

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

June 25, 2007
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Degginger, Deputy Mayor Chelminiak, and Councilmembers Balducci, Davidson, Marshall, and Noble

ABSENT: Councilmember Lee

1. Executive Session

Deputy Mayor Chelminiak called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and announced recess to Executive Session for approximately 20 minutes to discuss one matter of property acquisition.

2. Study Session

(a) Regional Issues

- (1) Cross-Lake Washington Transportation – Status Report on Improvements to I-90 and SR 520 – Follow-up Pricing Discussion

Diane Carlson, Director of Intergovernmental Relations, opened discussion regarding planned improvements to I-90 and SR 520 and proposed tolling/pricing.

Kim Becklund, Transportation Policy Advisor, introduced the following staff from the Washington State Department of Transportation – Theresa Greco, Project Manager of I-90 Corridor Program; Ron Paananen, SR 520 Director; Chris Picard, Manager of the Urban Planning Office; and Shuming Yan; Urban Planning Office Deputy Director.

Mr. Paananen described the urgency to replace the SR 520 bridge to improve safety, reliability, and mobility on the corridor. The bridge was closed three times in 2006 due to windstorms has sustained damage in some of the storms. The goal is to have the new bridge open to traffic in 2018. This will require the completion of a final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in 2010.

Legislation passed in 2007 requires the governor to hire a mediator, and the Keystone Group from Colorado has been selected in this role. They will meet with the Executive Committee tomorrow and local stakeholders on Friday of this week. The legislation also requires an independent review by citizens and development of alternative designs by the end of 2007, development of a high-capacity transit plan, submission of a finance plan to the governor by the end of the year, and the development of a project impact plan to be conducted by the King County Department of Public Health.

Mr. Paananen reviewed a configuration adopted by the State Legislature with four general purpose lanes, two HOV lanes, and the addition of a bike/pedestrian path. Electronic tolling will be implemented along the SR 520 corridor. WSDOT signed an agreement with Sound Transit in April stating the intent to coordinate SR 520 planning and to work with the University of Washington in this effort. An additional planning component is catastrophic failure planning. WSDOT will work with Eastside communities to design lids at some of the interchanges, determine the pedestrian/bike path route, and to discuss noise walls and overall impacts.

The draft EIS was issued in August 2006, and more than 1,700 public and agency comments were received. During the past year a panel reviewed bridge construction issues including rebuilding the pontoons supporting the bridge. A Supplemental EIS is now required to identify these issues, and this is to be published later this year. Completion of a final EIS is anticipated in 2010.

Mr. Paananen explained that project funding is a major issue, as it is for many transportation projects. Estimated costs range from \$3.3 billion to \$4.4 billion. The legislature created a risk pool for the Alaskan Way Viaduct project and SR 520. The SR 520 project is eligible for up to \$1 billion of the risk pool, and the Viaduct is eligible for up to \$400 million. Original estimates for tolling revenues were \$700 million, which is considered conservative. It is possible revenues could total closer to \$1.2 billion.

Next steps include Eastside design workshops, continuation of the environmental assessment and development of the draft Supplemental EIS, catastrophic failure planning, working with the mediator on project impacts, and development of a finance plan. Mr. Paananen noted that the mediator works for the governor and not the project team. Open houses are scheduled this week in Bellevue and Seattle.

Councilmember Balducci encouraged a greater sense of urgency regarding the project. Mr. Paananen agreed, and noted the frustration in attempting to address the SR 520 project as well as the need to replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. Paananen said electronic tolling for irregular travelers, including those from out of state, will be accomplished by taking photos of license plates and sending bills in the mail. It has not been decided if tolls will be imposed on both the I-90 and SR 520 bridges.

Mayor Degginger said he shares Ms. Balducci's concern about timing and the need to expedite the project. Mr. Degginger urged that tolling options and implementation be fully explained and discussed with the public.

Chris Picard, Office of Urban Planning, provided a presentation on the Lake Washington Urban Partnership Program, which represents WSDOT's national strategy to reduce congestion. Funding has not been provided through the current umbrella grant. However, it is linked to additional grant opportunities managed by the U.S. Department of Transportation and places WSDOT at the front of the queue for funded grants. The three top priority programs are: 1) Value pricing pilot program, 2) ITS program, and 3) New Starts program (focused on transit). The four T's of the program are: 1) Tolling, 2) Transit, 3) Telecommuting, and 4) Technology. Mr. Picard said variable tolling is under consideration, in which different toll levels will be charged during peak and off-peak hours.

Partners in the Urban Partnership Program in addition to WSDOT are King County and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC). The program is focused on raising funds to improve capacity on SR 520 between I-5 and I-405. Mr. Picard said the program is looking at European practices known as active traffic management including allowing the use of roadway shoulders as well as junction control in which a one-lane off-ramp can be converted to a two-lane off-ramp during peak hours.

Mr. Picard explained that tolling makes sense because of the lengthy peak commute periods, in which SR 520 is operating at as low as 60 percent of capacity at times. The intent is that the use of tolls will increase capacity closer to 100%.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. Picard described the objectives to increase traffic flow and move more people across the bridge.

Responding to Councilmember Noble, staff said the maximum estimated traffic flow is 2,000 cars per lane per hour. In further response, Mr. Picard said tolls are to be implemented in 2009-2010. Mr. Noble noted this is well before construction of the bridge is anticipated. Mr. Picard said the intent is to collect the funds specifically for the use of improving SR 520. However, there is not yet legislative authority to impose a toll.

Mayor Degginger questioned how the partnership can be applying for a grant and planning for tolling when there is not yet legislative authority or funding and when the project has not been discussed with the public. Mr. Picard explained that this is a new WSDOT proposal and work was initiated just a few months ago. He said the partnership has been working with regional transportation forums to garner support.

Councilmember Balducci clarified that the PSRC Transportation Policy Board has not voted to support the partnership. Her understanding is that the partnership is intended to receive federal grant funds.

Mayor Degginger said the grant money has been available before under the Small Starts program. He noted that this program is typically directed at smaller and medium-sized cities with smaller projects and a significant match of local funds. Mr. Yan said the partnership has been talking with staff from affected jurisdictions. Once the grant is received, most likely in 2009-2010, the partnership will work more extensively with local governments.

Deputy Mayor Chelminiak expressed frustration that the City of Bellevue has not been involved in discussions to date. He noted his understanding that once the bridge was paid for, there would be no tolls. Mr. Paananen said this variable relates to the original authorization to link tolls to the bonds that built the bridge.

Dr. Davidson observed that the plan includes only two general purpose lanes each way, no bus lanes, and no shoulders. However, four lanes from each way are merging onto the highway. He noted he is having trouble understanding the logic behind the assumption that traffic flow will be improved.

In closing, Mr. Picard said the partnership's grant application has been short-listed, and whether SR 520 will be included in the final five projects should be known by the end of August.

Councilmember Balducci encouraged a model in which drivers can choose to use a toll lane or not. She feels the Council should support the partnership's approach.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Mr. Picard said a pilot project is planned for SR 167. Mr. Degginger questioned how many pilot projects are needed. He expressed support for regional tolls rather than those focused on specific routes.

Moving on, Ms. Greco provided an update on the I-90 two-way transit/HOV project, which is underway with Stage 1 under construction. Stages 1 and 2 add the HOV lane from Bellevue Way to Mercer Island. Completion is anticipated in the summer of 2008, and the project is progressing well. Stage 1 construction and associated impacts are funded. Stage 2 construction is estimated to begin in 2017. Stage 3 adds HOV lanes across the bridge, provides bike path screening, and looks at tunnel modifications. The RTID package contains \$35 million for this stage, and approximately \$70 million is needed to complete the HOV system, not including the tunnel modifications.

Responding to Councilmember Marshall, Ms. Becklund said if the Sound Transit ballot measure is approved this fall, the East Link Light Rail system is anticipated to be completed to Redmond by approximately 2024. Mrs. Marshall expressed concern that Stage 3 improvements must be completed in advance of construction of the light rail system. She complimented staff and the RTID group for pushing for funding at this time. Ms. Greco said WSDOT is working with Sound Transit to coordinate the two projects.

Mrs. Marshall said she spoke with a group of Mercer Island residents the previous week. Many of them are not aware of the project and feel it will not be completed. She noted that the Washington Policy Center also does not have confidence that the project is moving forward.

Responding to Mr. Noble, Ms. Greco said if RTID passes at the polls, WSDOT hopes to secure matching funds of \$35 million from Sound Transit. However, Sound Transit's priority is to focus on light rail instead of HOV lanes, which to this point has been part of the state's commitment to transportation projects.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Bellevue Transportation Director Goran Sparrman said completion of the Sound Transit light rail system is slated for 2018 at the earliest and 2028 at the latest. He confirmed that the I-90 improvements must be completed before light rail can be constructed on the highway. This means that Stages 2 and 3 must be funded and accelerated well in advance of 2018.

(2) Sound Transit Phase 2 – Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID) Joint Ballot Activities

Ms. Carlson briefly reviewed plans to present a joint Sound Transit Phase 2/RTID package ballot measure this fall. The package contains numerous projects affecting Bellevue. East King County transit and road investments in the package total \$5.5 billion. The King County Council voted to approve placement of the item on the ballot, and the Sound Transit Board is to take action within the next couple of weeks. The ballot titles will be finalized in August, in preparation for the November election.

Ms. Carlson asked whether the Council would like to take a formal position on the ballot measure.

Councilmember Balducci noted this is potentially the most important land use decision for Bellevue as well as the largest transportation investment. She feels it is imperative to take a position on the ballot package.

→ Councilmember Balducci moved that the Council take a formal position regarding the joint Sound Transit Phase 2/RTID ballot measure. Councilmember Marshall seconded the motion.

Dr. Davidson expressed his ongoing concern that the public might not understand the implications of the Sound Transit proposal. He noted a commitment of the original ballot measure by the Regional Transit Authority (RTA) Board, which later became Sound Transit, that a second election would occur in 10 years. This election comes 11 years after that date, and the project has been significantly modified since the original commitment to the public.

Councilmember Marshall noted extensive public hearings on both the Sound Transit and RTID planning processes. More than 8,000 citizens have commented on plans for Sound Transit Phase 2. She feels Council's taking a position is not telling citizens how to vote, but rather articulating the importance of the transportation funding and projects for Bellevue and the region. Supporters of the joint transportation package include the Eastside Transportation Partnership

(ETP), Bellevue Downtown Association, and Seattle Chamber of Commerce Executive Committee. She encouraged Bellevue's leadership on this issue.

Mr. Chelminiak expressed support for the motion and requested a review of the overall process.

City Clerk Myrna Basich explained that the Council must offer the opportunity for public comment before taking a formal position on the ballot measure. However, it does not have to be in the form of a public hearing. In recent times, the Council has typically allowed proponents and opponents 15 minutes each to state their positions. Additionally, there is a public noticing requirement. Action can be scheduled before Council recess in August. The regular process is to then direct staff in a subsequent meeting to prepare a Resolution to enact the decision. Ms. Basich said a public hearing requires a 10-day advance notice.

Mr. Chelminiak feels it is important to take a position on the ballot measure.

Mr. Noble concurred. He feels it would be inappropriate for the Council to not take a stand, given the significant impact to the community by the ballot measure.

Mayor Degginger concurred. He feels the issue warrants more than 15 minutes of presentation time per side during a public hearing.

Mayor Degginger noted Council consensus to schedule public comment for July 23, and to plan for two hours of public comment.

→ The motion for the Council to take a formal position regarding the joint Sound Transit Phase 2/RTID ballot measure (following a noticed public comment opportunity), carried by a vote of 6-0, with Councilmember Lee absent.

(3) NORCOM Update

Noting the time, Ms. Carlson said she would forego the presentation regarding NORCOM. However, she directed Council to materials beginning on page SS 2-13 of the meeting packet for information. Staff's recommendation will be presented to Council in July.

Ms. Carlson noted that considerable grant monies are helping to fund the creation of the new NORCOM agency.

Mrs. Marshall commended this regional approach to streamline and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public safety communications. Mayor Degginger concurred.

(4) Federal Legislative Update

Ms. Carlson noted packet materials beginning on page SS 2-35 providing a federal legislative update.

Mayor Degginger said it is important to support legislation relating to energy exchange credits. The legislation concerns the suspension of monthly federal credits, which have allowed ratepayers to share in the benefits of low-cost, federally owned hydropower dams, which in this case is the dam operated by the Bonneville Power Administration.

Mayor Degginger noted Council consensus to send a letter expressing support to reinstate the credits to ratepayers.

Information items in the meeting packet relate to Metropolitan King County Regional Committees and the Jail Administrative Group (JAG).

(b) Continued Discussion of Bellevue Downtown Circulator

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman recalled ongoing discussions with Council regarding the creation of a downtown circulator system. During the last discussion, Council requested additional work pertaining to another route option that would serve the Overlake Hospital Medical Center and Group Health campus. Council also requested additional ridership forecasting.

Bernard Van de Kamp, Regional Projects Manager, recalled previous presentation of three possible routes for a downtown circulator system. The fourth alternative developed pursuant to Council direction during the last discussion provides service to the medical campus during morning and evening shift changes. This involves a shuttle from the hospital to the Transit Center between 6:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. and between 3:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

Estimated operating costs for the hospital shuttle are approximately \$100,000 annually, and it would serve 18,000-25,000 riders per year. This equates to \$4.15 to \$5.50 per trip. Previous ridership estimates of 20-30 riders per hour were based on experiences in other cities. Mr. Van de Kamp said there could be 156,000 to more than 200,000 riders per year.

Assuming a financial partnership with King County Metro, the City's share for the hospital shuttle would be \$34,000. Mr. Van de Kamp said the Council must send a letter to King County Metro by July 3 indicating an interest in continued work on this project. Bellevue staff will work with Metro staff to develop a final proposal and refine cost and ridership estimates, for submittal to the County by October 1. The King County Council will then consider the proposal and take action by the end of the year.

Mr. Van de Kamp requested Council direction regarding the submittal of a letter to King County Metro, noting it could be drafted by Transportation staff or by the Council.

Councilmember Marshall expressed support for submitting a letter, and for encouraging inclusion of a shuttle serving the medical campus. She suggested that Overlake Hospital Medical Center and Microsoft might be interested in becoming funding partners as well.

Responding to Councilmember Noble, Mr. Van de Kamp said the budget contains a \$1 million allocation over a five-year period for the circulator project. Additional funding is needed to implement any of the alternatives.

Mayor Degginger noted Council consensus in support for the new alternative developed by staff. At Mr. Degginger's request, Mr. Sparrman said staff will draft a letter to Metro for the Council's review and approval.

At 8:02 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich
City Clerk

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