

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Extended Study Session

January 12, 2009
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room 1E-113
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Degginger, Deputy Mayor Balducci, and Councilmembers Bonincontri, Chelminiak¹, Davidson, Lee, and Noble

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

Deputy Mayor Balducci called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm., and announced recess to Executive Session for approximately 10 minutes to address one item of potential litigation.

The meeting resumed at 6:10 p.m., with Mayor Degginger presiding. Noting that the Sound Transit East Link project is the only agenda item, he announced that a Public Hearing on the project will be held before the City Council in February. He encouraged citizens to comment at that time on the proposed light rail system.

2. Oral Communications

- (a) Tracy Larson, Surrey Downs East Link Committee, said the Committee supports alternative B7 as well as a tunnel north of the Main Street light rail alignment. This would utilize the existing BNSF rail corridor and move the proposed Main Street transit portal north for downtown access. Ms. Larson said the Committee requests that the City initiate a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this option. Residents feel this light rail alignment protects residential neighborhoods, avoids severe traffic impacts, and minimizes downtown business disruptions.
- (b) Kevin Wallace spoke in favor of alignment alternatives B7 and C2T, which he feels best represent the values of the Bellevue community. This alignment best protects residential neighborhoods, minimizes traffic impacts and business disruptions, and protects the most structures from condemnation and demolition while providing fast, convenient, safe, and reliable transit service. Mr. Wallace asked the City Council to employ common sense in reviewing the conclusions of the DEIS. He noted that the study does not address traffic

¹ Councilmember Chelminiak arrived at 6:14 p.m.

impacts to roadways during the projected seven-year light rail construction process. As an example, he questioned the impact of fully or partially closing Bellevue Way south of downtown, as required by all Segment B alternatives except for B7 using the BNSF rail right-of-way. He described additional concerns including potential at-grade alignments through the downtown and the DEIS report's conclusion that an elevated alignment through the downtown would not lower the area's visual quality. Mr. Wallace noted that Sound Transit's estimated project costs do not include costs to the City as well as the costs for businesses and residents within the community. He encouraged the Council and the public to support Alternative B7 as the preferred alternative for the final EIS.

- (c) Patrick Bannon, Communications Director for Bellevue Downtown Association, described the activities of the BDA committee that has been studying the East Link project in preparation for formulating its recommendations later in the month. He thanked City staff for their work with the BDA and the community.

3. Study Session

- (a) Council Business and New Initiatives

Councilmember Noble announced that Deputy Mayor Balducci has been elected to chair the Eastside Transportation Partnership (ETP).

- (b) Sound Transit East Link Project: Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) Briefing and Discussion

City Manager Steve Sarkozy noted that tonight's meeting focuses exclusively on the Sound Transit East Link light rail project. On February 23, the Council will be asked to approve a comment letter identifying a preferred alternative and providing the City's recommendations to Sound Transit. On January 26, the Council will discuss alternative alignments and their compatibility with the City's Comprehensive Plan and the work of the Light Rail Best Practices Committee. A Public Hearing is scheduled for the City Council meeting on February 2.

Don Billen, Project Manager, Sound Transit, provided an update on the East Link light rail project. The Sound Transit Board is scheduled to identify a preferred alternative this spring, and the final Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared over the next 12-18 months. Mr. Billen briefly reviewed the list of public meetings and open houses throughout the region.

Mr. Billen recalled questions from the Council during the December 8 discussion. He explained that both the Sound Transit and Bellevue-Kirkland-Redmond ridership modeling incorporate land use, parking costs, congestion levels, and baseline transit service factors. However, due to differences in additional inputs used for the modeling (e.g., anticipated land use changes in the Bel-Red area), Bellevue's model forecasts higher transit ridership than the Sound Transit model for the no-build option. Both models use the same basic methodology to analyze differences in ridership levels under the build alternatives.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Balducci, Mr. Billen explained how the accuracy of model forecasts can be validated using a backcasting methodology.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Mr. Billen said the Sound Transit model does not incorporate projected development in the Bel-Red corridor through 2030. Mr. Billen said the model is based on data from the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), which projects significant growth in Bellevue's downtown but does not take into consideration potential redevelopment of the Bel-Red corridor. It also does not reflect potential redevelopment in Redmond's Overlake area.

Responding to Councilmember Noble, Mr. Billen said Sound Transit's no-build forecast assumes a six-lane SR 520 replacement bridge with tolls. The Sound Transit 2 plan anticipates service to Overlake Hospital by 2020 and service to Overlake Transit Center and Redmond by 2021. The EIS covers any terminus between Overlake Hospital and downtown Redmond in both 2020 and 2030, depending on the final Sound Transit 2 plan.

Dr. Davidson noted he has toured several light rail systems, many of which do not meet projected ridership levels. Mr. Billen explained that ridership modeling has become more accurate as transit service planning has expanded over the past few decades.

Councilmember Bonincontri listed potential factors that could affect transit ridership including concerns about climate change, the potential future usage of electric cars, and people choosing to combine transit usage with walking or bicycling a portion of their commute based on an interest in a healthier lifestyle. Mr. Billen said none of these factors are accounted for in any of the regional models. He acknowledged the difficulty in predicting possible behavioral factors that will influence transit usage.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Mr. Billen explained that the Puget Sound Regional Council develops economic growth forecasts and allocates the growth across the region. This data is then part of the information used to guide the planning of transit services.

Mr. Billen briefly reviewed ridership estimates for South Bellevue light rail alignment alternatives. Factors within the alternatives that produce different ridership levels include the walking distance to origins and destinations, park and ride access, and travel time for through riders. The optimal system will balance access to the service with overall travel time. Mr. Billen noted that South Bellevue alternative B7 causes both a shift in ridership and a reduction in total demand due in part to a decrease in bus transfers.

Mr. Billen described the importance of integrating bus and light rail systems by properly addressing the duplication of services, market overlap, and connections between the two types of services. He reviewed potential alignment and service scenarios through 2030.

Mr. Billen responded to questions of clarification.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Billen clarified how different light rail alignments would affect bus service along Bellevue Way. The South Bellevue park and ride lot would be expanded only if light rail serves that location.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Billen explained that station locations, such as the potential station and new park and ride lot near SE 8th Street, are influenced by the I-405 master plan and the widening of I-405.

Responding to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Billen said Metro and Sound Transit planners work together to design services that are logical to the customer and protect existing riders. In further response, Mr. Billen said it is possible that bus service hours will be reallocated within the East Subarea with the implementation of light rail.

Responding to Mr. Lee, Mr. Billen said that Metro and Sound Transit have worked well together over the past 10 years to complement each other's service.

Responding to Ms. Balducci, Mr. Billen commented on the goal of maximizing total transit usage by improving local bus service while also providing access to the light rail system.

Dr. Davidson opined that estimated daily boardings of 4,000 for Bellevue Way SE and 3,000 for downtown Redmond appear unrealistically high.

Councilmember Bonincontri observed that alternative B7 does not capture bus transfers from Renton and Newcastle as well as some of the other options might be able to do.

Councilmember Lee expressed concern that local bus service could be adversely affected by the implementation of light rail.

Based on current transit behaviors, Councilmember Chelminiak expressed doubt that daily boardings for the I-90/Rainier Avenue stop will be as high as is estimated. Councilmember Noble concurred.

Responding to Mr. Noble, Mr. Billen said daily boardings at the South Bellevue Park and Ride are higher than the 118th Avenue SE station due to a higher number of bus transfer patrons.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Mr. Billen briefly reviewed estimates related to how people will access the South Bellevue station (i.e., bus, car, walking/biking).

Mr. Billen reviewed the five cost estimating contingencies incorporated into the analysis:

- 1) Allowance for design details that are not yet known, 2) Allocated contingency for known variables of which the details are currently unknown (e.g., geotechnical conditions),
- 3) Construction change order contingency, 4) Unallocated contingency for variables that are unknown at this time, and 5) Project reserve.

The City of Bellevue's influence on project costs is dependent upon management of the project scope, permit requirements and timeliness, utility relocations, right-of-way preservation, and risk allocation.

Sound Transit staff provided an overview of the 19 possible route choices for the following designated segments: 1) I-90, 2) South Bellevue, 3) Downtown Bellevue, and 4) Bel-Red/Overlake. System-wide East Link daily ridership ranges from 43,500 to 48,000 for the alternatives. Project costs vary based on whether an option includes surface, elevated, and/or tunnel elements. Environmental impacts will affect project costs as well.

Mr. Billen reviewed the I-90 segment and its alternative elements.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. Billen said light rail will be able to travel at full speed (55 mph) across the I-90 bridge. However, speeds will be reduced for the transitions between the fixed roadway and the floating bridge. These fluctuations have been accounted for in the travel time estimates.

At 8:00 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared a short break.

The meeting resumed at 8:12 p.m.

Sue Comis, Segment Manager, Sound Transit, reviewed the five alternatives for the South Bellevue segment.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Ms. Comis explained that an elevated line and parking garage at the South Bellevue Park and Ride would be approximately four stories high facing the Mercer Slough, and approximately two stories high from the Bellevue Way sidewalk perspective.

Deputy Mayor Balducci expressed concern about the visual impacts of all of the elevated alternatives.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, James Irish, Environmental Manager for Sound Transit, said water runoff from Park and Ride facilities will be mitigated through state-of-the-art techniques.

Ms. Comis reviewed a visual simulation of the Mt. Baker elevated station. She then continued her description of the Segment B alternatives, which involve both elevated and at-grade portions.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Ms. Comis said the three houses near the Winters House will be acquired to accommodate the light rail line under some of the Segment B alternatives.

Continuing the presentation, Ms. Comis explained that alternatives B2A and B3 involve alignment along 112th Avenue SE via an at-grade line along the existing median of the roadway. Alternatives B2A (at-grade) and B2E (elevated) place a station at SE 8th Street. Ms. Comis noted that alternative B7 includes a new bridge across the Mercer Slough.

Ms. Comis said an elevated configuration from I-90 into South Bellevue adds approximately \$40 million to the project cost. An elevated South Bellevue station adds another \$40 million, and the

transition portion between the station and the Winters House adds approximately \$25 million. An at-grade line would result in lower project costs.

Sound Transit staff continued to respond to comments and questions of clarification regarding the alternatives.

Mr. Irish noted that locating the light rail line along the median on Bellevue Way is based in part on reducing the impact to the historic Winters House.

Mr. Billen referred the Council to page ES-14 of the DEIS Executive Summary [Page 3-34 of the Council packet] for a table reviewing the key trade-offs of the Segment B alternatives. These include the type of access provided in South Bellevue as well as the types of operating impacts and construction impacts.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Irish said the B7 alternative results in noise impacts to a higher number of living units due to the proximity of multifamily buildings. However, he explained that the noise impacts for all alternatives will be fully mitigated. Mr. Irish noted that the table on page ES-14 reflects both traffic-related and light rail-related noise impacts.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Ms. Comis explained that the areas surrounding light rail stations will be what the cities want to see there based on their own Comprehensive Plans and zoning designations. Sound Transit will not propose any zoning changes.

Responding to Mr. Degginger, Ms. Comis explained that turn movements to access the South Bellevue Park and Ride, and at any location involving light rail, will be controlled with traffic lights.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Ms. Comis said no businesses will be displaced with alternative B3. The four business displacements under the B7 alternative are associated with the new Park and Ride facility.

Ms. Comis briefly reviewed six alternatives for Segment C, Downtown Bellevue. Three of the alternatives involve tunnels. All of the alternatives have two or three stations including one at the Bellevue Transit Center and one at the hospital/medical campus on 116th Avenue. She described the techniques of cut-and-cover tunnel construction and mined/bored tunnel construction. There are both bored and cut-and-cover tunnel options along Main Street. Ms. Comis showed visual simulations of the two types of tunnels and briefly reviewed the impacts.

Ms. Comis reviewed the C4A at-grade alternative as well as two elevated alternatives using either 112th NE or 110th NE.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted that there is no route coming up from a tunnel at approximately NE 2nd Street or at any location north of Main Street. Ms. Comis explained that a large construction staging area (four to five acres) is needed to accommodate a tunnel portal, which would involve significant property acquisitions as well.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Ms. Comis said that stations at the Bellevue Transit Center and the hospital/medical complex were identified early on as priorities for the light rail system. The south downtown/Old Bellevue/Main Street area station present in some of the alternatives provides additional access, although one could argue that this additional station location is not needed. In further response, Ms. Comis said station stops are brief (i.e., 20 to 30 seconds).

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Billen agreed that a fully grade-separated light rail line is ideal in terms of travel times.

Responding to Ms. Balducci, Mr. Billen said City staff is conducting its own analysis of downtown traffic impacts associated with light rail implementation.

Ms. Comis noted that two choices for the downtown segment are the location of the hospital station and the preferred southern tunnel portal.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted the Sound Transit report's references to the Surrey Downs District Court site. He clarified that the court facility was intended to be temporary, and the future use of the site will be to fully develop the existing park.

Mr. Billen reviewed that key trade-offs for the downtown segment are cost, the type of access provided in the Downtown, construction risk, and the types of operating and construction impacts.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Balducci, Mr. Billen said in cases in which it is necessary to purchase City park property, Sound Transit proposes purchasing replacement park land. If McCormick Park is impacted, Sound Transit proposes purchasing land to the north to maintain the buffer between downtown and the residential area. In further response, Mr. Billen clarified that the property to be acquired by Sound Transit is needed for construction staging, and it would later be developed into a park.

Responding to Ms. Bonincontri, Mr. Billen said construction contingencies address risks and their mitigation. He acknowledged that tunneling options typically carry a higher level of construction risk.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Ms. Comis and Mr. Billen said construction risks associated with the two tunnel options are different, but one method is not necessarily more or less risky overall. Mr. Irish offered to provide additional details regarding the relative risks.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. Billen said it is likely that Sound Transit will begin East Link construction prior to full completion of the University link. In terms of tunneling risks, Dr. Davidson suggested learning from the experience in Portland, Oregon. Ms. Balducci agreed that Portland's experience reflects some serious challenges.

Responding to City Manager Steve Sarkozy, Mr. Irish said alternative C7E is classified as having no substantial change in visual quality because of the proximity of the alignment along I-405.

Responding to Ms. Balducci's comment that there are residences along 112th Avenue SE, Mr. Irish said the visual assessment is based on the scale and height of the structure as it goes through a developed area, as well as to the proximity of the freeway.

Leonard McGee, Segment Manager, Sound Transit, reviewed the four Segment D alternatives for the Bel-Red/Overlake area. Two alternatives (at-grade and elevated) utilize the NE 15th/NE 16th Street corridor to be developed by the City as part of the redevelopment of the Bel-Red area. Land use changes in Redmond's Overlake area are underway as well. The number of stations for all four alternatives ranges from two to four, and all include a station at the Overlake Transit Center. Alternative D3 along NE 20th Street involves deep trenches under both 148th and 152nd Avenues, which results in property impacts on both sides of NE 20th Street.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. Billen said Bellevue's proposed Bel-Red plan is not taken into consideration in the Bel-Red/Overlake alternatives. If the City's plans are adopted, ridership would likely be higher.

→ At 10:00 p.m., Deputy Mayor Balducci moved to extend the meeting to 10:30 p.m. Councilmember Chelminiak seconded the motion.

→ The motion to extend the meeting carried by a vote of 7-0.

Mr. Sarkozy observed that only one station is identified in Bellevue's Bel-Red corridor, which potentially services approximately 10,000 homes as well as business development anticipated in the redevelopment of the area. However, the Overlake Village Station in Redmond is funded, reflecting an apparent inequity. Mr. Sarkozy suggested that perhaps some of the incoming westbound trips could be captured at the Overlake Transit Center, which might also provide the opportunity for an expanded Park and Ride facility.

Mr. McGee said a modest expansion of the Overlake Transit Center Park and Ride from 170 to 320 spaces is deliberately intended to avoid further impacts to the already congested area. He noted concerns from Microsoft regarding this impact. The Overlake Village Station is consistent with Redmond's plans related to the extension of light rail into its downtown.

Mr. Sarkozy noted that the subject area in Redmond is 35 acres, while Bellevue's Bel-Red corridor represents up to 900 acres.

Councilmember Chelminiak observed that East Link maintenance facility 2 is located in an area targeted by the City of Bellevue for residential development.

Mr. McGee said Sound Transit's initial analysis was looking at the Bel-Red corridor's current industrial uses. He acknowledged, however, that East Link alternatives for the area are no longer consistent with Bellevue's land use planning. Sound Transit is considering locations in

Redmond as well for maintenance facilities. However, maintenance facilities are not funded in the Sound Transit 2 plan and can therefore be addressed later.

In further response to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Billen suggested that the City provide input regarding maintenance facilities locations in its letter to the Sound Transit Board. This would allow for further consideration of options in the final EIS.

Councilmember Chelminiak opined that there should be some study of the potential implications related to the redevelopment of the Bel-Red corridor. Mr. Irish explained that the Bel-Red alternatives are consistent with Bellevue's current Comprehensive Plan. If the Bel-Red Subarea Plan is adopted prior to the final EIS, and the land use changes and growth forecasts are included in the PSRC adopted forecast, Sound Transit will be able to revise its information for the final EIS.

Mayor Degginger thanked Sound Transit staff for the presentation.

Mr. Degginger encouraged Councilmembers to think about the principles they would like to utilize to guide continued Council discussion and review.

At 10:08 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared the meeting adjourned.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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