

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Extended Study Session

February 23, 2009
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room 1E-113
Bellevue, Washington

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

ABSENT: None

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:07 pm., with Mayor Degginger presiding. There was no Executive Session.

2. Oral Communications

- (a) Karen Johnson, Overlake Hospital Medical Center, presented a gift basket to Deputy Mayor Balducci to welcome the new addition to her family.
- (b) Kevin Wallace, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, reported that the Chamber today adopted an update to its light rail position, which is to encourage the City Council to ask Sound Transit for further information and study on Segment B alternatives through a Supplemental EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) process. The Chamber is concerned that Sound Transit has not proposed acceptable mitigation measures to address construction and traffic impacts along Bellevue Way (B3 route) or along the B7 route at SE 8th Street and 118th Avenue SE. While the Chamber is interested in the City's proposed alternative route running at-grade light rail along the east side of Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE, this is not an option under consideration by Sound Transit. Mr. Wallace noted the Chamber's memo outlining areas in need of further study by Sound Transit.
- (c) Dave Karle, who served on the Light Rail Best Practices Committee, expressed support for alternative B7, or failing that, a compromise as proposed by the City for a modified at-grade B3 alignment. Mr. Karle feels that high ridership will only come with fast trains, and route B7 will be the fastest option in the B segment with the fewest number of

road crossings and stations. Successful light rail systems use existing right-of-way, which is cheaper and faster to develop. Mr. Karle said it is critical to choose the right alignment to ensure ridership. He noted the huge costs associated with realigning San Jose's light rail system.

- (d) Barbara Shepherd, speaking on behalf of the Mercer Park and Brookshire Condominiums Homeowners Association, thanked City and Sound Transit staff for their willingness to meet with residents to discuss the light rail issues. She noted that the B7 route has lower ridership and slightly higher costs. Residents are concerned that these costs will increase further due to work related to the widening of I-405 and to address sound and traffic congestion mitigation. Ms. Shepherd expressed concern that the implementation of Option B7 will eliminate Metro bus routes.
- (e) Winston Lee, Belmore Homeowners Association, spoke regarding the proposed Puget Sound Energy substation in East Bellevue at site D and its negative impacts. He submitted his comments in writing. He expressed concern that more than 30 businesses could be displaced by the substation.
- (f) Mike Koenig, President of Belmore Homeowners Association, reported on his contact with Puget Sound Energy regarding its substation site selection criteria, which includes convenience and costs. However, Mr. Koenig said the criteria does not address issues such as the impact on tax revenues when businesses are displaced. He further questioned the impacts of locating an electrical substation next to medical offices and facilities. Mr. Koenig asked for the Council's help in identifying the appropriate criteria for selecting a substation site.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, City Manager Steve Sarkozy explained that this matter is currently being reviewed by staff. PSE is proceeding to establish the site as an essential public facility under state law. The application will be heard before the City's Hearing Examiner in the near future. Residents may contact Land Use Director Carol Helland for further information.

Deputy Mayor Balducci explained that because this matter is subject to the quasi-judicial process, the City Council cannot become actively involved in the decision process and must allow the Hearing Examiner to conduct the hearing, document his or her findings, and make recommendations. If the Hearing Examiner's decision is appealed to the City Council, the Council will hear all information submitted for the record.

- (g) Bill Thurston, President of the Bellevue Club, thanked the Council and staff for their work on light rail planning, and restated the Bellevue Club's support for the B7 alignment.
- (h) Stacie LeBlanc Anderson, a Surrey Downs resident, described the potential for a historic district in north Surrey Downs to preserve 1950s modernist architecture by Mithun and Neslund. She noted City documents recognizing these homes, as well as the Winters House and the Sacred Heart Church on Main Street, as historically and/or architecturally

significant. Ms. Anderson explained that there is the potential in the Surrey Downs Mithun and Neslund homes for the creation of a Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places, which could become the first Historic District of 1950s modernist homes in Washington state. Ms. Anderson encouraged the City Council to act to preserve these historic structures.

3. Study Session

(a) Council Business and New Initiatives

No new initiatives were discussed.

(b) Sound Transit East Link

City Manager Steve Sarkozy recalled the City's three-year planning effort for the Bel-Red corridor that has helped to identify linkages between land use and light rail planning. Ongoing discussions have focused on the preferred light rail alignments. Tonight's presentation will review the planning process to date and continue to discuss the Segment B options.

Bernard van de Kamp, Transportation Regional Projects Manager, recalled Council's adoption of the Bellevue Transportation Vision in 1999, which envisioned improvements to the freeway system including high-capacity transit and connections through downtown Bellevue. The 2004 Regional Transit Long Range Plan identified transit plans for King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties. In 2005, the City Council adopted a High Capacity Transit Interest Statement, which identified light rail as a preferred transit technology and addressed issues such as regional performance and neighborhood protection. During this time, Sound Transit began its East Link project scoping process to determine what routes should be studied. In 2006, Sound Transit began its draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) analysis, which was completed in 2008. The Bellevue City Council appointed a Light Rail Best Practices Committee to study the issues during 2007 and 2008.

Mr. van de Kamp recalled that the DEIS was released in early December 2008, which was followed by a 75-day public comment period that will close on February 25. City staff has presented the technical findings of the report to the Council and compared alignment alternatives based on previous Council-adopted policy direction. Extensive public outreach activities have been conducted by both Sound Transit and the City as well.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed Council decisions to date. There has been a preliminary consensus in support of option D2A for Segment D extending through the Bel-Red area between the hospital district on 116th Avenue and the Overlake Transit Center. For Segment C through downtown Bellevue, the Council supports option C2T, a 106th Avenue tunnel alignment via the Red Lion site. Mr. van de Kamp described the potential for an underground station near Main Street and 108th Avenue NE instead of the East Main Station currently identified. Council discussions to date have narrowed the Segment B options to B7, using the Burlington Northern

Santa Fe right-of-way, and a proposed modified B3 option with side-running light rail along the east side of Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE.

Mr. Van de Kamp described the B7 alignment, which includes a station at 118th Avenue SE and SE 8th Street and connects to the downtown via a tunnel at the current Red Lion site. The route is elevated over I-90 and the Mercer Slough, follows the BNSF right-of-way at grade, and becomes elevated at SE 8th Street and over 114th Avenue to the Red Lion site.

Mr. van de Kamp recalled previous discussions regarding traffic congestion impacts along 118th Avenue SE associated with locating a park and ride lot and light rail station. He reviewed two mitigation concepts for managing the traffic impacts by adding lanes and reconfiguring the intersection of 118th Avenue SE and SE 8th Street. The City's analysis of mitigation impacts differs from Sound Transit's findings and identifies increased traffic congestion and greater delays than are described in the East Link DEIS. This is because the interchange configuration at SE 8th Street and I-405 has changed with the project currently under construction in South Bellevue.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed the B3 alternative studied in the DEIS, which is median-running light rail along the center of Bellevue Way with a station at the South Bellevue Park and Ride lot. The lot's capacity would be expanded from 519 to 1,475 spaces, and the route follows 112th Avenue SE to SE 8th Street. Mr. van de Kamp recalled staff's presentation last week of a B3 side-running concept along Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE, which could result in cost savings and reduced visual impacts. This option was not studied in the DEIS. Mr. van de Kamp noted potential impacts to the Mercer Slough, Winters House, and the Bellefield 112th Avenue access.

Mr. van de Kamp briefly reviewed projected traffic conditions along Bellevue Way and the South Bellevue Park and Ride lot under the B3 alternative, as well as potential mitigation concepts.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman provided additional description of the B3 side-running alternative, noting the potential for design enhancements and grade separation to better mitigate traffic impacts. This option could involve moving the Winters House as well. The concept maintains the existing four lanes on Bellevue Way with a sidewalk on the east side, and attempts to use necessary retaining walls (including wood fencing and landscaping) to shield residential areas to the west. Mr. Sparrman noted that additional design work is needed for this concept. Continuing north through the connection to 112th Avenue SE, the light rail alignment would remain on the east side of the roadway to connect to the I-405 corridor and downtown Bellevue.

Councilmember Davidson expressed concern regarding traffic congestion at the entrance of Bellevue Way from I-90 and into the South Bellevue Park and Ride lot. He is more concerned about congestion at this location than at the SE 8th Street Park and Ride location.

Councilmember Noble questioned the feasibility of effective traffic mitigation at the SE 8th Street/118th Avenue SE location. He is concerned that Sound Transit has not sufficiently studied these issues.

Mr. Sparrman described the geographic constraints of this location and the associated system of intersections which can become heavily congested at times. He noted that 118th Avenue SE is used as a bypass route to avoid traffic on I-405 as well. Mr. Sparrman explained that the mitigation concepts could be implemented, but the costs could be extremely high. In further response to Mr. Noble, Mr. Sparrman said the possibility of grade separation or tunneling at this location has been discussed. However, such options are not feasible given the space and environmental constraints.

Councilmember Lee commended City staff for their extensive analysis of the Sound Transit East Link DEIS. However, he feels further study of alternative B7 is needed to address issues raised by the community and to plan for the long-term future of the region. He would like to encourage Sound Transit to look at alternative engineering solutions for Segment B. Mr. Lee said it is important to maintain effective local transit services to reduce traffic congestion, while also providing regional light rail service. He feels that further technical analysis of light rail options is needed to determine what is best for the community.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Sparrman said there are no feasible alternative locations for the SE 8th Street/118th Avenue SE park and ride lot and light rail station involved in the B7 alignment.

Deputy Mayor Balducci expressed concern regarding the ridership projections for the B7 and B3 options. Mr. van de Kamp confirmed B7 ridership projections of 1,000 per day versus ridership projections of 4,000 to 4,500 per day for routes serving South Bellevue. The difference in ridership estimates is based on existing transit service that feeds into the South Bellevue park and ride lot. It is assumed that a high level of transit activity would continue at this location. The lot would be expanded by approximately 950 stalls, which is the same overall addition that would be provided with the B7 alternative. Mr. van de Kamp said the 118th Avenue SE station would provide less convenient access for bus riders.

Staff continued to respond to questions from the Council regarding the technical analysis, alternatives studied, and potential modifications.

Mayor Degginger recalled the Council's concerns regarding the Segment B alternatives. Mr. Sarkozy confirmed that staff has looked at all of the ways to mitigate traffic impacts for both the B7 and B3 alignments. Staff has also looked for opportunities for cost savings as requested by the Council.

Councilmember Lee opined that the cost estimates are preliminary and that decisions should be based on what is best for the community.

Councilmember Davidson reiterated his observation that Bellevue Way traffic becomes highly congested while traffic at SE 8th Street does not.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Balducci about the C2T tunnel alignment through the downtown, Mr. Sparrman said there is the potential for boring versus cut and cover tunneling for a portion of the alignment. However, the question becomes cost effectiveness as boring is a fairly expensive technique, and more engineering work is needed to determine the best approach. Ms. Balducci encouraged the consideration of boring as a less disruptive technique.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Mr. van de Kamp explained how traffic impacts associated with the C2T alignment will be mitigated on NE 6th Street between 110th and 112th Avenues NE.

Councilmember Noble questioned how the Council will proceed given that the City is not in favor of a number of Sound Transit's options. Mayor Degginger acknowledged that the DEIS does not address a number of areas including construction impacts and local traffic impacts. He feels more discussion is needed with Sound Transit regarding Bellevue's preferences and interests.

Mr. Sarkozy agreed that none of the alignments identified in the East Link DEIS are clearly acceptable to the City in their current format.

Mr. Sparrman clarified that the DEIS analysis is a disclosure process to identify impacts. He opined that further engineering work would be sufficient to disclose the additional impacts associated with proposed alternative modifications suggested by the City (e.g., B3 side-running option), as opposed to conducting a supplemental EIS.

Deputy Mayor Balducci said it is important to give specific direction and feedback to the Sound Transit Board now on the East Link DEIS, while also providing comments regarding areas in need of further analysis and study. Councilmember Chelminiak concurred.

Councilmember Davidson expressed his preference for alignment B7, which he noted has a reduced visual impact due to its proximity to the freeway and avoids the environmentally sensitive areas well. He would like a design that would avoid an impact on Greenbaum Home Furnishings. Dr. Davidson feels that once a route is determined, the technical issues can be worked through.

Deputy Mayor Balducci observed that both B3 and B7 have significant flaws. She favors the proposed B3 modification, which is a hybrid of the B3 and B7 routes. This alignment maintains access to the South Bellevue park and ride lot, and the side-running aspect better protects traffic flow on Bellevue Way. She likes the proposed undercrossing at the South Bellevue park and ride. Ms. Balducci said that the modified B3 option best protects the Bellevue Club and Surrey Downs neighborhood. Construction impacts for any of the alignments will be significant, and it is therefore critical that the City advocate strongly for exceptional mitigation. Ms. Balducci noted concerns with the B7 alignment related to the residential and traffic impacts along 118th

Avenue SE. If the Council decides to support the modified B3 alignment, Ms. Balducci suggests that this support be specifically articulated in terms of the modifications requested.

Councilmember Lee acknowledged that any route will have some level of impacts on neighborhoods. He reiterated his support for alignment B7, noting the need for effective mitigation measures along 118th Avenue SE. He encouraged a long-term outlook on designing the light rail system. He feels it makes the most sense to align the route along the freeway as part of the larger regional system. Mr. Lee said more technical analysis is needed to appropriately design the system and mitigate the impacts.

Councilmember Chelminiak reviewed portions of the draft comment letter prepared by staff. He noted residents' concerns regarding proposed state legislation calling for increased land use densities around transit centers. He feels this legislation will not be successful, in part because it is not supported at the local level. Mr. Chelminiak supports park and ride facilities, downtown mobility, maintaining general purpose capacity, and neighborhood protection. He supports the portion of the draft letter urging Sound Transit to consider whether the South Bellevue park and ride lot can be developed to accommodate high-capacity transit while minimizing environmental and neighborhood impacts. Mr. Chelminiak is disappointed that B7 does not work for the City, and that there is not a better option for locating the park and ride lot and station needed for that route. He favors a tunnel through the downtown, as well as the modified B3 side-running route proposed by staff. However, he also supports additional analysis of B7 and the other B3 modifications.

Deputy Mayor Balducci stated that the Council supports transit-oriented development in the Bel-Red corridor, but is not considering this approach associated with any of the Segment B light rail options.

Councilmember Bonincontri likes that the B3 alignment using the South Bellevue park and ride lot provides good local access to transit. She supports the modified B3 option proposed by staff as a preferred alternative, recognizing the need for significant additional design and engineering work.

Councilmember Noble favors alignment B7. While segment boardings are higher for the B3 route, he noted that total system ridership is not significantly different between the two routes over the long term. Mr. Noble feels the cost estimates reflected in the DEIS are unreliable because they do not consider the extensive mitigation measures that will be required. The environmental impacts associated with the B3 and modified B3 options have not been fully considered. The environmental impacts of B7 relate to building over the wetlands and slough, which he noted has already been done. Mr. Noble is concerned about traffic and construction impacts along both routes, but he feels these would be most disruptive along Bellevue Way and the South Bellevue park and ride lot. He feels that a park and ride lot at SE 8th Street will increase transit use, and further that it is consistent with language in the Downtown Implementation Plan regarding the creation of satellite parking facilities. He is in favor of B7 if feasible. If not, he is willing to consider the modified B3 proposal. Mr. Noble reiterated his position that at least one more light rail stop should be added in the downtown Segment C route.

Mayor Degginger thanked the community for its participation in this planning process. He commended the Light Rail Best Practices Committee for its work to develop recommendations aimed at finding the best fit for a light rail system within the community. Mr. Degginger thanked the Council, City staff, and the public for their study and input of information into the process.

Mr. Degginger noted general Council interest in the B7 and B3 modified options. He was surprised at the lack of analysis, in the East Link DEIS report, of construction and overall transportation impacts. He thanked City staff for their additional analysis around these issues. Mr. Degginger questioned the accuracy of ridership projections for the two options, and encouraged a focus instead on system-wide ridership.

Mayor Degginger expressed concerns regarding the B3 alignment, stating that median-running light rail is not feasible given the construction and traffic impacts. However, construction impacts can be mitigated through the modifications proposed by staff. If the modified B3/B7 hybrid cannot be considered by the Sound Transit Board, Mr. Degginger cannot support B3 as proposed because of the significant impacts. He feels that the modified/hybrid option presents the best opportunity for mitigating traffic, construction, and environmental impacts.

Mayor Degginger reviewed that four Councilmembers support the modified B3 option/B7 hybrid, while three Councilmembers support the B7 alternative.

At 9:34 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared a short break. The meeting reconvened at 9:46 p.m.

(c) Regional Issues

(1) State Legislative Update

Alison Bennett, Policy Program Manager, noted packet materials regarding the 520 tolling legislation (House Bill 2211). Mayor Degginger said the bill would authorize tolling to begin next year on SR 520 to accelerate construction of the east portion of the project.

Ms. Bennett reported that House Bill 1490 regarding climate change and transit-oriented development was modified last week to remove the mandatory provision. Proponents will continue to work to identify incentives for cities to meet certain density targets through transit-oriented development.

Ms. Bennett briefly reviewed the provisions of House Bill 2173 sponsored by Representative Hunter which modifies annexation provisions in King County. The bill is supported by staff as it will make annexations easier to achieve.

→ At 9:59 p.m., Deputy Mayor Balducci moved to extend the meeting until 10:15 p.m. Councilmember Chelminiak seconded the motion.

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

Following brief discussion, Mayor Degginger noted a lack of support for the legislation.

(2) Federal Legislative Update

Ms. Bennett provided a brief update on federal legislation. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was signed by President Obama on February 17, 2009. City staff is reviewing project opportunities in a number of areas including Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant funding, competitive energy grants, Community Development Block Grant funding, Clean Water and Drinking Water Revolving Loans, National Endowment for the Arts funding, and broadband service programs.

Kim Becklund, Transportation Policy Advisor, reported that Washington state will receive \$492 million in transportation funding. Approximately \$330 million will go directly to the state, of which \$172 million must be obligated by July of this year. Ms. Becklund noted concerns that a disproportionate share of this funding is targeted outside of the urban areas. A separate allocation totaling \$148 million goes to the metropolitan planning organizations (e.g., Puget Sound Regional Council) throughout the state. This results in \$75 million in funding for the Puget Sound area, which includes approximately \$40 million to be spent within King County.

At 10:13 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared the meeting adjourned.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

kaw