

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

May 6, 2013
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

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

ABSENT: Councilmember Davidson

1. Executive Session

At 6:01 p.m., Deputy Mayor Robertson called the meeting to order and declared recess to Executive Session for approximately 25 minutes to discuss one item of pending litigation and one item of property acquisition.

The meeting resumed at 6:51 p.m., with Mayor Lee presiding.

2. Study Session

(a) Bellevue Transit Master Plan and King County Metro Status Report

Mayor Lee invited Jay Karns to comment on the Bellevue Transit Master Plan during Study Session, given the challenges Mr. Karns would face waiting for the public comment opportunity later in the evening.

Mr. Karns provided the perspective of a wheelchair user who is dependent on bus transit. He is aware that King County Metro is proposing to eliminate Routes 226, 241 and 271. He noted that family and friends use those routes and other routes as well. He testified that altering or eliminating those routes would make it very difficult, if not impossible, for certain citizens to move about. He suggested that Metro look at other areas for budget cuts.

Mayor Lee thanked Mr. Karns for his comments and invited Jane Hague, King County Council, to comment on Metro's services.

Ms. Hague commended the Council on its Downtown Livability Initiative and acknowledged the importance of reliable transit services. She said it has been wonderful to see the City's collaboration with Sound Transit for light rail planning. On behalf of Metro, Ms. Hague said

their bus system is not without its challenges. Metro is facing a 17 percent reduction in services over the next years, despite cuts in recent years.

King County Councilmember Hague commented on Metro's efforts to lower costs, including a change from a 18 percent fare box return to 28 percent. Metro is still looking to the state legislature for funding. The agency believes it can make a good case before the legislature, but time is of the essence. Ms. Hague thanked Franz Loewenherz and Kim Becklund, City Transportation staff, for their outreach to her office and to Metro staff.

Councilmember Balducci thanked Councilmember Hague for her strong support of Eastside transit. Ms. Balducci acknowledged the importance of continuing to enhance efficiency and effectiveness while also adequately funding the system to serve the public, especially those dependent on transit.

Mayor Lee thanked Ms. Hague for being an advocate of transit for Bellevue. He commented on the Regional Transit Task Force which looked for efficiencies and improved accountability. He would like to hear more about which Task Force recommendations have been implemented and what improvements have been made.

Brad Miyake, Deputy City Manager, opened staff's presentation of the Bellevue Transit Master Plan and King County Metro's Status Report.

Transportation Director Dave Berg recalled staff's presentation on March 11 regarding the market strategies report and the concept of abundant access. He introduced Victor Obeso, Manager of Service Development for King County Metro.

Franz Loewenherz, Senior Planner, said the March 11 Council briefing addressed the multiple public benefits of transit: economic, environmental, community and individual. The Bellevue Transit Master Plan has three major elements, with the first and current phase being the Service Element. This analysis identifies the City's transit service priorities that are responsive to different financial scenarios and time horizons.

Mr. Loewenherz said that transit usage in Bellevue increased by 111 percent between 2002 and 2013. Two-thirds of this usage is concentrated in the most densely populated areas (Downtown, Eastgate, Factoria, Crossroads). Daily person trips involving Bellevue are expected to increase from 1.2 million in 2010 to 1.75 million in 2030. Mr. Loewenherz said Bellevue is responding to increased transportation demands by investing in roadway and infrastructure improvements. The East Link light rail project provides a transformational opportunity for Bellevue as well.

Mr. Loewenherz commented on the concept of abundant access, which is a vision based on extensive outreach, Council's project principles, the current transit network, users' preferences, and future travel markets. He recalled the discussion of tradeoffs related to this concept of abundant access, for example, peak-first or all-day service, coverage or ridership, diversity or specialization, and connections or complexity.

Mr. Loewenherz further recalled the discussion of market-driven strategies for chosen objectives and varying funding scenarios (i.e., reduced funding, stable funding, growing resources). He said it is important to be realistic about future transit resources and to work with transit partners in planning for supportive land use, pedestrian and bike amenities, and transit speed and reliability improvements.

Responding to Mayor Lee, Mr. Loewenherz said there are a number of assumptions in the funding scenarios, including the 40 routes that have at least one stop in Bellevue. Staff will address this and the market-driven strategies more fully with the Council on May 20.

Mr. Obeso presented Metro Transit's 2012 Service Guidelines Report. He observed that Bellevue is taking steps to create opportunities for people to use transit, walk, and bike more frequently. He said Metro wants to continue to work with the City, including with its Boards and Commissions. He noted that resources are constrained and Metro cannot meet every need.

Mr. Obeso described average weekly ridership on Metro buses and trolleys and said that Metro reached its second highest ridership in 2012. Regional Sound Transit service usage is growing as well.

Mr. Obeso said the current budget requires a 17 percent reduction in transit services, or 600,000 annual services hours, by 2016. This begins in the fall of 2014 with a cut of 150,000 hours.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Robertson, Mr. Obeso said sales tax revenue is expected to grow going forward. However, Metro lost approximately 20 percent of its sales tax revenue between 2009 and 2011. The amount Metro collected in 2008 will not be collected again until 2015, given the current economy and forecast.

Mr. Obeso described Metro's actions from 2009 to 2013 to reduce its deficit. These include scheduling efficiencies, service reductions, labor cost savings, fare increases, capital program reductions, a hiring freeze, and other measures. He noted that Metro continues to evaluate the impact of the termination of its Ride Free Area program.

Mr. Obeso highlighted key objectives of Metro's Strategic Plan for Public Transportation 2011-2021. This plan builds on King County's 2010-2014 Strategic Plan and draws from the recommendations of the Regional Transit Task Force provided in 2010.

Mr. Obeso explained that the service guidelines define a transparent process using objective data to help Metro make decisions about adding, reducing and changing transit service to deliver productive, high-quality service where it is most needed. Approximately 70 percent of routes will be reduced, revised or eliminated, and the remaining routes will become overcrowded and unreliable. He described maps depicting possible service reductions countywide and in Bellevue. Nine of the 12 routes currently serving Bellevue College will be eliminated or reduced/modified.

Mr. Obeso commented on how transit saves the region money and how reductions in bus service will aggravate traffic congestion. In closing he said that transit demand is at an all-time high, yet limited resources make it necessary to cut services.

Mayor Lee questioned how to address issues such as those raised by the citizen who spoke earlier. Mr. Obeso said that every community wants more transit service, and there are always tradeoffs being made. He noted the addition of the RapidRide B Line between Bellevue and Redmond as an example of addressing a specific demand. Mr. Obeso said that reductions will unfortunately affect many in the community, and it will be impossible to avoid negative impacts.

Deputy Mayor Robertson stated that transit usage in Bellevue has increased 111 percent, and there are multiple employment and activity centers. She wants to ensure that Bellevue retains good service for its core routes. Ms. Robertson said there must be effective bus service connecting to light rail stations after light rail is implemented. She said effective transportation and transit are essential to support growth.

Mr. Obeso said he believes that Metro's strategic plan and services guidelines are aligned in that way with Bellevue's Transit Master Plan. The plans focus on retaining and strengthening those already strong connections. He talked about the importance of targeted strategic adjustments to make service changes having the highest positive and/or least negative impacts.

Councilmember Chelminiak commented on the map of possible route impacts in Bellevue. He noted that a number of routes are to be eliminated and others will be revised. Only a few remain unchanged, which he considers losing ground.

Mr. Obeso said the routes most likely to remain unchanged are the longer, all-day routes (e.g., the RapidRide B line).

In further response, Mr. Loewenherz referenced page SS 2-2 of the meeting packet, which lists the specific routes in Bellevue to be deleted, reduced/revised, and unchanged.

Councilmember Balducci expressed concern about the impending service reductions. She observed that the Council needs to work on two fronts: 1) Making the system as efficient and affordable as possible, and 2) Identifying additional resources including local options. Even if reductions are based on prioritizing high productivity routes and optimizing efficiencies, many citizens dependent on transit, especially the disabled and the elderly, are left without needed services. Ms. Balducci thanked Mr. Obeso for his work and the presentation.

Mr. Obeso confirmed that all plans indicate that transit demand will continue to grow. He noted that Community Transit services have been reduced by approximately 30 percent and Pierce County Transit has been cut nearly in half. So far, Metro has had smaller reductions and has been able to find efficiencies. However, additional revenue is critically needed.

Ms. Balducci strongly urged Bellevue's support for local options. She said many buses are significantly overcrowded, which raises safety issues as well.

Mayor Lee said he is a long-time advocate of transit funding. He suggested that, if certain bus routes can be reduced or eliminated with the introduction of light rail, perhaps money would be

available to reallocate toward providing strong bus connections to Bellevue's six light rail stations. He encouraged seeking funding from federal, state and local levels.

Councilmember Stokes said he appreciated the report. He said there is enough pressure on the state legislature to produce needed education funding. He is not optimistic about the ability to achieve more transit/transportation funding. He said it is frustrating, in general, to study and discuss issues when it is too late for the Council/City to affect outcomes.

Mayor Lee concurred with Mr. Stokes' comments. He commented on the need for the City to collaborate with partners on an ongoing basis to promote a long-term, regional vision.

Councilmember Wallace said the need for transit in Bellevue is real, especial when considering that Bellevue is the second largest economy in King County and will continue to grow. He suggested that support for additional revenue should be coupled with a request for a public vote.

Councilmember Chelminiak would like Bellevue representatives, including the City Council, to be authorized to support state legislation that would provide local revenue options for transit. He would accept putting this to a public vote although he does not believe that is necessary. He opined that the City needs to be on the record with the state legislature regarding the need for transit services.

Mayor Lee concurred. Mr. Chelminiak noted that the state legislature reopens with a special session next Monday.

Mr. Stokes agreed with the need for a strong Bellevue voice and suggested working with neighboring cities as well.

Councilmember Wallace concurred with Mr. Stokes' earlier comments that the appropriate time to have begun this discussion was last November. He observed that there is an ongoing issue of not involving the Council in certain issues until it is too late to influence an outcome. Mr. Wallace said he is on the record for supporting the local revenue option if it is supported by a local vote.

Ms. Balducci recalled that she commented on the need to support Metro funding early in the Council's process of establishing its state legislative agenda. She does not believe that a public vote is necessary. However she will support that approach if it is favored by a majority of the Council.

→ Councilmember Chelminiak moved that Bellevue representatives engage positively on finding a local revenue option for transit during the state legislative session, as long as that option is subject to a public vote. Deputy Mayor Robertson seconded the motion.

Mayor Lee asked regional issues staff to comment on the discussion.

Joyce Nichols, Interim Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, confirmed that the legislature's 30-day special session starts next Monday. She said the transportation budget and package have

been combined and they include support for local options for transit funding. However, the Council has not formally directed staff to highlight Bellevue's support for a local option. She recalled that there have been previous comments about the issue of whether the proposal should go to a public vote. Ms. Nichols observed that there will not be a transportation package from the state legislature until there is an operating budget agreement. However, staff and the City's lobbyist will work in Olympia for whatever the Council directs.

Councilmember Stokes reiterated his request that the City do a better job, in general, of prioritizing and planning for the long-range future. He expressed support for the motion. He agrees with expressing a strong position in favor of the local option.

Deputy Mayor Robertson observed that Councilmembers have appeared before the state legislature to express support for the proposed transportation package. However, she agrees with the importance of emphasizing specific support for the local revenue option for transit.

Mayor Lee expressed support for the motion.

→ The motion carried by a vote of 6-0.

At 8:08 p.m., Mayor Lee declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

/kaw