CITY OF BELLEVUE
LIGHT RAIL BEST PRACTICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES

September 25, 2007 Bellevue City Hall
7:00 p.m. City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
Co-Chair Joel Glass, Transportation Commission
Co-Chair Jennifer Robertson, Planning Commission
David Karle, Parks and Community Services Board
Francois Larrivee, Environmental Services Commission
Douglas Mathews, Planning Commission
Lise Northey, Transportation Commission
John Rogers, Environmental Services Commission
Claudia Balducci, City Council, Liaison
Dr. Don Davidson, City Council, Alternate Liaison

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:
Faith Roland, Parks and Community Services Board

STAFF PRESENT:
Bernard van de Kamp, Transportation
Mike Kattermann, PCD
Matt Terry, PCD
Goran Sparrman, Transportation
Dan Stroh, PCD
Paul Inghram, PCD
Maria Koengeter, Transportation
Janet Lewine, PCD

OTHERS PRESENT:
Don Billen, Sound Transit
David Knowles, David Evans & Associates
Margaret Norton-Arnold, Norton-Arnold Co.\
Chris Hoffman, Norton-Arnold Co.

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. WELCOME AND REVIEW OF AGENDA

Mr. Glass called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. and welcomed everyone present. The agenda was reviewed and no revisions were suggested.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. July 24, 2007

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Mr. Karle. Second was by Ms. Northey and the motion carried unanimously.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT – None

4. EAST LINK PROJECT BRIEFING

A. Presentation by Sound Transit Staff

Don Billen, Sound Transit East Link project manager, reminded the committee that the project would be funded for construction through the roads and transit ballot measure that will be on the ballot in November. A major focus of the package is expansion of the regional light rail system that is now under construction and in final design for the segment between the University of Washington and Seatac airport. The package would fund extensions to Ash Way north of Lynnwood, all the way south to Tacoma, and east to downtown Bellevue and Overlake. In addition, the package authorizes preliminary engineering, environmental review and strategic right-of-way acquisition all the way to downtown Redmond. If additional cost savings are achieved, the package includes authority to build to downtown Redmond.

Mr. Billen said the East Link project came out of a multi-year long-range planning process, beginning with the Sound Transit long-range vision which calls for light rail in the east corridor across Lake Washington. The plan envisions branches to Issaquah, Kirkland and Redmond. There were five different transit modes studied for the east corridor in the long-range planning process. Three different forms of bus rapid transit were examined. The Sound Transit board used the analysis to narrow the list of options. One of the things they looked very closely at were the projections for future employment and housing. On the Eastside, the area between downtown Bellevue and Overlake, including the Bel-Red corridor, are projected to be by far the densest areas. As a result, the board decided in ST2 to focus on a system connecting Bellevue, Overlake, and eventually on to downtown Redmond. Light rail was chosen as the preferred technology; among other things, it offers the opportunity to run trains from Redmond to downtown Bellevue, across Lake Washington to Seattle, and then continue northward, eventually on into Snohomish County.

Because the trains can be run directly between the east and north corridors, it will be possible to connect the five largest employment centers in the region: Capitol Hill, University of Washington, Overlake, downtown Bellevue, and downtown Seattle.

The conceptual engineering work is being done in tandem with the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which will provide the public and decision makers an impartial basis on which to weigh the different alternatives and leading toward the ultimate selection of a preferred route and station locations. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is being developed and is scheduled to be published in September 2008. That will be followed by a public comment period, extensive outreach, and identification by the Sound Transit board of a preferred alternative. A Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) will then be prepared and a record of decision will be sought from the Federal Transit Administration, which is required before moving to final design and construction.

Mr. Billen explained that light rail is a form of electrical rail transit powered by an overhead system. Because the power source is overhead, light rail has the ability to run at street level making it possible for both pedestrians and cars to cross the tracks without running the risk of coming into contact with the power supply. Light rail can also run on elevated structures or in tunnels. The train lengths can vary between one and four cars depending on ridership demand.

The ability to run at street level is one of the reasons light rail has been used widely in North America over that past few decades. In cities where congestion levels are high, having light rail operate in its own right-of-way is very attractive; in cities where the densities are not great enough to support a full subway system, light rail fills an important niche. Light rail also has the ability to utilize grade separation where needed in order to separate it from cross traffic. Light

rail systems also accommodate ADA access by providing level train boardings. Modern light rail systems are also relatively quiet, quieter in fact than a diesel bus.

The success of light rail systems is dependent on other transportation resources, including walking, biking, bus and vehicular access. Each of those modes is being studied in the East Link design process to make sure there is good local access to the regional system.

There is a difference between commuter rail and light rail systems. Sound Transit operates a commuter rail system between Tacoma, Seattle and Everett using a diesel-powered system on the BNSF tracks. It provides peak-hour services only and has limited stops.

Light rail is not the only form of electric rail transit. Rapid rail, or third-rail transit, requires full grade separation because the electric power is carried in the third rail. Street cars, like light rail, use an overhead system for receiving power, but they typically operate in mixed traffic.

Mr. Billen explained that station spacing is a factor critical to the performance of light rail systems. The closer together stations are placed, the slower will be the average speed of the system. As station spacing increases, average speeds also increase. On the Central Link between the University of Washington and the airport station spacing averages about one mile; the same is being considered for the East Link project. The EIS will evaluate in details the effect of various station location scenarios on system ridership.

The Central Link system is designed to be a regional system. The system will initially open between downtown Seattle and the airport with two-car trains, though the station platforms will be able to accommodate up to four-car trains. The system is designed to support headways of every two minutes in the north corridor and every four minutes in the east and south corridors. The Tacoma system serves more as a downtown circulator.

Sound Transit is focusing on including in the design certain common elements throughout the system that will make it easily recognizable and understandable. The commonality includes station layouts, materials, and signage. At the same time, each of the stations will be tailored to fit with the individual communities in which they will be located.

Part of the initial segment project has involved retrofitting the downtown Seattle transit tunnels to include compatible rails, upgrading the fire/life safety systems, upgrading the ventilation systems, and adding new signage. Rail service in the tunnels is slated to start in two years. Another part of the downtown Seattle project has been the construction of a two- or three-block extension of the existing tunnel under Pine Street. The tracks and switches installed there will allow trains to reverse direction from the northbound to the southbound tracks at the end of their runs at the airport and Westlake Center.

To the south of downtown Seattle, the Central Link will operate at-grade. The first station will be just to the east of Safeco Field along Royal Brougham. Further to the south will be the Sodo station at Lander Street serving the industrial employment area; a modern operations and maintenance facility will also be located in the Sodo area. A light maintenance facility will also be needed on the Eastside, but it will not be necessary to replicate the heavy maintenance functions that will be carried out in the Sodo area.

The topography of the Beacon Hill area required that a tunnel be constructed. It begins on the west side, passes under I-5 and comes out at the north end of Rainier Valley. Midway through Beacon Hill is a deep tunnel station; the topography of the hill means the station is actually 165 feet deep; it will be accessed by high-speed elevators.

The system operates on an elevated guideway after coming out of the Beacon Hill tunnel. The station at Mt. Baker is elevated. The line then comes down into the middle of Martin Luther King Way and heads down Rainer Valley; MLK Way had to be widened to make room in the median for the light rail trackway. The south end of Rainier Valley will be served by an at-grade station.

Mr. Billen said the portion of the system that is perhaps the most visible to the public is the elevated section at Tukwila along SR-518. The elevated guideway runs along the edge of a residential neighborhood. The initial terminus of the line will be the International Boulevard station at the intersection of SR-518 and SR-99. The facility will include a park and ride lot and a bus transit center. The system will open to the station in mid-2009. Shuttle buses will run to SeaTac airport for the first six months following the opening until the airport link project is completed, which will include an elevated station at the airport terminal.

The University Link will extend from the Pine Street stub tunnel north to Capitol Hill and the University of Washington. A pedestrian bridge from a subway station in the Husky Stadium parking lot will provide access to the main campus.

The East Link project will come across I-90 using the center lanes of the floating bridge. Prior to the conversion of the center roadway to light rail/transit, Sound Transit and the Washington State Department of Transportation will complete a project to add new HOV lanes to the outer roadway.

Mr. Billen explained that the factors which influence design include engineering requirements, cost, environmental impacts, land use plans in the jurisdictions served, station accessibility, and community input. Each of those factors will be weighed and evaluated through the EIS.

Mr. Billen urged the committee to consider how different cities have implemented light rail; the similarities and the differences between those systems and those planned for the central Puget Sound region and Bellevue in particular; examples of effective collaborations between cities and transit agencies; and examples of effective project scope management.

B. Questions

Mr. Larrivee said it is his understanding that there is a business mitigation fund for businesses that are negatively affected during the construction phase. Mr. Billen said there are business mitigation programs that have been applied systemwide during construction. They have included everything from signage to attempts to soften the environment during construction to marketing assistance. In Rainier Valley, the city of Seattle and King County created and funded a community development fund. The vision for light rail in southeast Seattle has been to leverage investments in light rail in a way that will transform the neighborhood. Money was put into the fund above and beyond normal business mitigation. A revolving loan fund has been instituted that start-up businesses can use to get going; the funds are also used to reimburse businesses beyond what Sound Transit is able to provide to compensate for construction interruptions.

Ms. Robertson noted that some of the stations appear to be outdoor facilities while others are enclosed. Mr. Billen said there are a variety of factors that are relied on in making those decisions. Most important is the patronage projections at each station; at a minimum a 30 percent canopy coverage is provided, but where ridership demands additional coverage, it is often provided. Escalators serving elevated stations need to be enclosed in order to enclose the

mechanical equipment.

Mr. Larrivee suggested that it is somewhat confusing to have the King County Metro bus rapid transit initiative under way at the same time the future of Sound Transit is being raised. Mr. Billen said Sound Transit and King County Metro operate in different corridors. In addition, the station spacing Metro is looking to deploy along their bus rapid transit routes are much closer together in keeping with being more of a intra-subarea system and less of a long-distance regional system. There will be some good connectivity between the bus rapid transit system and the light rail system.

Responding to a comment made by Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Billen agreed that much can be gleaned from current construction projects and applied bringing light rail to Bellevue. He stressed the need to keep an open channel with local residents, both at the design and construction phases.

Mr. Glass asked if the blue sound wall was put up before the construction started or as the result of input from local residents. Mr. Billen said the decision to build the noise wall was made because it was known that construction on the tunnel was going to need to go on 24 hours per day. A noise variance was needed from the city; it was based on some detailed noise studies looking at the projections of what would be generated by construction. The truck haul routes also had to be approved by Seattle. For the East Link project, there will be proposed truck haul routes and projections about the volume of generated truck activity. Instead of using back-up beepers on trucks operating at night, flasher systems are utilized to reduce the overall noise level.

Mr. Rogers said he would be interested in hearing how the initial sound modeling has compared to the actual construction noise levels. Mr. Billen said he can provide that information at a later date. He suggested that it might be helpful for the committee to receive a presentation from the Sound Transit community outreach staff who serve on the front lines dealing with issues of concern to the neighborhoods.

5. BEST PRACTICES TOPICS

A. Introduction of Consultants

Bernard van de Kamp explained that Maria Koengeter has been assigned to serve as the lead project manager for the city's Transportation Department and will work primarily with the consultant team. He noted that Mike Kattermann from the Department of Planning and Community Development will continue in the role of helping to facilitate the committee and take the lead on the public involvement side.

Ms. Koengeter said David Evans and Associates has been hired to serve as lead consultant to the study. That firm has put together a team that includes Nelson Nygaard, which has expertise in urban design and ped-bike/light rail connections; and Norton-Arnold Company, a public involvement firm. She introduced David Knowles from David Evans and Associates; Margaret Norton-Arnold, president of Norton-Arnold Company; and Chris Hoffman, vice-president of Norton-Arnold Company.

B. Report on September 13, 2007 Open House

Mr. Kattermann said Norton-Arnold collected all of the comments received at the open house and drafted a summary and appendices that include a verbatim transcript of all of the comments received and all of the materials handed out at the open house. A total of 95 people signed in at

the open house, and about 150 comments were received. The purpose of the open house was to provide information to the public about light rail in general, about the Best Practices project in particular, and about the East Link project specifically.

The comments received at the neighborhoods table confirmed previously voiced concerns regarding property values, crime and safety around stations, parking issues, and safety in general. The need to have the neighborhoods stay connected to the rest of the city was also highlighted, as was the possibility of leveraging additional improvements such as the undergrounding of utilities.

At the light rail stations table the public commented that development around some station locations would be accepted, but not at all station locations. They also highlighted the importance of access by pedestrians, bicycles and buses, and noted concerns about spillover effects.

The table focused on streets elicited questions regarding how light rail would work with other street uses such as traffic flow, bicycle lanes and pedestrian crossings. They also called out the need to make sure impacts on adjacent uses are minimized around stations and along street rights-of-way. Addressing noise and visual impacts was also listed.

Construction and operation was the topic of the fourth table at the open house. The issues raised involved the need to address noise, dust, vibration, light spillover, and access for businesses and residences. The size and location of staging areas was also highlighted as an issue.

C. Discussion of Topics

Mr. Knowles explained that David Evans and Associates is an engineering and planning firm headquartered in Portland but with offices all over the West Coast, including one in Bellevue. He said the company has a significant staff of transit engineers.

Mr. Knowles said the Best Practices project is exactly the right thing for Bellevue to be doing. It is also the right thing for Sound Transit to be doing, though it does create some issues with respect to duplication of effort. The project will help the City Council make decisions about policy and design issues that need to be carefully addressed. With the conceptual design process just starting and with the environmental process under way, the time is perfect for the Best Practices study to exert maximum influence over the ultimate light rail project. The study will also help inform the decisions Sound Transit must make.

Mr. Knowles stressed that the starting point for these kinds of projects needs to be about building community. Light rail systems are about far more than just moving people rapidly, efficiently and over long distances; they are also about building communities and complementing the neighborhoods the systems must pass through. Under the topic of community and neighborhoods, the focus should be on determining what the community already has in terms of neighborhoods, what light rail can do make the community better, and how can the impacts, either real or perceived, be addressed in the design and implementation process. Light rail systems provide an alternative to the use of cars, and in that sense they relieve traffic congestion within the neighborhoods. They can also help provide services that some neighborhoods may not have by stimulating development.

Under the topic of connecting people, Mr. Knowles suggested the starting point must be the fact that the transit rider is a pedestrian. Accordingly, much of what needs to happen around the transit stations will need to pay attention to the pedestrian experience. Bicycles, autos and transit

will all need to have the ability to connect to the light rail system. In Portland, so many riders are showing up on bicycles that there are issues around how to deal with them. Europeans arrange to have bicycles at each end of their commutes. The study will include a focus on identifying the best practices around good pedestrian connections, and good access for disabled riders.

Land use is another topic that has been of great concern to many. Mr. Knowles said the issue is whether or not light rail triggers changes in land use around stations and along alignments. The real question to be researched by the consultant team is whether or not the community wants change. If the determination is made that the focus should be on a continuation of an existing, stable neighborhood, the policies and regulatory framework will need to be crafted accordingly. Examples of light rail lines running through existing neighborhoods will be provided to the committee.

Light rail can be the stimulus for different types of development. There is a lot of evidence that mixed use develop that provides a lot of urban activity can occur as a result of high-capacity transit, but it can also be an organizing principle for communities interested in a significant amount of new development.

Street design and operations is another topic on the list to be covered. The issue is how to integrate light rail into the street. There are lots of examples of light rail using exclusive rights-of-way on streets as well as through dense areas and urban plazas. There are, however, certain conflicts that must be addressed. Safety is an issue, as is noise and integration with traffic movements. Examples of what works and what does not will be provided.

Mr. Knowles said the topic of transit profiles is significant to Sound Transit. There are design implications associated with systems built at-grade, with elevated structures, and in tunnels. There are pros and cons for each approach, including land use opportunities and issues. Systems in tunnels do not diminish traffic capacity, but they provide a much different urban experience for the transit rider from at-grade systems. Overhead structures can separate light rail from traffic, but they are visibly imposing.

The issue of light rail impacting property values has been frequently raised in the public meetings. Mr. Knowles said his team will do its best to try to find quantitative evidence regarding the issue from other communities, both positive and negative. It is anticipated that there will be stories coming from both viewpoints. The approaches taken by other communities to respond to either the actual fact of property value decreases or the perception of negative impacts will be ferreted out and shared with the committee.

Station security is an issue for all operating systems. There is a fair amount of documentation and evidence of best practices regarding station security. The team will research what has been done at various light rail lines around the country, including the kinds of design treatments that are possible to improve safety and security.

Construction impacts and mitigation is a very important concern, especially for businesses but also for everyone who counts on streets being open and available for use. The construction of light rail lines is disruptive to traffic. The consultant team will provide examples of what other communities have done with regard to construction management. Phasing and staging are very important when it comes to minimizing disruptions, and in that arena the contractor plays a significant role.

Mr. Knowles said during the next few months the consultant team will be providing detailed

information regarding each item on the list. He stressed the need to look for examples of how local governments and transit agencies have collaborated and what their experiences have been.

With regard to connecting people to light rail transit, Ms. Northey observed that the systems being constructed in Seattle are not providing park and ride facilities. She suggested that the topics list should include park and ride lots. Mr. Knowles said his team will be looking at that issue.

Ms. Northey agreed with the need for the city to collaborate with all applicable agencies in bringing light rail to the area. She said collaborations can be done well or poorly. The city stands to gain significantly from leveraging mitigation projects, including freed bus hours and the possibility of putting up a noise wall along I-405. She also proposed including on the list a study of best practices for capturing windfall profits from major capital investments.

Mr. Karle said he did not see anywhere on the list the notion of ranking how successful the various case studies systems are. The ranking criteria should include ridership along with how the locals feel about their systems once they are fully operational. With regard to connecting people to light rail, there should be some talk about station placement impacts and what successful stations look like. Enhancing and protecting property values is certainly something that needs to be reviewed.

Co-chair Robertson said she would like would like to see information about whether or not the transit-oriented developments that have come to pass have been successful, and what their effect has been on surrounding properties and local neighborhoods. The issues of public safety and crime generally should be considered. With regard to grade separation, she said she would like to know how average travel times are impacted where lanes are shared with automobile traffic.

Mr. Rogers said it would be terrific to have for each area specific metrics for what constitutes success, and an understanding of the problems other lines have experienced that have baffled people or that have been a continuing challenge. He noted that a bonus system was implemented in Phoenix around community complaints during construction; under the approach, contractors that receive no complaints are awarded a bonus. A similar approach may work very well in Bellevue.

Co-chair Glass said he would like to see specific examples of light rail systems that have resulted in enhanced property values. He also noted that light rail running through Bellevue will encounter a variety of different types of conditions, including neighborhoods, the downtown and the Bel-Red corridor; each area may experience different impacts.

Councilmember Balducci said it may be unique that the line running through Bellevue will in a relatively short distance encounter so many different types of areas. She said the property value question will absolutely have to focus on residential properties, but it should also focus on commercial properties, both in developed areas and in areas that will be developing. Human health should also be given the spotlight in terms of construction dust and noise.

Councilmember Balducci said nearly everyone she has spoken with in the Surrey Downs community has been opposed to including a station in their neighborhood. They cite the fact that there is a park and ride lot nearby and claim that few would choose to walk to the station to access light rail. They are not willing to risk the issues that come along with having a station in a residential area. She said the study should consider whether the issues can or should be avoided as opposed to mitigated.

D. Confirm Topics for Best Practices Study

There was consensus to include all of the noted items on the list for additional study and review.

E. Introduction of Case Study Criteria and Candidate Systems

Ms. Koengeter noted that the committee packet materials included proposed criteria and a description of 25 North American light rail systems. She said the proposal is to conduct an initial screening of the listed systems based on when they were constructed and system characteristics in an attempt to identify a dozen or so systems that most closely match the East Link system that will come through Bellevue. The ultimate product will be a matrix outlining the selected systems against the established criteria that will be used to select the three to five systems that most closely match Bellevue conditions; those specific systems will then be analyzed for lessons learned, trade-offs, success stories, and the difficult choices that had to be made.

Ms. Koengeter reviewed with the committee the proposed criteria and welcomed their feedback.

Mr. Karle reiterated his desire to see success used as a metric.

Mr. Northey questioned using as a criteria candidates are a central city on a light rail line. She said Bellevue has significantly different characteristics than most central cities. Examples of central cities are Seattle, Los Angeles and New York, and few lessons learned from their systems would be of benefit to Bellevue. It would make more sense to focus on major cities on a second extension. She also questioned how the quality of a system will be defined and used as a metric. Mr. Knowles explained that all of the larger cities have systems that run through the smaller suburbs, and it is those places that will be studied in most cases.

Mr. Mathews pointed out that just as much can be learned from projects that have not met with success and asked the consultants not to rule them out in determining what to study.

Mr. Larrivee said the committee should be told what aspects of comparative projects are not at all like Bellevue in order to keep things straight.

Councilmember Davidson asked the committee members to keep in mind that whatever system is selected for Bellevue will not be constructed for many years. Accordingly, it will be necessary to envision Bellevue 20 years from now rather than as things stand currently in planning for light rail.

6. OTHER BUSINESS / QUESTIONS FROM THE COMMITTEE

A. October Tour Dates Reminder

Mr. Kattermann noted that all of the committee members have signed up for the Central Link tour and will be getting final information soon on meeting times and place.

B. October 16 Committee Meeting, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Room 1E-108

It was noted that all future committee meetings, beginning on October 16, will be in Room 1E-108.

C. Discussion Potential Dates for November East Link Tour

Mr. Kattermann said two or three hours will be needed for the East Link tour. He said because of the time of year the tour will need to be during the day on a weekday or on a Saturday. The event will be advertised as a meeting, and the itinerary will be posted.

There was a general preference voiced for conducting the tour on a Saturday and the group selected the afternoon of November 3. Friday, November 2 was set as a backup date.

D. Set January 2008 Meeting Date

The first meeting of 2008 was scheduled for Wednesday, January 2.

7. ADJOURN

Co-chair Glass adjourned the meeting at 9:00 p.m.