

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

January 19, 2010
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Davidson, Deputy Mayor Lee, and Councilmembers Balducci, Chelminiak, Degginger, Robertson, and Wallace

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by Mayor Davidson. There was no Executive Session.

2. Study Session

(a) Initiation of Eastgate/I-90 Land Use and Transportation Update

City Manager Steve Sarkozy made introductory comments regarding the scope and framework for the Eastgate/I-90 Land Use and Transportation Plan Update.

Planning Director Dan Stroh explained that the update is a joint planning effort between the Planning and Community Development Department and the Transportation Department. He said staff is seeking input from the Council regarding the project scope and the principles that will guide this effort. The Eastgate area is one of Bellevue's chief employment centers, with approximately 25,000 employees. Mr. Stroh reviewed the boundaries of the study area, which is adjacent to potential annexation areas (PAAs).

Mr. Stroh summarized some of the themes that will be addressed in the study including a holistic planning approach, the erosion of neighborhood services, transportation system efficiencies demands, the lack of connectivity across the corridor, Mountains to Sound Greenway coordination, developing a coherent image for the corridor, the evolution and role of Bellevue College, and opportunities for innovation. He briefly reviewed current uses in the area including office concentrations, retail nodes, and light industrial areas as well as parks and schools.

Kevin O'Neill, Assistant Director of Transportation, briefly reviewed transportation corridors through the area including the regional freeway system, the Mountains to Sound Greenway, and transit services. He noted that the recently adopted Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan identified the Mountains to Sound Greenway as one of the primary ped-bike corridors. The objectives of the planning update include evaluating potential land use changes and multi-modal transportation improvements for the corridor, promoting a stronger identity for the area, and supporting Bellevue College's plans as a new four-year institution.

Mr. O'Neill noted 10 proposed guiding principles to direct the work of the Council, the advisory committee, Boards and Commissions, and staff. These include enhancing economic vitality and diversity, integrating land use and transportation elements, recognizing fiscal constraints in terms of the ability to fund new infrastructure, retaining and enhancing neighborhood services, and modeling environmental sustainability. The proposed scope of work encompasses an economic and market analysis, review of land use alternatives, transportation analysis, greenhouse gas and potential health impact analysis, the selection of a preferred alternative, integrated Growth Management Act (GMA) and State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review, and the identification of financing and implementation strategies. The City will work with the public, and potentially an advisory/steering committee, to develop land use alternatives for 2030 and to analyze transportation impacts and needs associated with these land uses.

Mr. O'Neill reviewed the proposed project timeline and public involvement process. Staff suggests appointing a citizen advisory committee early this spring, with the goal of identifying a preliminary preferred alternative by the end of the year. The final preferred alternative would be selected in 2011 and be followed by staff's work on related Comprehensive Plan Amendments and Land Use Code Amendments. Mr. O'Neill said staff is seeking Council direction regarding the project scope, proposed guiding principles, and public involvement plan.

Councilmember Degginger expressed support for the planning effort. However, he feels that the Lakemont Boulevard interchange and surrounding area must be part of the primary study area. He noted that the study area does not include neighborhoods located south of I-90. Mr. Degginger suggested partnering with the City of Issaquah to address transportation needs and planning.

Mr. Stroh explained that staff's intent was that the primary study area would be the commercially zoned areas in which land use changes will be considered. Staff did not want to send the message that neighborhoods will be targeted for potential Comprehensive Plan and zoning changes. The secondary study area encompasses the broader neighborhoods as well as major transportation systems. Mr. Stroh said staff will review the proposed study boundaries.

Councilmember Robertson expressed support for moving forward with the planning effort. Responding to Ms. Robertson, Mr. Stroh confirmed that funds have been allocated within the Capital Investment Program (CIP) budget to initiate the study.

Councilmember Robertson concurred with Councilmember Degginger's suggestion to expand the planning study area. She recalled that residents of neighborhoods south of I-90 were

involved in the planning efforts related to Factoria Mall and the Factoria Area Transportation Study Update. Given that the Eastgate area involves a major highway, Ms. Robertson questioned the City's ability to effectively influence greenhouse gas levels or impacts. While she supports environmental policies that encourage responsible development, she does not want significant City funds to be used to attempt to mitigate emission impacts from a state highway facility.

Councilmember Balducci expressed support for the planning effort, noting that it makes good sense to address the overall corridor instead of individual subareas. She spoke in favor of extending the primary study area along I-90 to include the Lakemont Boulevard interchange. This would retain the focus on land use and transportation planning, without raising concerns among residents that neighborhood areas will be rezoned. She supports appointing a citizen advisory committee to participate in the planning process, to include residents who live in the area and potentially at least one representative from the potential annexation area. She suggests assigning a Council liaison to the committee as well.

Regarding the guiding principles, Ms. Balducci stated that retaining and enhancing neighborhood services is one of the most important objectives. She suggested that this principle be moved up to #2 or #3 on the list of principles. She acknowledged the importance of going into this process with a recognition of the fiscal constraints relating to the ability to fund new infrastructure. Regarding the slide on traffic congestion points, she suggested adding a congestion point on the map at I-90 and the 156th Avenue exit. Ms. Balducci feels that improving Bellevue's segment of the Mountains to Sound Greenway should be a high priority.

Councilmember Chelminiak concurred with the Mountains to Sound Greenway and neighborhood services priorities. Responding to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Stroh said staff proposes exploring the potential for mixed use development in the primary study area. Mr. Chelminiak expressed support for partnerships with Bellevue College. He noted it is important to educate residents about the goals of the project and the distinctions between primary and secondary study areas. He supports the proposal for a citizen advisory committee.

Councilmember Wallace commented that this area has a great potential for future transit oriented development. He observed that the guiding principles do not explicitly address the integration between commercial/mixed use areas and single family neighborhoods. He suggested that staff review principles that have been applied to neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown, including Surrey Downs and Ashwood. Mr. Wallace commented on the potential for the future extension of light rail traveling east from Bellevue along I-90. He encouraged working with Sound Transit to incorporate any preliminary plans they have for Phase 3 light rail development into the City's Eastgate planning effort, if feasible.

Following up on Councilmember Degginger's comments, Mr. Wallace suggested that the Lakemont Boulevard interchange be studied as a separate project, due to the complicated transportation issues at that location. He further suggested coordinating transportation planning with the needs and functions of the Factoria area.

Deputy Mayor Lee complimented staff for their work on the Bel-Red Corridor planning effort, which he feels will be helpful in the Eastgate planning project as well. He noted that the Eastgate area provides a good opportunity for development and redevelopment. However, he expressed concern regarding current economic conditions and wondered if the timing is right for this effort. He asked staff to elaborate on the rationale for the proposed project schedule.

Councilmember Degginger commented on principle #1 and suggested adding the underlined language: Enhance economic vitality and diversity without degrading mobility in other parts of the city, and ensuring that it continues to contribute to the diversity of Bellevue's economic mix.

Mayor Davidson summarized that it makes good sense to continue discussion about the project scope and guiding principles in a future meeting.

City Manager Steve Sarkozy stated that he is hearing Council support to proceed with the planning effort, but that more information is needed before endorsing a specific scope of work and guiding principles.

- (b) East Link Update – Scope of Analysis and Schedule for Segment B (South Bellevue) and Segment D (Bel-Red)

Mr. Sarkozy opened discussion regarding the East Link project, noting that staff's presentation on Segment D has been postponed to a future meeting.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman recalled the history of Council discussions and Sound Transit's identification of a preferred alternative for the East Link light rail system. At the City's request, Sound Transit conducted further design work on the Council's recommended modified B3 side-running alternative. Mr. Sparrman reviewed the modified B3 alignment, which substantially reduces construction impacts, potentially reduces costs, provides a greater distance between the light rail line and residences, and provides opportunities for traffic mitigation.

The South Bellevue Park and Ride lot currently has approximately 500 parking spaces and is heavily used. Mr. Sparrman recalled past discussions about how to make sure that the East Link project does not degrade the function of the park and ride lot. Mitigation options discussed included adding a southbound HOV lane from the park and ride lot to I-90, modifying ingress and egress via the traffic signal, and potentially adding a southbound HOV lane from the juncture of Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE. Mr. Sparrman reviewed projected 2030 traffic conditions along Bellevue Way SE at the South Bellevue park and ride lot, and described how different mitigation measures (e.g., addition of HOV lane on Bellevue Way) will impact travel times and congestion.

Mr. Sarkozy commented that staff's analysis of the East Link alternatives is based on principles that have generally been accepted by the Council and the community. These include avoiding any degradation to surface street capacity, ensuring that Bellevue residents do not pay a disproportionate share of East Link costs, maximizing intermodal transfers, and protecting neighborhoods.

Mayor Davidson encouraged the Council to work toward a unanimous resolution of the preferred light rail segment alternatives. He believes this will be a synergistic process rather than a compromise.

Councilmember Balducci observed that her experiences as an employee and a Councilmember have taught her that if issues are discussed enough by a variety of people, a superior solution typically presents itself. She noted this has not been the case with discussions about Segment B, however. Ms. Balducci said the intersection of I-90 and I-405, and the existing South Bellevue park and ride lot, provide a key location for access to light rail and other transit services. She acknowledged that any alignment of Segment B will impact some neighborhoods. The challenge is to design an alignment that will best mitigate and minimize the impacts.

Ms. Balducci proposed that Sound Transit study what is being called the B7 modified option, which serves the South Bellevue Park and Ride, continues east to the BNSF corridor, and links up with Downtown Segment C at essentially the current Red Lion site.

Councilmember Degginger recalled discussions in February, in which the overwhelming reason for the support of the B3 modified alternative was the high ridership at I-90 and the ability to expand the South Bellevue Park and Ride. He noted the constraints associated with an option for a station and park and ride lot on 118th Avenue SE. As alternatives have been discussed over time, the primary challenge has become how to connect the South Bellevue Park and Ride with the Downtown without producing significant environmental and neighborhood impacts. He supports further study of the B7 modified proposal.

Councilmember Robertson, former Co-Chair of the Light Rail Best Practices Committee, explained that the committee concluded that grade separation or a dedicated right-of-way would be the best options for ensuring the quickest and most reliable service. Another key component was providing adequate park and ride facilities, which has been critical to the success of the San Diego light rail system.

Ms. Robertson said that the issue of noise came to the forefront following the opening of the Seattle system, which has experienced higher noise levels than anticipated in some portions of the line. This has become a significant criteria in discussions about Segment B, and is the reason that Ms. Robertson favors B7 over B3. However, given the importance of park and ride lots within the overall system, she supports consideration of the proposed B7 modified option which will utilize the South Bellevue Park and Ride and locate the line away from residences as much as possible.

Ms. Robertson said the benefits of using the BNSF corridor include reduced noise impacts, fast and reliable service, and the avoidance of impacts to Bellevue Way and the Winters House. She suggested that the visibility of light rail trains from I-405 will encourage ridership, and she feels that the B7 alignment provides the best option in terms of the future expansion of light rail to Eastgate, Issaquah, and Seatac. If the modified B7 option is not feasible, she will support B7

over the B3 alignment. She suggested that the Council send a clarifying letter to Sound Transit in the coming weeks to provide Council's input on both Segment B and Segment C.

Councilmember Chelminiak commented on the challenges of identifying the Segment B alignment. Unfortunately any option will have some effect on environmentally sensitive areas and neighborhoods. He supports study of the proposed B7 modified alternative. Mr. Chelminiak briefly reviewed an analysis of park and ride usage and emphasized the importance of these facilities in the overall system.

Councilmember Wallace stated that for him the subject of light rail is primarily about mitigating impacts to homes, businesses, and roads while enabling Sound Transit to provide effective light rail service through Bellevue and the region, within Sound Transit's budget. He summarized his reasoning for his support of the B7 alignment. While the B3 alternative utilizes the South Bellevue Park and Ride, it places further demand on Bellevue Way, which is the only southbound arterial between Downtown Bellevue and I-90. Mr. Wallace noted that the B7 modified alternative still impacts the South Bellevue Park and Ride. However, placing light rail along the existing BNSF railway corridor does not impact street traffic.

Mr. Wallace commented on the need to protect neighborhoods from noise impacts. He suggested that the City hire its own consultant to conduct an analysis of noise impacts for both the Bellevue Way and BNSF corridor alignments. He said that the existing noise wall along the BNSF right-of-way would help mitigate the impacts of light rail. He feels that the BNSF route provides the most efficient service between I-90 and the Downtown. Mr. Wallace encouraged the Council to support the original B7 alignment if the modified B7 option is not feasible.

Deputy Mayor Lee expressed support for Councilmember Robertson's position. He has supported alternative B7 all along, in part because it has the least neighborhood impacts. He recalled suggesting to Sound Transit what has now been proposed as the B7 modified alternative, which was to provide a station at the South Bellevue Park and Ride and then continue east to the BNSF right-of-way. In addition to the benefits mentioned already by the Council, Mr. Lee said it makes sense to locate the rail along I-405 where it can connect to transit users. Mr. Lee is pleased to have Councilmember Balducci on the Sound Transit Board, as he feels this will help to further Bellevue's interests.

Using a map as a visual aid, Mayor Davidson reviewed his understanding of the B7 route, the modified B7 alignment, and the connection of both to Segment C serving the Downtown.

Councilmember Balducci said one advantage of maintaining the light rail line along I-90 as much as possible is that it provides the foundation for the future continuation of light rail out to Eastgate and Issaquah. She favors a system that will encourage commuters to park at the park and ride lot closest to where they live to use transit, rather than one that enables people to drive to the park and ride lot closest to where they work.

Councilmember Wallace noted his preference for options C9T (Tunnel) or C14E (Elevated) in the Downtown. He observed that the City cannot afford an at-grade alignment through the

downtown. Councilmember Wallace noted that Councilmembers are in general agreement about Segment D. He explained that a constituent forwarded to him a Sound Transit drawing of the D2A option, which shows an at-grade crossing at NE 20th Street. He stated that this would be a difficult long-term traffic situation, and suggested that Sound Transit elevate this crossing.

Mr. Sparrman said staff is studying alternatives for the NE 20th Street crossing, and at this time both at-grade and elevated options are under consideration.

Councilmember Chelminiak looks forward to more extensive discussion about Segment C. He noted that tonight's discussion has addressed the importance of serving the South Bellevue Park and Ride. However, there has not been any discussion about what would be done if the system cannot serve that facility, and instead people must use the Wilburton Park and Ride for access. Mr. Chelminiak wants to ensure optimal access to the system for Bellevue residents and workers. He supports further study of the B7 modified proposal, as well as the concept of the more northerly crossing of the slough.

Councilmember Balducci noted that she and other Councilmembers have tended to favor alternative C9T through the Downtown. However, she looks forward to hearing the results of ongoing study and analysis before taking a formal position on Segment C.

Deputy Mayor Lee concurred. Responding to Mr. Lee, Ms. Balducci said the Sound Transit Board is tentatively scheduled to review and narrow the list of Segment C alternatives at its last meeting in March. She suggested that the Bellevue City Council provide its input to the Board before that meeting. The Board has no formal schedule for further consideration of Segment B alternatives, so Council input on that segment should be submitted to the Board as soon as possible. The next Sound Transit Board meeting is January 28.

Responding to Councilmember Degginger, Mayor Davidson confirmed direction to staff requesting additional information on the B7 modified concept.

Councilmember Robertson questioned whether the Council can put this on its agenda for next week, in order to formalize input before the Board's January 28 meeting.

Mr. Sarkozy said staff can prepare a preliminary concept plan for the potential alignment.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Mayor Davidson said staff will draft a letter to the Sound Transit Board, for Council review next week.

At 7:51 p.m., Mayor Davidson declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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