

CITY OF BELLEVUE
LIGHT RAIL BEST PRACTICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES

October 16, 2007
7:00 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-108

COMMITTEE MEMBERS
PRESENT:

Co-chair, Joel Glass, Transportation Commission
Co-chair, Jennifer Robertson, Planning Commission
Francois Larrivee, Environmental Services Commission
Douglas Mathews, Planning Commission
Lise Northey, Transportation Commission
John Rogers, Environmental Services Commission
Faith Roland, Parks and Community Services Board
Claudia Balducci, City Council, Liaison
Dr. Don Davidson, City Council, Alternate Liaison

COMMITTEE MEMBERS
ABSENT:

David Karle, Parks and Community Services Board

STAFF PRESENT:

Mike Kattermann, PCD
Maria Koengeter, Transportation
Janet Lewine, PCD
Bernard van de Kamp, Transportation
Paul Inghram, PCD
Goran Sparrman, Transportation

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. WELCOME AND REVIEW OF AGENDA

Chair Robertson called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. All committee members were present with the exception of Mr. Larrivee and Mr. Mathews, both of whom arrived at 7:04 p.m.; Councilmember Balducci, who arrived at 7:05 p.m.; and David Karle, who was excused.

Motion to approve the agenda as printed was made by Mr. Rogers. Second was by Ms. Roland and the motion carried unanimously.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. September 25, 2007

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Mr. Rogers and the motion carried unanimously.

3. PUBLIC OUTREACH PLAN

A. Presentation by Staff

Land Use Planner Mike Kattermann noted that an updated version of the public outreach plan

had been provided to each committee member. He pointed out that the six main objectives have not been changed. The next open house is slated for November 6 prior to the next regular committee meeting; an open house on the second set of topics will be scheduled for January and/or February. A final open house will be held in April to talk about the policies and draft catalogue.

Mr. Kattermann observed that the first committee tour of the Central Link project was held on October 12; the second group is scheduled for October 19, and the final group is scheduled for October 26. The tour of the proposed alignments and station locations for the East Link project will be coming up in early November. Tours of the case study cities will be scheduled for January.

Informational displays are being put together and will be put up at Crossroads Mini City Hall and other locations. Staff will make themselves available to address organizations as requested. Guest lecturers may be brought in.

The project website has been online since July. An email address for the project has been set up – lrbestpractices@bellevuewa.gov – and work is under way to get each committee member a code to allow external access to the emails received.

An article regarding the work of the committee was included in the latest edition of *It's Your City*. An updated article will appear in the next edition as well. A frequently asked questions sheet has been developed and will be kept updated. A project brochure is being printed and will be out in a week or so.

B. Communication with Committee

Mr. Kattermann said there have been requests from the public to be able to address the committee members individually. He stressed that whenever a committee member responds to an email or query, the response should be made part of the public record by being shared with the entire committee. Staff will provide hard copies until full access to the email box is set up.

C. Questions

Mr. Glass stressed the need to make information available at places such as Bellevue Square where there may be those who are not completely informed relative to everything going on in the city; he said their feedback is also important. Outreach to places and events not normally considered venues for getting information out has proved very successful in the update to the ped-bike plan. Mr. Kattermann said he has a list of upcoming festivals and events and will also be taking the show on the road to keep all the city's boards and commissions updated. Every opportunity will be taken to get the word out as broadly as possible.

Chair Robertson noted that the Bellevue PTA operates a legislative list-serve. The PTA uses the program to send messages to the legislative chairs of all the PTAs who then can include articles in all the different school newsletters.

4. CASE STUDY CRITERIA AND CANDIDATE SYSTEMS

A. Presentation by Staff

Transportation Planner Maria Koengeter introduced Mike Eidlin with David Evans and Associates. She explained that the purpose for establishing case study criteria and candidate

systems is to review the best practices from a systemwide planning and implementation perspective. They will allow for zeroing in on things such as the decision making processes of local governments, the policy frameworks used by other cities, and the experiences of cities in coordinating with the transit agencies charged with developing light rail systems. The case study systems will also highlight some of the tradeoffs made between best practices and real world applications.

Ms. Koengeter said the initial screening conducted by David Evans and Associates consisted of a review of system demographics, characteristics and a general comparison against the initial criteria. Systems not fitting with the criteria were removed from the consideration matrix, leaving a total of 12 systems on the list.

Calgary has three lines totaling 43 kilometers and has 33 stations. The line is almost entirely above ground; there is one small tunnel section in the downtown area. A significant portion of the system was constructed on existing rights-of-way. There is an emphasis on transit-oriented development in the downtown, but only a mixed success with transit-oriented development outside of the downtown. Calgary is unique in that both the transit and land use decisions were made by the city. There were issues raised by neighborhoods regarding noise, parking and access.

The line in Dallas totals 45 miles. It travels through established residential areas and the urban downtown as well as redevelopment transit-oriented development areas. The line includes at-grade, elevated and tunnel profiles. There is strong community support for the system; a recent vote to extend the line was successful.

The light rail system in Denver runs 35 miles on six lines; there are 36 stations and 19 park and ride lots. There is a couplet in the downtown that connects to a transit mall that is similar to what is proposed for the at-grade alignment in downtown Bellevue. The majority of the system was built along railroad and highway rights-of-way. There is strong community support for extending the line.

The Hudson-Bergen line in New Jersey is 26 miles long and has 23 stations. It travels through a mix of land uses using old railroad rights-of-way and some new right-of-way. The line has served as a catalyst for development of some areas. The line is noteworthy in that it used an innovative design/build/operate/maintain construction format.

Los Angeles has five lines totaling 73 miles of light rail and 62 stations. The Gold Line, constructed most recently, includes at-grade, elevated and tunneled portions. The line is noted for its innovative mitigation to address the concerns of residential areas, particularly with regard to noise. The trains run slower through part of the line as a means of reducing noise impacts.

Minneapolis has one recently opened line 12 miles long with 17 stations. It connects residential areas with the urban downtown, the airport, and the Mall of America. It was built largely at-grade along an arterial using existing right-of-way. The only tunneled portion is at the airport connecting the two terminals.

The light rail line in Sacramento is just short of 37 miles long, eight miles of which is single track. Much of the line was constructed as single track but a second track was added as ridership popularity of the line grew. There are 45 stations and 18 park and ride lots. In the downtown the line runs in its own right-of-way in some areas and shares right-of-way with automobiles in other areas. Much of the line runs through residential areas.

San Diego has 51 miles of track in three lines; there are 53 stations. The alignment runs at-grade in the downtown area. The most recent Mission Valley extension includes tunnel, at-grade and elevated profiles, and includes a tunneled station. Much of the system was constructed on existing railroad rights-of-way, though the Mission Valley line had to acquire new right-of-way in a variety of land use areas.

San Francisco has an extensive transit network, including a light rail system. The system demonstrates opportunities for creating multimodal connections in a fully integrated transit environment. The most recent light rail extension runs through a former streetcar neighborhood; the new line is just over five miles long and includes 18 at-grade stations.

San Jose has three lines totaling 42 miles; it has 62 stations. The form is primarily auto-oriented. The downtown area has a land use pattern resembling that of downtown Bellevue. The areas outside of the downtown offer a number of transit-oriented development examples. The line runs primarily at-grade in a dedicated right-of-way, though there is a short tunnel in the downtown area.

St. Louis has 48 miles of line that utilizes 37 stations. It connects the downtown with the suburbs and the airport. It includes a significant emphasis on park and ride lots as a means to provide access to the line. The line is largely elevated through the suburbs and rural areas. It was constructed mostly on existing rights-of-way and includes an old freight tunnel through the downtown that was converted to light rail.

Vancouver, B.C. has 30 miles of track and 33 stations. The line travels through a mix of land uses and is probably the most extensive urban elevated system of all those considered. There are also tunnels in the downtown area and a number of transit-oriented development examples.

- B. Questions
- C. Committee Feedback

Mr. Larrivee asked if any of the systems pass through environmentally sensitive areas. Mr. Eidlin said his experience has been that many of the lines encounter a variety of environmentally sensitive areas and deal with them in a number of different ways. He said the normal practice is to avoid such areas where possible. Wetland areas are particularly challenging given that if they cannot be avoided it is often necessary to mitigate with some multiple effect. Mr. Larrivee said it does not appear that Mercer Slough can be avoided.

Commissioner Northey suggested that infrastructure other than light rail has undoubtedly been constructed in sensitive areas that may provide lessons learned applicable to Bellevue.

Mr. Mathews suggested the line through Bellevue will not have much existing railroad rights-of-way to utilize. As such, the study should focus on the systems that had to acquire new right-of-way. In Eidlin pointed out that most light rail systems push to use existing rights-of-way whenever possible given the extraordinary effort it takes to assemble a corridor. That is one reason the existing BNSF corridor running through Bellevue will be so important to keep intact.

Councilmember Balducci urged the committee to look at approaches that did not work, as well as approaches that did. That will be a very important aspect to the study and will be very helpful for the Council. If all of the needed information cannot be selected from four or five specific case studies, it may be necessary to pick and choose from portions of certain light rail systems that have elements applicable to Bellevue. She said she would also like to see examples of transit-oriented development that occurred as a result of market forces.

Mr. Eidlin allowed that Portland has a lot of examples applicable to Bellevue; it includes segments for which right-of-way had to be assembled, it has pieces of track running adjacent to single family homes, and it has areas that were constructed over wetlands where mitigation was required.

Councilmember Balducci suggested putting Portland back on the list, at least for the secondary screening.

Mr. Glass suggested that of the systems on the list, San Jose sounds the most similar to Bellevue. He suggested ruling out New Jersey just because it is so far away and would be logistically difficult to visit.

Mr. Glass noted that many of the cities on the list are warm weather cities. He asked if there are differences between systems in warm locales versus areas that experience inclement weather. He was reminded that both Calgary and Minneapolis experience poor weather conditions during the year. Mr. Eidlin allowed that there are differences in systems based on the weather conditions they experience, most notably in the design of the stations. In southern cities, maintaining ambient temperatures inside the shelters is very important; Phoenix has attempted to do so in an environmentally sensitive way. In Dallas there are large open canopies allowed for natural ventilation. Northern cities strive to provide more protection from wind, rain and snow.

Mr. Larrivee asked why the focus on the San Francisco system was not on the other side of the bay in the area that more closely resembles Bellevue. Mr. Eidlin said one of the dilemmas has been that while the Sound Transit system is called a light rail system, in many ways it approaches heavy rail in its operating characteristics. The screening could be expanded to include non-light rail systems, and that would pick up the BART system in San Francisco, Atlanta, and other cities.

Commissioner Northey said she would rule out both the San Francisco and San Diego examples as not being similar enough to Bellevue. She said she would welcome taking another look at the Sacramento system and possibly the Pittsburgh system. Mr. Eidlin said there is very little of the line running through Pittsburgh that looks anything at all like Bellevue.

Ms. Roland said she has ridden most of the lines highlighted. She said she likes the San Diego line very much. She said when she visits cities she will ride the light rail systems only if they feel safe, and the San Diego system is both safe and easy to use. Ease of use should be a criteria in the study. She allowed that while land use is handled differently in Canada, reviewing their systems should not be ruled out in that they acquire right-of-way in a similar manner. She said it would be helpful to quantify system usership relative to area population for the case studies. She agreed that Portland should be included on the list.

Mr. Rogers stressed the need for the committee to receive data on at-grade in-street systems operating in downtown areas. He said he would like to see examples of what has been done well and what has not been done well, and how systems have been phased in over time. How existing single family residential has been protected should also be studied in detail, and the more examples the better.

Ms. Robertson agreed the Portland system should be put back on the list and asked why the Boston system was not included. Mr. Eidlin said the Boston system is a mix of heavy and light rail; the cars are older and the right-of-way is mostly in the street. The system is awkward at best, is old, and was built at a time when many of the constraints that must be dealt with now

were not addressed. She suggested that systems should not be discounted just because they are too far away for the committee to visit.

Mr. Larrivee said he would like to see photos of systems operating during peak congestion times.

Ms. Northey observed that in some of the system photos shown light rail is running down the side of the street and noted those designs seem less pedestrian friendly. Mr. Eidlin agreed and pointed out that light rail designers prefer to have systems running in the center of the streets to avoid conflicts with vehicle turning movements and pedestrians.

Ms. Koengeter said staff will have additional information for the committee at a future meeting.

5. EXISTING POLICY

A. Presentation by Staff

Senior Planner Janet Lewine explained that there are 13 individual elements in the Comprehensive Plan, and most of the policies applicable to transportation and light rail can be found in the Transportation, Land Use, Citizen Participation, Economic Development, Urban Design and Environmental elements. She added that the 14 subarea plans, which serve as subsets of the Comprehensive Plan, are important because they establish the vision of what is important to the community in each area of the city.

Ms. Lewine said the Comprehensive Plan is adopted by the City Council and serves as the long-range vision for the city. As such, all other plans adopted by the city must be aligned with the Comprehensive Plan. The interest statements often offer specifics with regard to high-capacity transit and the transit vision of the city, but they are not officially adopted documents.

With regard to the topic "Connecting People to Transit," Ms. Lewine noted that at the open house there were comments from the public regarding the need to provide pedestrian, bicycle and local bus connections; connecting transit to major uses; access to light rail stations by pedestrians; and adequately sized park and ride facilities. She noted that the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan holds policies that are specific to the topic and the public comments. The interest statements discuss the need to link transit to population and employment centers and are specific to walking times for pedestrians wanting to access transit.

Ms. Lewine noted that many of the policies direct development to be sensitive to transit facilities, but there are no specific policies directing transit to be sensitive to the community. The issue is, however, addressed in the interest statements.

The Community and Neighborhoods topic received the most comments by far. Ms. Lewine said the topic issues appear in a variety of places in the Transportation Element, the Land Use Element, the Urban Design Element, and other places. The public comments focused on evolving neighborhoods, spillover traffic and parking, and other undesirable impacts. There were also concerns regarding environmental impacts. There are policies in the various Comprehensive Plan elements that address the concerns raised, and the interest statements address most of the concerns raised and recognize the need to invest in preserving the neighborhoods.

Ms. Lewine informed the committee that fewer public comments were received regarding the topics Protecting and Enhancing Property Values and Station Security. There are also few examples of policies in which enhancing property values and station safety is the focus. Case

study information and research specific to the topics needs to be done. The concern that private properties could be negatively impacted was the main issue raised by the public. The policies in the Comprehensive Plan are primarily focused on maintaining and sustaining economic growth through improved public facilities. There are policies aimed at making sure park and ride facilities are safe, and that pedestrian facilities in general are well lit and safe; the policy language could be strengthened by including specific references to transit stations.

Mr. Kattermann said the committee at its November 6 meeting will be focused on the first four topic areas. Information from the consultants on their findings will be presented, and the input from the roundtable discussions that will immediately precede the committee meeting will be discussed. The committee will get into a more in-depth discussion of the four topics at the meeting in December.

B. Questions

Mr. Larrivee asked if the committee will have the selected case studies finalized before the November 6 meeting. Mr. Kattermann said the original thought was that the case studies should be done first. For several reasons, however, the discussions will start with the first four topics instead. Mr. Larrivee observed that the information from the selected case studies will help to inform the discussions regarding the topic areas, making it necessary to come back to them again down the road. Mr. Kattermann agreed that will need to be done.

6. PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Mark Walsen, 317 109th Avenue SE, urged the committee in looking at light rail case studies to consider not only the light rail facilities but what was there before the facilities were constructed. The issue should be looked at in terms of costs and benefits. The committee should ask about both what is better and what is worse. In seeking information from the various cities, questions should be put to neighborhood leaders and the general citizens to get the full picture of how light rail has changed their communities.

Ms. Betsy Blackstock, 712 109th Avenue SE, praised the committee for asking staff to focus on both success stories and failures, and on how environmental issues have been handled by other jurisdictions. Man on the street information about light rail systems will be very helpful for the committee to have.

Mr. Jack Hunter, 5603 116th Avenue SE, questioned why the committee had scheduled a meeting for the same night as the vote on the roads and transit measure. He said if the measure fails, the whole transit issue will be moot for Bellevue. He agreed with the need to protect single family homes and the environment.

Mr. Kattermann explained that Sound Transit has both the funding and the directive to continue with its planning for the East Link project irrespective of the outcome of the November 6 vote. Since their work will continue, Bellevue needs to utilize the window of opportunity to influence their decision-making process.

Ms. Renay Bennett, 826 108th Avenue SE, clarified that one of the alternative routes Sound Transit is looking at will cross the lake on I-90, pass over Mercer Slough to the BNSF corridor and then turn north on 118th Avenue SE. There are examples of construction projects in wetlands right in Bellevue that should be reviewed, including a hotel on 114th Avenue SE, the I-90 bridge, a portion of SE 8th Street, and the Bellefield Office Park. No one case study will ever be able to match conditions in Bellevue exactly, so it makes the most sense to pick and choose

elements of other systems to study. The committee should also keep in mind that single family property values are much different from commercial property values and will be impacted in far different ways. Residents of Surrey Downs are very concerned because of the very real possibility that if light rail goes through the neighborhood homes will be condemned to make room for it.

7. OTHER BUSINESS/QUESTIONS FROM COMMITTEE

A. November 6 Committee Meeting

Councilmember Balducci noted that she will not be able to be present for the meeting on November 6 and suggested that because it is election day there will be much to distract the committee members and the public. She proposed finding another date for the meeting.

Mr. Kattermann allowed that notice of the open house has not been published. He proposed rescheduling to November 7, a Wednesday.

Ms. Koengeter said the purpose of the November meeting is to deliver the research product. The focus of the December meeting is on process and public input. It would be best not to try to fold the two meetings into one.

There was agreement to move the November 6 meeting to November 20. Mr. Kattermann said the open house meeting may need to be rescheduled as well.

B. November 9 or 17 East Link Tour

It was agreed to schedule both dates from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. to accommodate the committee members.

C. Council Briefing

Mr. Kattermann said a Council briefing will be scheduled for late November or early in December.

D. Reschedule December 4 Committee Meeting

There was agreement to reschedule the December 4 meeting to December 18.

E. Availability for January Case Study Tours

There was agreement to hold January 18 through 21 for case study tours.

8. ADJOURN

Ms. Robertson adjourned the meeting at 9:17 p.m.

Staff to the Light Rail Best Practices Committee

Date