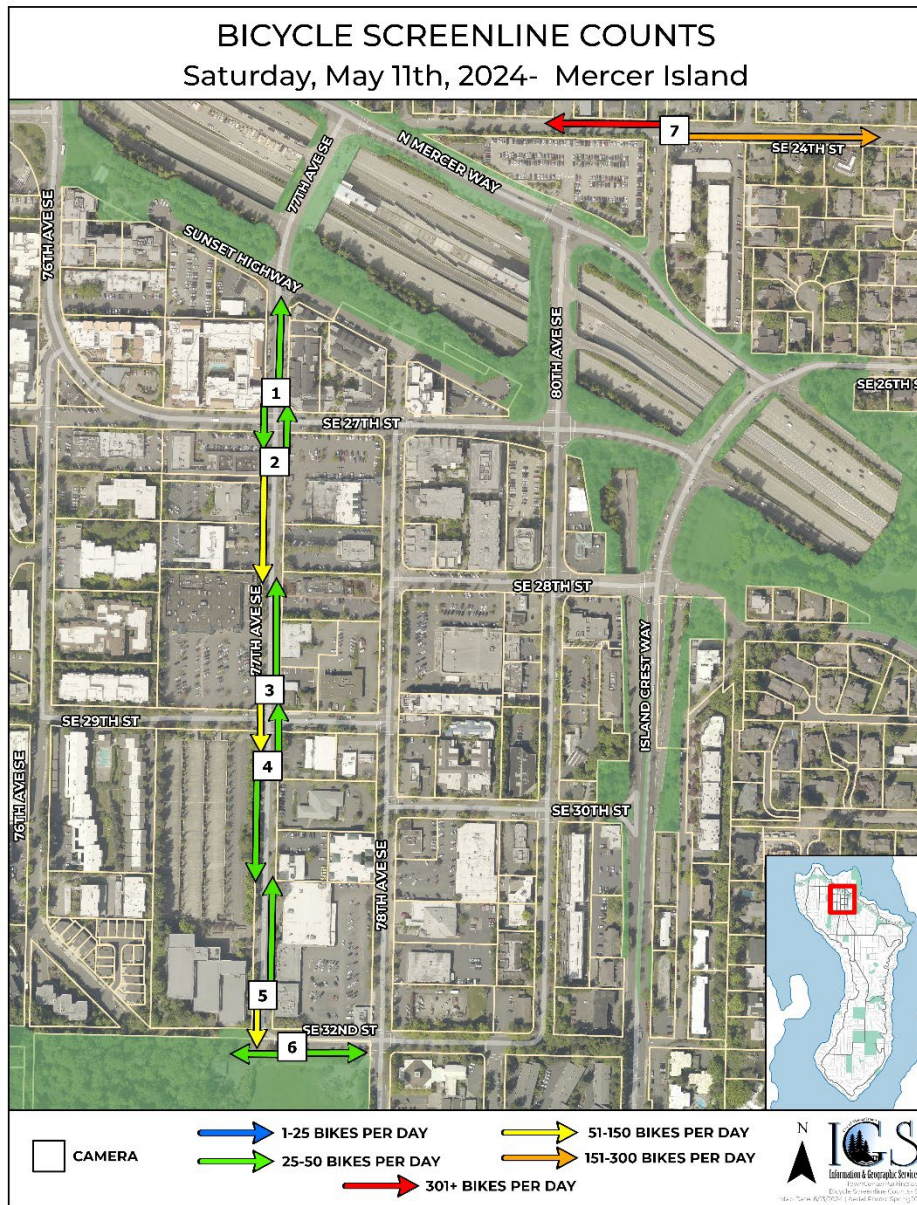
Bicycle screen line counts track the total number of bikes traveling each direction per hour. Cameras were deployed at seven locations around Town Center along the City's bike lane network. As shown in Map 2, the weekday bicycle screen line count showed 689 bicyclists traveled through Town Center throughout the day, with most bicyclists travelling along SE 24<sup>th</sup> St and 81<sup>st</sup> Ave SE.



Map 8 Bicycle Screen Line Count, Thursday May 9, 2024



Similarly, as shown in Map 2, the weekend bicycle screen line count showed 1,335 bicyclists traveled through Town Center throughout the day, with most bicyclists travelling along SE 24<sup>th</sup> St and 81<sup>st</sup> Ave SE.



Map 9 Bicycle Screen Line Count, Saturday May 11, 2024