November 14, 2006
Bellevue City Hall
4:00 p.m. Room 1E-113

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mike Creighton, Co-Chair; Terry Lukens, Co-Chair; Kurt Springman, Joel Glass, Doug Mathews, Sue Baugh, Norm Hansen, Faith Roland, Bill Ptacek, Ken Schiring, Pat Sheffels, Laurie Tish,

MEMBERS ABSENT: Steve Dennis, Earl Overstreet, Dean Rebhuhn

OTHERS PRESENT: Matt Terry, Dan Stroh, Department of Planning and Community Development; Kevin O’Neill, Goran Sparrman, Kris Liljeblad, Bernard van de Kamp, Tresa Berg, Department of Transportation; Leonard McGhee, Sound Transit; Jon Runstad, Cindy Edens, Greg Johnson, Wright-Runstad

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. Welcome and Review of the Agenda

2. Approve Minutes from June 29, 2006, meeting

Ms. Sheffels called attention to the second sentence of the fourth paragraph on Page 2 and suggested that “The suggestion was made that the south end of Bel-Red Road…” should read “The suggestion was made that the south side of Bel-Red Road…..”

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Mr. Springman. Second was by Ms. Sheffels and the motion carried unanimously.

3. Status Update on Progress on Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Schedule of Upcoming Work

Long Range Planning Manager Kevin O’Neill informed the committee that development of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) is under way. He said it is based on the three land use and transportation alternatives endorsed by the committee on June 29. A draft of nearly every chapter has been completed; those drafts are currently being reviewed by staff. Because it is necessary to allow time for the responsible official to do a final read-through before publishing the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the publication date will likely be sometime in early January; it would also not be prudent to have the public comment period coincide with the holidays.

Mr. O’Neill explained that this will be a programmatic EIS intended to support a planning level decision. The document will include as much specificity as possible for each alternative. Project level EISs, on the other hand, are drafted for specific projects, such as a building or roadway project.
4. Update on East Link Environmental Scoping Process

Sound Transit East Link project segment manager Leonard McGhee informed the committee that the very successful scoping process ended on October 2. Since then, staff has had time to review the comments received. The largest number of comments received were from the south and west Bellevue neighborhoods concerned about potential alignment impacts to their properties; suggestions were made for Sound Transit to study alignments in the I-405 corridor. The DEIS process will kick off in late January or early February 2007 and be completed by the first quarter of 2008; the FEIS will be completed in 2009.

Mr. McGhee reviewed with the committee the alternatives for the five segments of the East Link project. The comparative evaluation analysis used is intended to illustrate the differences between the alternatives within the five segments. The analysis of each alternative is based on a two percent design level, which is just enough to give an idea of the associated impacts. The Sound Transit Board will be identifying the most promising alternatives; they are slated to take action on December 14 to narrow the list to a reasonable number of promising alternatives for review in the DEIS. A preferred alignment will be selected after the DEIS is published in 2008 and after public comments are received and reviewed.

Because each of the alternatives serves the same basic market, ridership estimates do not vary much by alternative. For East Link, the estimate is that between 31,000 and 36,000 additional riders will use the system. The cost of each alternative differs based on length, profile, and the number of stations; the number and type of impacts also vary by alternative.

Mr. McGhee said Segment A involves use of the center roadway of I-90 across Lake Washington. It includes two stations, one on Rainier Avenue and one on Mercer Island near the park and ride lot. There will be options to analyze for Segment A, however, in terms of the operation of I-90, specifically rail only, or rail/bus operations on the HOV ramp between downtown Seattle and Rainier Avenue, and how to preserve access from Bellevue Way to the I-90 HOV lane westbound and eastbound I-405.

Segment B is the section between I-90 and Main Street in Bellevue through south Bellevue. Mr. McGhee reviewed with the committee the various alignment options using Bellevue Way, Bellevue Way/112th Avenue SE, and I-405. He noted that each of the four I-405 alternatives would require a new bridge across Mercer Slough, adding cost, risk and ecosystem impacts.

The committee was told that Segment C, downtown Bellevue, is the most challenging. It is important, however, in that the alignment in the downtown will determine where the Bel-Red corridor lines connect. Segment C includes three tunnel alternatives, one at-grade alternative and two elevated alternatives. It was observed that the highest costs are associated with the tunnel options.

Segment D passes through the Bel-Red corridor to Overlake in Redmond and includes three primary routes. One alignment utilizes Bel-Red Road, primarily at-grade except for a retained cut passing under 148th Avenue NE. The NE 16th Street option has various alignments associated with it, both at-grade and elevated. The third main route is along the south side of SR-520 to the Overlake area; it includes an at-grade alignment created by developing a retained bench. The Bel-Red Road alignment has the highest impacts to adjacent uses but low relocation costs. The NE 16th Street alternatives have generally low impacts, but some involve very high relocation costs. The SR-520 alignment has the lowest costs but has no stations other than at either end. From the public comments received, stations will be considered for the old Safeway
site and along NE 24th Street in Redmond.

Segment E takes the line from Overlake to downtown Redmond. It has three possible alignments. The preferred alternative of Redmond heads west along SR-520 past Marymoor Park to a station near the interchange of SR-520 and SR-202, then heads west to stations near Town Center and the Redmond park and ride. To reduce costs, Redmond staff have indicated support for not extending the line to the park and ride lot.

Mr. McGhee pointed out that the East Link system will need a maintenance facility on the Eastside. He said five sites are under consideration including sites in the Bel-Red corridor: a site between 116th Avenue NE and the BNSF right-of-way to the north of NE 12th Street; the site of the Weyerhaeuser distribution facility on the west side of the BNSF right-of-way; and a site north of NE 20th Street between 136th Place and 132nd Avenue NE. A site in Redmond near SR-202 and SR-520 is also being considered.

Mr. McGhee said Sound Transit is using the Puget Sound Regional Council land use forecasts to determine ridership numbers.

Mr. McGhee said they can be reached by spur from any of the alignments.

Mr. Lukens asked when the Council will be weighing in and making its wishes known with regard to the alternatives. Department of Transportation Director Goran Sparman said staff will update the Council again on November 20 and expects Council action on December 4.

5. Updates on Major Regional Transportation Projects
   a. SR-520 DEISs
   b. I-405/NE 8th Braided Ramp Project
   c. BNSF Corridor
   d. Transit Now Program

Regional Projects Manager Bernard van de Kamp said there has been quite a bit of movement on the SR-520 project; the bridge replacement project has been under way for nearly nine years. A DEIS was published during the summer of 2006, and the lengthy public comment period wrapped up on October 31. Selection of a preferred alternative by the committee has been put off indefinitely to allow time to thoroughly review the volume of public comments received.

Bellevue has been working closely with its neighboring jurisdictions and has reached consensus with Redmond, Kirkland the and Points communities on a preferred alternative. From the perspective of Bellevue, of the two options on the table, the six-lane alternative is preferable over the four-lane alternative. The conclusion reached holds that there are too many constraints offered by the corridor to exceeding the six-lane alternative.

There are several design options associated with the EIS. One that has received a great deal of discussion is the Pacific interchange which would replace the ramps at Montlake Boulevard with a new interchange where the ramps to nowhere are in the area of the arboretum, creating a new bridge accessing the Pacific/Montlake intersection over the ship canal and landing in the Husky stadium south parking lot. The option addresses many regional traffic problems on the west side. Bellevue supports the option.
Continuing, Mr. van de Kamp said there are similar improvements highlighted for the east side. Of particular interest to the Bel-Red area is the notion of creating a direct access ramp to and from the west at 108th Avenue NE, allowing transit vehicles to access an off-ramp serving the south Kirkland park and ride lot and providing a back door to get into downtown Bellevue. The direct access ramp works well in the corridor and addresses the desire of the Points communities to preserve the two flyer stops that are important to them. The future vision for the SR-520 corridor includes the addition of high-capacity transit. By adding in the flyer stops, the corridor will be widened slightly, preserving right-of-way that could be converted at some time to high-capacity transit, either in the form of bus rapid transit or light rail.

Mr. van de Kamp said the NE 10th Street crossing connecting 112th Avenue NE to 116th Avenue NE through the hospital district is headed toward construction. A contract for Phase I has been awarded which will result in improvements to 116th Avenue NE to prepare for future volumes. That project will be followed by the freeway overcrossing section, a $67 million project that is slated to be completed by 2009 and which will accommodate future ramps to and from the north.

The 112th Avenue SE to SE 8th Street widening project is headed for construction in the spring or summer of 2007. Also called the Wilburton Weave, the project will add one lane northbound from 112th Avenue SE past I-90 to SE 8th Street. The improvement will have congestion relief benefits all the way south to Renton in the northbound direction, though over the long term it will need to be followed with more improvements to accommodate traffic growth. The project will add one general purpose lane and one HOV lane in the southbound direction from SE 8th Street to just south of I-90; the project will stop short of including additional improvements at Coal Creek Parkway. An additional bridge across I-90 will be required and the project will relieve the weave congestion between downtown Bellevue and I-90 during the PM peak. With the recent filing by BNSF to abandon operations on the railroad between I-90 and SE 8th Street, the need to reconstruct the rail bridge and reconstruct the entire corridor with a new tunnel was obviated, bringing about major cost savings. The project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2009.

Mr. van de Kamp shared with the committee drawings of the proposed NE 8th Street braided ramp project. The drawing showed the NE 10th Street overpass in place along with an improved NE 12th Street overpass with improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities. He explained that the project will remove access to SR-520 from NE 8th Street; in its place will be an extension of the collector/distributor roadway connecting to I-405 further north, physically separating the I-405-bound traffic from NE 8th Street entirely from the traffic exiting I-405 heading for SR-520. NE 10th Street will ultimately have ramps to and from SR-520, beginning with the northbound ramp which will connect on a third stack over the collector/distributor on the east side of I-405.

A similar braided ramp configuration is planned for SR-520 at 12th Avenue NE to eliminate the weave for traffic existing I-405 onto SR-520. The braid will physically separate the two traffic flows. An improved off-ramp will be constructed at 124th Avenue NE. The new land use pattern in the Bel-Red area envisioned by the Bel-Red study will yield higher volumes using 124th Avenue NE, so the off-ramp will need sufficient queuing capacity.

Some improvements will be made to the ramps from SR-520 to I-405, giving traffic more time to merge by extending the length of the merge lane.

Mr. van de Kamp said the I-405/NE 8th Street collection of projects were fully funded as part of the 2005 gas tax increase and will be constructed between 2009 and 2011. The environmental process is underway and will take anywhere from 12 to 18 months to complete.
The Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railroad has filed an intent to cease operations between I-90 and SE 8th Street, and they may file to cease operations entirely in the corridor. The rail line has very low usage, with Boeing and the dinner train the primary users. Boeing is able to move its fuselages from Everett to Renton via the line running through Seattle, though some revision to the bridge over the Cedar River will be necessary; the dinner train is considering operations only to the north. King County is considering a complicated transaction with the Port of Seattle in which Boeing Field would be exchanged for the BNSF right-of-way. The intent is to gain a regional trail along the railroad right-of-way without precluding future light rail uses.

Mr. van de Kamp said the successful vote on November 7 to raise the sales tax by one tenth of one cent will yield revenues to improve King County Metro transit frequencies and services throughout the county, primarily on high-usage routes. Forty percent of the new service will go to the Eastside, 40 percent will go to South King County, and 20 percent will go to the Seattle area under a policy worked out several years ago. Five bus rapid transit routes operating on arterials in conjunction with queue jumps and signal priority are proposed in the Transit Now package; one of the routes will connect downtown Bellevue with Crossroads, Overlake and downtown Redmond, though the details are yet to be worked out.

6. Presentation by Wright Runstad

Jon Runstad said the interest of Wright Runstad in the Bel-Red Safeway property grew directly out of the Bel-Red corridor study and the work of the steering committee. He noted that Wright Runstad has constructed several successful projects in Bellevue, beginning with One Bellevue Center which opened in 1983 when downtown Bellevue was a very different place; it was the first building in the downtown constructed under the new downtown zoning rules. Overall, Wright Runstad has developed some 2.5 million square feet of office space in the city.

Mr. Runstad said the Safeway site represents the next Bellevue commitment for Wright Runstad. The site has great potential and is in an area that is in transition. As the area redevelops, it will complement the downtown and will expand the capacity of the city to accommodate new business opportunities.

Wright Runstad President Greg Johnson said the work of the steering committee is what got the company excited about the opportunities the Safeway site presents. He noted that the company is under contract to purchase 36 of the 60-acre Safeway site and has the right of first refusal for the balance of the site. The site has several attributes, including access to the regional freeway system, a topography that affords opportunities for significant views, residential areas to the south and north, and thriving retail areas nearby.

Mr. Johnson said of the alternatives that have been forwarded to the EIS, Wright Runstad prefers Alternative 3; it provides for the greatest density, which is warranted and supported by the inclusion of high-capacity transit.

The land to be retained by Safeway will continue to be used by that company for the district headquarters, for milk and ice cream processing, and for warehousing.

Cindy Edens, Director of Development for Wright Runstad, said the Pearl District in Portland serves as an example of what the Bel-Red area could become, with open areas and a combination of office, retail and residential uses. She said a street grid with blocks measuring 200 feet by 240 feet has been sketched for the Safeway site, with NE 16th Street serving as the main public street.
for the area; there is the possibility that a parking garage could be constructed under the entire site.

Ms. Edens outlined for the committee how the site could develop with open space, trails around and through the development, ground floor neighborhood-scale retail, an open space and residential buildings with 800 to 1000 units on the southern portion, and an office area on the northern section.

Mr. Johnson said circulation and pedestrian walkability is the focus of the initial thinking for the site. He said the opportunity exists to create a great street experience for pedestrians. On the southwest corner there is a considerable grade separation between the site and the roadway; a part of the plan includes providing a pedestrian stairway connecting the open space with the area by Lake Bellevue.

Ms. Edens stressed the visual importance of varying the height and design of the buildings. She said Wright Runstad will be asking the city to be allowed to construct a range of building heights.

Mr. Johnson said the open space will be important both to the residential and office components, and will provide a sense of place to the site. The open space at the south end will connect to a future high-capacity transit or light rail stop, all of which fits into the urban village concept.

Mr. Runstad said height flexibility will be critical to implementing the vision; for one thing it will allow for more open space. An FAR of 2.0 is satisfactory, maybe 2.5 if housing is included. He suggested including heights of 75 to 130 feet, or six to ten stories, and allowing residential uses on the site. He added that Wright Runstad has a good capital partner who has a 20-year time horizon instead of five that so many have.

Ms. Baugh asked what the vision is for the residential portion of the development. Ms. Eaton said a mix of unit types is contemplated, from condominiums and townhouses and rental units. Mr. Johnson held that variety will be key to the success of the residential units, with different sizes and character differences. Townhouses around the open space/park area would be ideal. Housing or office over retail uses has not been specifically considered, thought nothing has been ruled out.

Ms. Sheffels asked if the open space will be open to the public or created just for local use. Mr. Runstad said it would be open to the public, though there may be a need to regulate the hours of use, particularly in the evening.

Ms. Roland asked how development of the site will mesh with the Coca Cola facility to the east. Ms. Eaton noted that there is a greenbelt between the two sites. Mr. Johnson added that there is a high tension powerline running down 124th Avenue NE. Transition of the Bel-Red corridor to a variety of uses will likely occur over many years and not all at once. It would be poor planning to create housing units under the powerlines and facing a warehouse facility. In time, the cost of the land on which Coca Cola sits may rise to the point that having a warehouse facility on it will not make financial sense.

Answering a question asked by regarding the transportation needs of the area, Mr. Johnson said the modifications that have been discussed as part of the Bel-Red corridor study will be critical. Some of them will benefit ingress and egress for the Safeway site, but a full study of the specific needs has yet to be done. He added that redevelopment of the Safeway site will occur in multiple phases; the market will dictate the pace for bringing the office and housing units online.
What is needed upfront is good planning.

Mr. Lukens suggested the committee should spend some time at its next meeting focused on process and how redevelopment of the Safeway site fits into the overall goal for the Bel-Red area.

Mr. Springman asked about the possibility of having a major sports facility locate on the site. Mr. Runstad suggested there is a lot of uncertainty with regard to what the Sonics are going to do. He proposed that there are far better sites for such a facility. However, if a proposal is made, Wright Runstad will consider it. He added that it is highly unlikely the company will be put in that position.

7. Next Scheduled Meeting

December 7, 2006

8. Public Comment

Ms. Ester Brookman said she lives very close to the Safeway site and is concerned about a development proposal that will generate a great deal more traffic. She suggested the roads serving the area will need to be enlarged to accommodate all of the cars. She also proposed that consideration should be given to undergrounding the high tension powerlines.

Ms. Pamela Toelle, a resident along 148th Avenue NE, explained that for many Bel-Red Road is the primary route for going east and west. A cut and cover approach to constructing transit would be preferable to running the line down the middle of the road.

Mr. Howard Katz, a resident of Lake Bellevue, said development of the Safeway site as outlined will add a large number of cars to the local roads, backing up NE 8th Street and NE 12th Street, unless there are solid plans for getting the cars to and from the freeways.

Mr. Todd Woosley, one of the owners of Brierwood Center, commented that the DEIS for SR-520 included an analysis for an eight-lane option; he suggested that the option offers the most benefits and is the only alternative that will reduce congestion while accommodating future demand. Only about nine percent of the trips on SR-520 to the east of I-405 come across the bridge; the bulk of the trips come from the north and south. With regard to the BNSF rail line, he suggested that a study of how the line could be used to move freight through the area, which is needed much more than additional recreation options. Transit Now will bring additional bus service to the Bel-Red corridor, but by giving the buses queue priority could have a negative impact on levels of service. Concurrency is a concern for the Bel-Red area, and everything done there should be done with an eye on improving things rather than providing additional impacts.

Mr. John Torrance, a real estate broker, said the Bel-Red corridor has huge potential for an employment base. He said the proposal of Wright Runstad is forward thinking. Light rail will be needed to serve the area. Open space is needed, and buildings up to 300 feet with an FAR of 2.6 would not be out of line. Alternative 3 is clearly the best option for the area.

9. Adjourn

Mr. Creighton adjourned the meeting at 5:59 p.m.