

**EAST BELLEVUE and SAMMAMISH COMMUNITY COUNCILS**

## Summary Minutes of Special Joint Retreat

May 8, 2001,  
7:00 p.m.

Robinswood Cabana  
Bellevue, Washington

**PRESENT:** East Bellevue Community Council  
Chair Bell, Councilmembers Halgren, Keeffe, Lemieux and Seal.  
Sammamish Community Council  
Chair Kenney, Councilmembers Aber, Marks, McLaughlin and Smith.

**SPECIAL GUESTS:** City Councilmember Phil Noble  
City Manager Steve Sarkozy  
Transportation Director Goran Sparrman  
Traffic Consultant Bill Haro

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM. Chair Bell presided.

**OPEN DISCUSSION WITH CITY LEADERS**

Chair Bell welcomed the participants. He stated the purpose of the Joint Retreat is to explore alternatives for concurrency with City leaders and an outside traffic expert. The primary focus will be concurrency and level of service in the East Bellevue area.

Steve Sarkozy, City Manager, thanked Council for the opportunity to share his perspective. He stated explosive growth, geography and the narrow connections between Seattle and all points east was a template for serious traffic issues. Added to that is a State and regional system that has been essentially non responsive in terms of funding for I-90, I-405 and SR 520. He reported that the City has exerted a tremendous amount of work to address these traffic concerns. He commended both staff's and City Council's efforts in seeking shared funding options and solutions to regional traffic problems affecting Bellevue's neighborhoods.

Mr. Sarkozy reported that recent national comparisons put the Seattle area 7<sup>th</sup> worst for traffic congestion. He pointed out that approximately 70% of the total hours or time loss in congestion occur on I-405, I-90 and SR 520, and, pointed to the departure of Boeings as a major wakeup call. He stated that the areas economic vitality and competitiveness is dependent on a working regional transportation system.

Phil Noble, City Councilmember, thanked the Community Councils for the invitation to attend, stating he would be representing his individual views. He stated his belief that the City's focus should be on traffic congestion versus concurrency. Mr. Noble cited "cut-through" traffic as the primary cause of Bellevue's roadway and arterial traffic congestion. A concerted effort to solve regional traffic issues will alleviate traffic problems in Bellevue's neighborhoods.

Goran Sparrman, Director of Transportation, briefly reviewed the significant changes over the past few years in the City's approach in dealing with escalating traffic congestion. Two years ago there was no regional consensus addressing improvements to I-405. Fundamentally, that has changed. Now, the question no longer focuses on if improvements should be made, but, when they can be accomplished

and how much it will cost. The City of Bellevue is at the forefront of this new direction.

The Puget Sound Regional Council has recently adopted an updated Transportation Plan which includes, for the first time, significant transportation capacity improvements to I-405 and SR-520. Mr. Sparrman explained the instrumental part Bellevue played in this update and reviewed its importance to Bellevue's local transportation system.

Mr. Sparrman next reviewed Bellevue's response to local traffic concerns. He pointed to the traffic calming program, enhanced traffic enforcement and public education as tools the City employs to make neighborhoods safer.

Jim Kenney, Sammamish Community Council, noted school zones in Bellevue appeared to be arbitrarily marked as a 20 mph zone. In response, Mr. Sparrman stated the type of school dictates the posting rules. He stated there are federal rules on school signage along with state regulations that compliment or exult those standards. Mr. Sparrman explained local authority's ability, within that framework, to augment those rules. The City of Bellevue does consistently apply those rules in accordance with size and type of school.

Grant McLaughlin, Sammamish Community Council, questioned the extent of flexibility in regards to meeting concurrency standards. In response, Mr. Sparrman stated some flexibility does exist. The Growth Management Act states that local agencies have to have concurrent standards, but, what that standard is and how it is measured is left to the local authority.

Mr. Noble clarified his previous statement, stating it was not his intent to infer that traffic was the problem and that concurrency was not. Both are problems, only different problems. Even if a solution is found to manage concurrency, it will not solve traffic volumes.

Mr. Sparrman stated that, although traffic counts are valuable, there is a tendency to focus on the mathematics behind the concurrency analysis which has little to do with real time traffic conditions. He noted that there were ways to contend with concurrency that leads in directions we don't want to go. Mr. Sparrman provided the proposed grade separation to NE 8<sup>th</sup> and 148<sup>th</sup> Avenue as an example of a solution for concurrency that would have done little to alleviate traffic volumes.

Mr. McLaughlin gave a brief history of the Community Councils involvement with concurrency issues, stating a strong interest in protecting the neighborhoods.

Mr. Keefe, East Bellevue Community Council, noted the negative health impacts of vehicular pollution and the need for them to be given adequate consideration.

In response to Mr. Lemieux, East Bellevue Community Council, Mr. Sparrman stated the speed read out trailer is just one component of traffic calming utilized to control traffic speeds and change motorist behavior. The City has one trailer unit currently, with an additional five trailers on order to assist with public education. These units will be used in conjunction with an increased patrol presence.

Chair Bell reported that he had spoken with staff regarding the 2000 data numbers which are still

unavailable. He stated those numbers, as expected, will show the level of service in East Bellevue out of compliance. He questioned the City's action plan to address this issue. Mr. Bell stated his primary interest lay not with the region but with East Bellevue neighborhoods.

In response, Mr. Noble answered there are ongoing discussions at the City Council level, and, yes, the exceeding of LOS in Mobility Management Area #9 has been expected. He noted that neighborhoods were also a City Council priority.

Mr. Seal, East Bellevue Community Council, provided a brief history of zoning and population growth on the eastside. He noted the continuing growth in the Redmond and plateau areas.

Mr. Sparrman pointed to the change in control of trip generation and growth outside the City of Bellevue as triggers to the new regional approach to traffic management. This approach has led to BROTS 2 and the agreed upon growth caps in Bellevue and Redmond.

Mr. Sparrman stated the City's desire to optimize 148<sup>th</sup> operationally and with minor capital improvements to squeeze an extra 5% capacity out of this facility.

In response to Mr. Keeffe, Mr. Sparrman provided a brief overview of the Sound Transit discussions and actions taken by the City to secure a firm commitment to increase needed services on the Eastside. It is clear that there is a fair amount of resources generated in East King County for high capacity transit over the next twenty years. The City of Bellevue is updating the Downtown Transportation Plan, looking at the relationship between the cities of Redmond, Kirkland and Issaquah to find opportunities to develop, in the longer term, good high capacity transit solutions to compliment our arterial systems.

Continuing to respond to Mr. Keeffe, Mr. Noble explained that the City is seeking to claim its fair share of ridership hours.

Chair Bell called for a five minute recess. He reconvened the meeting at 8:04 PM.

#### TRAFFIC ENGINEERING METHODOLOGY FOR AREA WIDE TRAFFIC CALMING

Chair Bell thanked the City for their participation in this portion of the joint meeting. He next introduced Mr. Bill Haro, Traffic Consultant.

Mr. Haro commended Bellevue on its regional approach to traffic congestion, stating the importance of working with Sound Transit to create regional connectivity. He stated the futility of trying to stop development and suggested, instead, that growth be managed. Mr. Haro stated agreement with Mr. Noble that the issues of concurrency and traffic are different, and solving one does not necessarily solve the other. Traffic needs to be dealt with in a separate environment.

Mr. Haro spoke to the traffic speed issue. He stated the most common offender is the local resident.

Mr. Haro suggested a list of mitigation measures to improve traffic conditions: 1) Fix the freeways.

Consider I-90 and SR-520 as one route, making the transition from one to the other using I-405 as a link between the two freeways. In addition, I-405 should provide a complete service facility to handle service to the City. He suggested this could be accomplished with an I-405 grade separation of the two services, one above ground and the other below. 2) Manage freeway access to I-90 and SR-520 out of downtown without getting onto I-405. He stated traffic will seek the fastest route. Mr. Haro stated the opinion that there needs to be as much freeway access as possible. We need to move motorists onto the freeways with the shortest route possible, encouraging minimal use of City streets. He explained the concept behind the truck route legislation passed in 1978.

Mr. Haro stated the need to enhance the arterial systems. There must be a classification system and street designations to build signal facilities that functions safely and efficiently for a maximum flow of traffic. He cited as an example the redevelopment of 140<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He suggested moving traffic currently flowing through neighborhoods to the nearest arterial and from there moving it to the next highest classified system. He stated the importance of efficiently run backbone arterial systems.

Mr. Haro, referencing earlier discussions of models, explained his disagreement. He stated he had never seen reasonable accuracy come out of a model. He suggested a screen line analysis as a better tool for concurrency. He continued to suggest that traffic crossing the screen line be managed to provide limited access in and increased traffic flow out. This would unload East Bellevue and allow the neighborhoods freer movement within their areas. Mr. Haro stated screen line analysis can convert delay into volume.

Mr. Haro next explained how changing the character of a roadway can be employed within neighborhoods to improve safety using traffic calming devices. Examples would be narrowing the streets at intersections, creating pedestrian islands at crosswalks, installing sidewalks on one side of the road, and, possibly creating one-way roadway systems. The use of speed bumps should be a last resort.

Concluding, Mr. Haro state the value of projects like the Lake Hills Shopping Center Redevelopment. Projects like this reduce the overall trips on City streets. He suggested that projects of this nature receive trip credit against any new trips generated.

There was discussion on other options to discourage downtown traffic, including parking fees and transit ridership.

City Councilmember Noble, Mr. Sarkozy and Mr. Sparrman excused themselves, leaving the meeting at 8:55 PM.

Chair Bell recessed for approximately ten minutes. He reconvened the meeting at 9:05 PM.

#### COMMUNITY COUNCIL DISCUSSION AND WRAPUP

In response to Mr. Kenney, Mr. Haro explained how, in the past, adjustments to signal timing was used to accommodate new development trips.

Mr. Keeffe commented on the general topic of traffic calming. He noted the use of altering roadway

perception to reduce speeds. Mr. Haro explained the use of the 85 percentile speed as an indicator of appropriate speed limits.

Responding to Mr. Seal, Mr. Haro agreed that median plantings were great tools to narrow the motorist's perception of roadway width.

Chair Bell expressed his concerns with the concurrency ordinance as it exists today, stating his agreement with the City that sole reliance on the volume/capacity ratio to solve congestion woes is a mistake. He stated that, in his opinion, the inevitable is arriving and that East Bellevue will have to swallow an exceeded v/c ratio. He reminded Council of the difficulties experienced in accepting previous changes to the Comprehensive Plan to accommodate growth by intersection area averaging. He challenged the Community Councils to think about abandoning the v/c ratio approach in exchange for a traffic management system that benefits neighborhoods in East Bellevue and the City as a whole.

There was continued discussion with Mr. Haro regarding traffic management and mitigation options.

Mr. Kenney reminded the Councils of the importance of keeping in mind the environmental impacts of traffic volumes such as air and noise pollution. He stated that the property values along 156<sup>th</sup> Street were deteriorating because of the increased volume of traffic. Mr. Kenney suggested that quality of life issues need to be factored into a future concurrency theme.

Mr. Keeffe reviewed his concerns with the reclassification of arterials within the East Bellevue area. Mr. Haro stated there are two things involved in a classification. The first is the category and second is what standards are applied to that category. The category of an arterial should be dictated by the definition or purpose of that particular roadway.

Chair Bell wrapped up the evening's session asking Council their desire regarding a follow-up joint meeting on this same topic or perhaps a new topic addressed in a similar format.

Mr. Aber suggested that Councils take the time to digest the information shared tonight and discuss at their respective meetings any future topics.

Chair Bell stated Mr. Sarkozy was receptive to an additional joint retreat in mid to late June.

Mr. Aber noted the generality of the City's participation, suggesting that the next time the agenda be more focussed.

Chair Bell adjourned the Joint Meeting at 10:06 PM.

Submitted By:

Michelle Murphy, CMC  
Deputy City Clerk