

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

February 17, 2009  
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room  
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Degginger, Deputy Mayor Balducci and Councilmembers Bonincontri, Chelminiak<sup>1</sup>, Lee and Noble

ABSENT: Councilmember Davidson

1. Executive Session

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

2. Study Session

(a) Sound Transit East Link Project

City Manager Steve Sarkozy recalled ongoing discussions related to planning for Sound Transit's East Link light rail system.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman provided an overview of the presentation.

Bernard van de Kamp, Transportation Regional Projects Manager, noted that the Council's desk packet materials include: 1) Memo from Don Billen, East Link Sound Transit Project Manager, 2) Rough draft of comment letter from the Council to Sound Transit, 3) Memo transmitting City staff's technical comments to Sound Transit staff, and 4) Table of more than 600 staff comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) report.

Mr. van de Kamp recalled staff's January 26<sup>th</sup> review with the Council covering the major themes of Bellevue's light rail planning: 1) Land use, 2) Visual impacts, 3) Parks and natural areas, 4) Transportation projects, and 5) Construction and other temporary impacts. Staff's technical comments on the DEIS are organized into these categories. An important land use consideration is that the Bel-Red Plan has not yet been adopted by the Council, and therefore assumptions related to redevelopment of that area are not reflected in the East Link DEIS. Mr. van de Kamp explained that Sound Transit followed federal guidelines in evaluating visual impacts. However, City staff disagrees with many of the visual impact ratings. Similarly, there

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<sup>1</sup> Councilmember Chelminiak arrived at 6:13 p.m.

are differences in some of the assumptions of City and Sound Transit staff regarding future transportation projects. Mr. van de Kamp observed that the DEIS provides little detail on construction and other temporary impacts.

Mr. van de Kamp reminded Council and the public that February 25 is the close of the DEIS comment period. Staff anticipates finalizing the City Council's transmittal to Sound Transit following the February 23 City Council meeting.

Mr. van de Kamp recalled Council direction from the February 9 meeting: 1) Support for the D2A alternative through the Bel-Red corridor (NE 16<sup>th</sup> at-grade alignment with stations at 124<sup>th</sup> and 130<sup>th</sup>), 2) Support for Option C2T through the downtown (106<sup>th</sup> Avenue tunnel via the Red Lion site on 112<sup>th</sup>), and 3) Interest in further study of a modified B3 alternative running light rail along the east side of 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, as well as continued consideration of the B7 alignment (using BNSF rail right-of-way). Concerns associated with both Segment B options are construction impacts and park and ride lot capacity.

Mr. Sparrman reviewed the B7 and modified B3 (112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE side-running) alternatives and possible mitigation concepts. The B7 route travels from I-90 across the Mercer Slough to the BNSF right-of-way to the east, north on the BNSF ROW at grade, and ultimately becomes elevated over 114<sup>th</sup> Avenue to connect to the downtown segment (Segment C). Mr. Sparrman described the proposed 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue/SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street station and park and ride location. He noted issues related to the I-405 master plan (e.g., freeway widening, SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street direct access), business relocations, and challenges of the steep grade. Additional mitigation concepts focus on noise, the natural environment (i.e., wetlands, fish ladder and parks), and traffic impacts that could be mitigated by roadway and intersection modifications. Mr. Sparrman briefly reviewed traffic conditions for the 118<sup>th</sup>/SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street intersection under the different mitigation concepts.

Mr. Sparrman reviewed the B3 option studied in the DEIS reflecting light rail along Bellevue Way and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE (via the existing median), with a bypass over SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street. He then reviewed the proposed modified B3 side-running option with light rail on the east side of Bellevue Way and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE.

Mr. Sparrman compared the B7 and B3 side-running options. Issues with the B7 option include the difficulty in mitigating street impacts due to a limited right-of-way, environmental constraints, an inability to mitigate outdoor noise impacts, and little potential for cost savings. The proposed B3 side-running modification substantially reduces construction impacts, maintains a greater distance from residences, and provides the potential for cost savings. However, impacts to the Winters House and park property along Bellevue Way are likely.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Mr. Sparrman stated his understanding that there are fairly strict criteria regarding historical structures (e.g., Winters House). However, work is underway with the State agency that has regulatory authority over these issues. He opined that dealing with the historical property would be challenging but not impossible.

Responding to Councilmember Noble, Mr. Sparrman described the difference in noise impacts for the B7 and side-running B3 alignments. The B7 alignment runs close to a widened I-405,

and light rail would run at a grade that is higher than the freeway and very close to some buildings. A wall up to three stories high would be needed to mitigate noise impacts, which would not be a desired visual impact. By contrast, option B3 in a side-running configuration is a more significant distance from the nearest houses.

In further response, Mr. Sparrman said the DEIS analysis indicates that outdoor noise impacts with the B3 option do not trigger regulatory actions.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Balducci, Mr. Sparrman explained that after the City Council submits its recommendations and the Sound Transit Board makes its decisions related to system alignments, much more engineering work needs to be done. Ms. Balducci said it is important for the City to continue working closely with Sound Transit to ensure the City is receiving updated information. In further response to Ms. Balducci, Mr. Sparrman clarified details of the two Segment B options and the mitigation of impacts.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Sparrman explained that with option B7, there are fewer boardings within the segment itself than with option B3. However, B7 has more boardings at the downtown transit center. He responded to additional questions of clarification regarding traffic impacts.

Responding to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. Sparrman said a 30-foot width is needed to run light rail at the roadway grade through south Bellevue. In some locations, the facility would be very close to the wetlands and/or park land.

Responding to Councilmember Lee, Mr. Sparrman said one benefit of the side-running B3 option is the ability to retain Bellevue Way and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE as they currently exist. In further response, Mr. Sparrman recalled that the City rebuilt SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street approximately six years ago, and 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE was improved fairly recently. The challenge with the B7 option involving a station at this location is that there is little room along 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE to expand the roadway to accommodate higher traffic volumes accessing the park and ride lot/station.

Councilmember Lee expressed concern that Sound Transit will choose alternatives based on limited engineering work and limited information on impacts and mitigation. He wants to ensure that Bellevue makes the best choice for the community and land use patterns.

Mayor Degginger commented on the challenge of participating in a process in which Sound Transit ultimately makes the decisions. He noted previous Council discussion regarding concerns that construction and traffic impacts are barely addressed in the DEIS.

Councilmember Noble expressed concern that park and ride demand has been underestimated in the past by transit agencies. Mr. van de Kamp agreed that actual usage of the SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street park and ride lot would likely be higher than projected in the DEIS, which further highlights concerns regarding the size constraints of this location.

Responding to Councilmember Bonincontri, Mr. Sparrman noted the need to do more work with Sound Transit to identify appropriate mitigation measures for the South Bellevue park and ride

lot and Bellevue Way. These impacts will be studied further in the Final EIS. Mr. Sparman said Sound Transit's mitigation work will be implemented to a certain point. Bellevue could choose to provide additional mitigation to achieve broader system benefits.

Councilmember Lee reiterated his position that the East Link light rail system must serve the needs of Bellevue and the Eastside, while providing effective connections to Seattle as well.

Deputy Mayor Balducci commented on the challenge of trying to thread a light rail route through existing development. Her initial inclination was to favor option B3 because it serves a high number of riders, and the South Bellevue park and ride lot is an important regional asset. However, she has concerns about construction, noise, and traffic impacts which have been discussed. Ms. Balducci would like further study and analysis of the proposed modified B3 side-running configuration.

Mr. van de Kamp said the Sound Transit Board is scheduled to discuss alternatives and alignments during its April 9 meeting, and to identify a locally preferred alternative at its April 23 meeting. The Final EIS and 30-percent design work is to be completed by the summer of 2010.

Responding to Councilmember Noble, Mr. van de Kamp stated his understanding that Sound Transit's current 550 bus route will be eliminated with light rail implementation. It is possible that King County Metro local routes could be realigned and/or a new route could be created to provide local service on Bellevue Way.

Councilmember Lee commented on the challenge of designing a transit system that will effectively serve both regional and local needs.

Deputy Mayor Balducci spoke to the dilemma inherent in the tradeoffs between current bus service and light rail, noting that elimination of the 550 bus route will leave many commuters without service because they will not have convenient access to the light rail system. She opined that the farther the light rail connection is from the I-405 and I-90 interchange, the less appealing it will be for a number of commuters.

Councilmember Noble shares Ms. Balducci's concerns regarding the implications of trading bus service for light rail, especially when light rail will not have the frequency of stops that is provided by bus service.

At 7:56 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich  
City Clerk

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