

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Extended Study Session

February 9, 2009
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room 1E-113
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Degginger and Councilmembers Bonincontri, Chelminiak, Davidson, Lee, and Noble

ABSENT: Deputy Mayor Balducci

1. Executive Session

Councilmember Chelminiak called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm., and announced recess to Executive Session for approximately 10 minutes to address two items of potential litigation.

The meeting resumed at 6:13 p.m., with Mayor Degginger presiding.

2. Oral Communications

- (a) Kevin Wallace, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, commented on his handout regarding alignment options for Sound Transit light rail. He encouraged the comparison of ridership between segments A, B and C. He explained that option B3 reflects only 500 more riders than option B7 in 2020, which he feels is not sufficient justification for B3. He referenced Table D-8 from the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), noting that in 2020 there is no impact to Bellevue Way under option B7. However, the impact to Bellevue Way is 50 percent worse under option B3. Continuing, Mr. Wallace explained why option C2T is preferred to C3T. He encouraged Council support of options B7 and C2T.
- (b) Cheryl Stillwell, an Enatai resident, questioned the scheduling of an additional meeting between the Enatai Neighborhood Association and City staff after residents already voted overwhelmingly in support of the B7 alignment at its annual meeting. Ms. Stillwell listed numerous neighborhoods and business groups who support option B7 as well. She is opposed to what she feels is the City's attempt to influence residents toward another option, when they have already spoken in favor of the B7 alignment.

- (c) Robert Zander spoke on behalf of Mercer Park residents living along 118th Avenue, who strongly feel that the B7 light rail alignment will not best serve Bellevue residents. He and his neighbors support option B3, which provides good access and transit service without going through neighborhoods.
- (d) Tom Diller, representing the Diller family, spoke about the Meydenbauer stabilization project and proposed Ordinance No. 5856. He said the family is currently involved in the condemnation process and is supportive of the project. Mr. Diller described previous discussions with the City regarding indemnification issues. He wants to ensure that his family is protected from any unanticipated outcomes of the project and the City's easement. Mr. Diller requested a delay in the condemnation process to allow time for his family and the City to discuss this issue.
- (e) Richard Leeds expressed concern about the impact of light rail alignments on the pedestrian bike path in the Enatai area.
- (f) Jim Hutchinson, Puget Sound Energy, described a coordinated effort with the Lake Hills Neighborhood Association to deliver compact fluorescent light bulbs and to speak to neighbors about the importance of energy conservation and efficiency.

3. Study Session

- (a) Council Business and New Initiatives
 - Councilmember Chelminiak moved to excuse Deputy Mayor Balducci from the regular meetings of the City Council on February 9 and February 17, 2009. Councilmember Bonincontri seconded the motion.
 - The motion to excuse Deputy Mayor Balducci from the regular meetings of the City Council on February 9 and February 17, 2009, carried by a vote of 6-0.
 - Councilmember Noble moved to appoint Dr. Brian Plaskon to fill the unexpired term of a position on the Human Services Commission, which will be eligible for reappointment on May 31, 2011. Mr. Chelminiak seconded the motion.
 - The motion to appoint Dr. Brian Plaskon to fill the unexpired term on the Human Services Commission carried by a vote of 6-0.
- (b) Ordinance No. 5856 authorizing and providing for condemnation of property rights required for CIP Plan No. D-86, Stream Channel Modification Program, otherwise known as the Meydenbauer Sewer Replacement and Bank Stabilization Project.

City Manager Steve Sarkozy opened discussion regarding the condemnation of property rights associated with the Meydenbauer stream channel modification project.

Lacey Madche, Legal Planner, explained that City staff is continuing to negotiate with the property owners to resolve the condemnation issues. The Ordinance does not require that the City condemn the property. Ms. Madche noted that condemnation is always an action of last resort.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Ms. Madche said the City hopes to be able to reach an agreement with the Diller family and to avoid filing a petition of condemnation with the Superior Court.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Ms. Madche said the City Attorney's Office will keep the Council informed about negotiations with the property owners.

Responding to Councilmember Noble, Ms. Madche confirmed that the project has specific time constraints. Because construction involves a stream corridor, the City is limited to a fish window which begins July 16th and ends September 30th. The purpose of asking Council to adopt this Ordinance now is to ensure that if the City and property owners are not able to reach a settlement, there will be enough time to file with Superior Court to receive the relief requested. Ms. Madche concurred with Mr. Noble that the project could be delayed until next year if the City is unable to meet this window of opportunity.

→ Councilmember Chelminiak moved to approve Ordinance No. 5856, and Councilmember Lee seconded the motion.

→ The motion to approve Ordinance No. 5856 carried by a vote of 6-0.

- (c) Sound Transit East Link Project: Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) Technical Comments, Outreach Update, and Initial Direction on Preferred Alignments

City Manager Steve Sarkozy recalled ongoing discussions regarding the Sound Transit East Link project and its future alignment through Bellevue. He noted that decisions affecting the project will ultimately be made by the Sound Transit Board. Transportation Director Goran Sparrman welcomed staff from Sound Transit and introduced the presentation.

Bernard van de Kamp, Regional Projects Manager, reviewed outreach activities to date and noted that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) comment period ends on Feb 25.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp explained that he was approached by the Enatai Neighborhood Association requesting that City staff attend their next meeting to provide information on the project and respond to questions. Similar meetings have been held with other neighborhood associations over the past two months. The meeting is hosted by the neighborhood association and is scheduled for Thursday, February 12th, at 7:00 p.m. in City Hall.

Don Billen, Project Manager, Sound Transit, provided an update on outreach activities associated with the East Link light rail project. Approximately 500 people attended five open houses, 100 people testified, and additional written comments have been received daily.

Mr. Billen said there have been a number of questions related to access to the light rail system through the South Bellevue park and ride lot at Bellevue Way or the BNSF railway corridor. He introduced Mike Bergman, Sound Transit Express Program Manager, to address this segment.

Mr. Bergman described how light rail could access the South Bellevue and 118th Avenue park and ride lots and stations, noting that the South Bellevue park and ride location provides more direct access involving fewer signalized intersections. Mr. Bergman reviewed existing transit service in South Bellevue and how it would connect to light rail. He noted there is approximately a half mile of extra travel distance each way for routes involving 112th Avenue, as well as increased operational costs and lower reliability due to traffic signals.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Bergman said the cost of the direct access project at NE 6th Street and I-405 was approximately \$100 million.

Sound Transit staff responded to a series of questions of clarification regarding the proposed alignment alternatives and station locations.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. Billen said he was not aware of any meetings with the owners of Greenbaum Home Furnishings. However, there were multiple mailings to addresses along the corridor throughout the scoping and project development process, including the release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) report.

Councilmember Noble questioned the potential for connecting light rail to the South Bellevue park and ride, then continuing to the east and circling around on the current BNSF right-of-way to connect to a large park and ride lot at SE 8th Street. He noted the need for more and/or larger park and ride lots. Since the South Bellevue park and ride lot will be closed and rebuilt, he wondered if any consideration has been given to moving the facility closer to the freeway.

Mr. Billen acknowledged that the alternative has been suggested. However, the significant challenges of the surrounding wetlands and overall traffic flow of the area make it an undesirable location for a significantly expanded park and ride facility.

Councilmember Lee feels it is important to consider the long-term goals and service levels to be achieved when weighing mitigation measures and costs.

Continuing the presentation, Mr. Sparrman reviewed traffic conditions at Bellevue Way SE and the South Bellevue Park and Ride as they relate to future light rail service. Potential ways to mitigate traffic flow include grade separation of light rail access into the park and ride lot and alignment to the east of Bellevue Way. Mr. Sparrman reviewed traffic conditions at SE 8th Street and 118th Avenue SE. He explained that 118th Avenue SE is a two-lane road which would be

difficult to widen to handle added traffic from the park and ride lot. This alternative could involve measures to mitigate noise and to modify the intersection configuration.

Mayor Degginger noted concerns related to the proximity of the BNSF right-of-way to residential areas. Mr. Billen said there are a number of places along the Central Link alignment in Seattle in which residences are close to light rail. The specific concern voiced in terms of the BNSF alignment is whether Sound Transit has accounted for the recent widening of I-405 in its planning. Mr. Billen explained that Sound Transit acquired the as-built drawings from WSDOT and confirmed that the horizontal light rail footprint is consistent with the I-405 Master Plan. There is sufficient space for the B7 alignment through this location. Mr. Billen noted his understanding that one of the sound walls to be built will be between the rail ROW and multifamily housing. However, there could also be a need for a retaining wall in this location due to the grading change.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Billen stated his understanding that the planned sound wall wraps around one of the residences. Sue Comis, Segment Manager for Sound Transit, said the sound wall is not yet built but would be at the Brookshire Condominiums around one of the buildings. It has been designed and it is five feet from the property line. Light rail would operate in the WSDOT right-of-way between the freeway and sound wall. Sound Transit would need to review more specific information about the wall including the actual height relative to the light rail facility.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Sparrman said the South Bellevue park and ride lot connects to Bellevue Way, which carries approximately 37,000 cars per day. In contrast, 118th Avenue SE at the SE 8th Street park and ride location carries 7,500 cars per day.

Councilmember Bonincontri inquired about the integration of bus service with light rail stations and travel times between specific transit centers. Mr. Bergman said the joint Sound Transit and Metro team assumes that Sound Transit routes serving the south I-405 corridor would continue to come into downtown Bellevue and serve that major destination, regardless of what light rail stations they also serve. The travel time from downtown Bellevue to the downtown Renton transit center is currently about 25 minutes. The team is also reviewing ways to integrate service with downtown Issaquah.

Mr. Sarkozy restated the Council's concern regarding the connection between bus service and the light rail system. He questioned whether there has been an analysis of the number of riders expected on various alignments, as well as where they are coming from and where they are going. This would help to determine the out-of-direction travel involved in the alternatives.

Mr. Billen said the ridership forecasting model attempts to account for such differences between the route alternatives. The forecast analysis indicates that the 118th Avenue/SE 8th Street station location results in a higher level of out-of-direction travel.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Mr. Billen said the two primary forms of noise mitigation under consideration are sound walls and residential sound insulation.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed Bellevue's light rail guiding principles, and moved into a discussion of the segment alternatives. He briefly reviewed Segment E, which connects the Overlake area with downtown Redmond.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp acknowledged that Segment E is not funded and the timing of Segment E is unknown. Mr. Sparrman said the Sound Transit 2 package includes some funding for early engineering work on this segment.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed Segment D extending from Bellevue's hospital district to the Overlake Transit Center. Alternatives include at-grade and elevated configurations. Mr. van de Kamp noted that Bellevue's Bel-Red Corridor Plan is consistent with the D2A alignment.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted the preference raised by Wright Runstad regarding a light rail stop at its development along 124th Avenue. He would like to include this suggestion in Bellevue's comment letter to Sound Transit.

Mr. van de Kamp said that option has not been studied in the DEIS. Mr. Sparrman said that additional engineering work to explore this option would be beneficial from the City's perspective as well in terms of enhanced service for its residents.

In further response to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Sparrman said that with this option the light rail would stay at a lower elevation through the Spring District station between 120th and 124th, and then become a slightly elevated structure to clear the wetlands.

Mr. Chelminiak questioned how this light rail stop would fit into the plan to develop the 15/16th Street corridor through the Bel-Red area. He noted his concern regarding the potential for an elevated structure. Mr. Sparrman said the alternatives are predominately at-grade, except for a slight elevation over the wetlands and again over Northup Way to connect to SR 520. The common theme for the 15/16th Street corridor is an at-grade roadway median light rail configuration.

Mr. van de Kamp described the alternatives for Segment C running between the hospital district and downtown Bellevue, and commented on their compatibility with existing transportation and land use policies. He reviewed the tradeoffs between at-grade, elevated, and tunnel options as well as those associated with alternative connections to Segment B serving South Bellevue. Estimated costs for Segment C options range from \$500 million for elevated structures to \$1.6 million for a Bellevue Way tunnel.

Responding to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. van de Kamp said a number of factors determine ridership estimates including boarding estimates and proximity to ultimate destinations

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp explained that a bored option for C2T is not possible due to the depth that would be required and the existing topography. For this alternative

there might be a possibility for boring just south of NE 2nd Street underneath Main Street. Boring is a potential option for traveling under Surrey Downs Park.

Dr. Davidson expressed concern that the cut and cover alternatives will significantly disrupt traffic during construction. He noted the Convention Center's concern regarding the potential for a portal at its front door.

In further response, Mr. van de Kamp said an option going under I-405 would require a long and expensive tunnel with a number of challenges related to the topography. Mr. Sparrman added that underground soil nails in the downtown that were put in place for stability during high-rise construction would interfere with a boring option under I-405.

Councilmember Noble stated his position that there should be two stations in downtown Bellevue, with the second one located closer to Bellevue Way. He feels two stations would increase ridership.

Responding to Mr. Lee, Mr. van de Kamp said travel time planning seeks to optimize the balance between the number of riders and the number of access points to the system.

Mayor Degginger commented that given the lack of right-of-way in downtown Bellevue, light rail at-grade options are not feasible. In addition, an elevated configuration is not considered compatible with the City's vision for downtown development. Mr. Degginger said it is therefore necessary to focus on the tunnel options.

Mr. Chelminiak noted that while many differing points of view were presented at the public hearing, there appeared to be agreement within the community in favor of a tunnel option through the downtown.

Mr. Noble concurred, noting his preference for a portal at NE 6th Street. If there is Council consensus in support of downtown tunneling, he recommends that the comment letter to Sound Transit reference the report of Bellevue's Light Rail Best Practices Committee, which reflects testimony and findings on this issue.

Mr. Lee supports tunneling as well, although he has some concerns about locating a tunnel portal too close to the Convention Center. He suggested a portal at 114th Avenue NE and NE 6th Street on the west side of I-405 as a more direct route into downtown.

Councilmember Bonincontri expressed support for option C2T, as well as a crossing at NE 6th Street instead of NE 12th Street. She is concerned, however, that construction of a cut and cover tunnel will have significant traffic impacts.

Dr. Davidson also supports option C2T. He noted an interest in Mr. Lee's suggestion and wondered if such an option could be designed to blend into the freeway at NE 6th Street.

Mayor Degginger noted general Council support for option C2T.

AT 8:38 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared a break. The meeting reconvened at 8:48 p.m.

Mr. van de Kamp confirmed Council's direction related to option C2T, and suggested discussion of how that connects to Segment B alternatives. Option B1 is an at-grade profile that does not connect to C2T. The highest cost alternative is a bored tunnel underneath the Surrey Downs neighborhood with no surface disruption. The mid-range alternative uses the southeast corner of 112th Avenue and Main Street (Red Lion hotel site). The least costly alternative involves a tunnel portal on the south side of Main Street between 112th and 110th Avenues. However, this alternative represents the highest residential impact and would require the acquisition of homes and businesses along the south side of Main Street to create a construction staging area.

Councilmember Noble said he is not in favor of displacing residences and businesses on the south side of Main Street. He opined that the option involving the Red Lion site would be the most efficient approach.

Councilmember Lee stated he would support the option with the least neighborhood impacts, even if the project costs are higher.

Mr. van de Kamp continued with a review of the remaining Segment B options, commenting on the positive and negative aspects of each.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp said the alternatives are designed to minimize impacts to the Mercer Slough wetlands.

Mr. van de Kamp said options B2A (112th at-grade), B2E (112th elevated), and B3 (112th bypass) are the most compatible with the Council's policies regarding light rail. He briefly described implications for HOV access at the I-90/Bellevue Way interchange. He noted a possible option of running along the east side of 112th Avenue SE. However, this variation was not studied in the DEIS.

Mr. Noble said he is concerned that all of the Segment B alternatives, except for B7, have significant construction impacts including closing the South Bellevue Park & Ride for what he estimates would be at least two years. He is further concerned that while the DEIS acknowledges that mitigation measures will be necessary, it is not specific about the types, costs or effectiveness of mitigation measures.

Continuing, Mr. Noble questioned the assumptions and methodology used to conclude that the B7 alternative represents the lowest ridership and is therefore the least cost effective. The DEIS states that it is misleading to look only at boardings in evaluating the B7 option. Mr. Noble said this should be considered with respect to the B3 alignment as well. Total system ridership between the two options differs by less than 2,000, which the DEIS states is not a substantial difference.

Mr. Noble said he is concerned about the impacts on residents along Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE, as well as those along 118th Avenue SE. He recalled past discussions during the process to update the Downtown Implementation Plan (DIP) about considering satellite parking lots around the downtown. He feels a park and ride lot at SE 8th Street/118th fits within that vision. He would favor a solution that could move the South Bellevue park and ride lot closer to I-90, from which light rail would continue to SE 8th and 118th. He acknowledged the environmental wetland issues inherent in this solution. However, he feels this would best serve regional connectivity.

Mr. Lee said it is important to maintain a regional, long-term perspective in designing the system. He is willing to consider option B7 and a station at 118th.

Councilmember Bonincontri described her preference for stations that connect to active pedestrian traffic. While the B7 route is the least disruptive to neighborhoods, it primarily serves the park and ride location at 118th where there is little or no pedestrian traffic. The South Bellevue park and ride lot has limited pedestrian potential as well because it is largely surrounded by the Mercer Slough. Ms. Bonincontri described her vision of a mass transit system with a heavy pedestrian access orientation. She is leaning in favor of option B3, but would like an option that would move the 118th station to a location that would better connect pedestrians with transit.

Dr. Davidson supports option B7 and is sensitive to the concerns of condominium owners along 118th Avenue. However, based on mitigation measures that have been implemented in Portland's system, he feels the impacts could be effectively addressed and minimized. Overall he feels there is a better chance to mitigate the impacts of Option B7 than any of the other options. Dr. Davidson reiterated his interest in avoiding impacts for Greenbaum Home Furnishings.

Mr. Chelminiak acknowledged that B7 is a workable option. However, it does not reflect the highest ridership levels and wait times are longer. He agrees with Ms. Bonincontri's analysis regarding the absence of pedestrian activity at the SE 8th Street/118th location. Mr. Chelminiak does not find any of the routes using Bellevue Way to be completely acceptable. After making a series of comments regarding the evening's discussion, Mr. Chelminiak said he favors Mr. Noble's suggestion to locate stations at both the South Bellevue park and ride lot and SE 8th Street/118th. He values future light rail as a community amenity.

Mayor Degginger spoke to the challenge of introducing light rail into the community while keeping long-term needs at the forefront. The challenge he observes with option B7 is whether the SE 8th Street location would be able to accommodate future increases in ridership, as space is limited for expanding either the park and ride or adjacent streets. Mr. Degginger said he shares Mr. Noble's serious concerns regarding construction impacts. He would like an analysis of the feasibility of light rail along the east side of Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE, as a modification of option B3 using the 112th Avenue median.

Dr. Davidson is interested in serving residents within Bellevue as well as the region. He noted that the SE 8th Street location would open up connections to the larger community via the Lake Hills Connector and Richards Road. Mr. Degginger concurred, noting the potential for connections to areas south of I-90 as well.

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

→ The motion to extend the meeting carried by a vote of 6-0.

(d) 2008 Comprehensive Plan Amendments relating to Pedestrian-Bicycle Plan Update

Mr. Sparrman opened discussion regarding Comprehensive Plan Amendments related to the Pedestrian-Bicycle Plan update. Council adoption of the 2008 CPA package is scheduled for February 17. The purpose of tonight's agenda item is to provide information requested during the January 5 discussion with Council.

Mr. Sparrman briefly reviewed the Planning Commission's recommendations to maintain 140th Avenue NE bicycle improvements on the project list, modify the project description to better address community concerns, and to reaffirm the high priority rating for a future bicycle project as recommended by the Transportation Commission.

Mr. Sparrman explained that both the 1993 and 1999 Ped-Bike Transportation Plans identified a bicycle lane project through the 140th Avenue NE corridor. The draft 2008 Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan identifies the project as one of 11 high priority bicycle corridor connections. Mr. Sparrman described concepts and possible alternatives for the project, and responded to questions of clarification.

Mr. Sparrman reviewed the draft language of the project description (140th Avenue NE between NE 60th and NE 24th Street), which has been revised pursuant to staff's previous discussion with the Council.

Councilmember Lee referenced the argument made by some that 148th Avenue is not a good candidate for a bicycle project because it is a busy arterial. Mr. Lee said a number of bicyclists who would prefer this route to connect to employment centers. Mr. Sparrman acknowledged that bicycle commuters often prefer to ride in a traffic lane. However, the challenge is to create a project that works for many stakeholders including recreation bicyclists of all ages.

Mr. Noble said he appreciates staff's time and work on this issue. He noted, however, that the Bridle Trails community has been opposed to the project since its inception. The project does not meet the criteria of connecting activity centers, and he feels the project should be eliminated based on residents' interests. Mr. Noble commented that the project could make sense only if the segment to the south between NE 8th and NE 24th Streets is completed. Councilmember Noble asked that this proposal be removed from the Ped-Bike Plan.

Councilmember Bonincontri concurred with Mr. Noble. After Council's January discussion, she went out and walked the entire facility. She does not see how the road could be effectively widened without changing the character of the corridor. The road currently has a rural feel with the multi-purpose trail on one side and a ditch and utility poles on the other.

Mr. Lee concurred as well, noting that he is sensitive to residents' concerns and willing to consider other routes.

Mr. Chelminiak commented that it is often challenging to achieve a community consensus for this type of project. He prefers to see a comprehensive approach to transportation facilities projects versus projects targeted specifically at adding bike lanes. He said it is difficult to envision adding bike lanes on 140th Avenue NE that could be outside of the existing roadway.

Dr. Davidson concurred with Mr. Noble. He noted that the rural character of Bellevue's section of the corridor contrasts sharply with its development within Redmond's borders. He is aware of residents' opposition to the project and would support removing it from the 2008 Ped-Bike Plan.

Mayor Degginger noted a Council consensus to remove the project from the 2008 Ped-Bike Plan. Mr. Sparrman said the proposal will be eliminated from the Plan Update to be presented for Council action on February 17.

Responding to staff, Councilmembers agreed to continue to identify in the Ped-Bike Plan a reference to an alternative north-south bicycle connection through the general area. Mr. Noble noted that many of the roads already have bike lanes.

At 10:30 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared the meeting adjourned.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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