



DATE: January, 13, 2010

TO: Chair Sheffels and Members of the Planning Commission

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SUBJECT: East Link Light Rail Update

Per Planning Commission's request, staff has prepared this update on the East Link light rail project. Following the adoption of the Light Rail Best Practices policy amendments in 2008, the city has worked with Sound Transit to evaluate a range of potential light rail station and routing alternatives. The purpose of this update is to describe the alternatives currently being evaluated, as well as the remainder of the environmental review process, schedule and public outreach. At this stage in the process, the City continues to work with Sound Transit to identify issues and assist in the evaluation of the new alternatives. There is no formal role in this part of the project for any city boards or commissions and no action is requested of the Planning Commission with this briefing.

Background

On May 14, 2009, the Sound Transit Board passed a motion identifying the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for light rail routes and stations for the East Link Project Final EIS. The LPA and all of the other alternatives continue to be evaluated in the East Link FEIS that is expected to be complete in fall 2010. Concurrently, the LPA was advanced into preliminary engineering, beginning a more detailed design process. The City has been actively participating in Sound Transit's preliminary engineering design teams in order to advance the project consistent with the City Council's direction. A brief description of the design status for each segment follows:

Segment B – South Bellevue

The City Council requested, and the Sound Transit Board advanced into the LPA, a Bellevue Way-112th Avenue SE side-running alternative. Sound Transit developed conceptual engineering of the alternative and has determined that the design is feasible. City staff has been working through several issues with Sound Transit, including the design of the South Bellevue Park & Ride station, access to the Farm Stand, design options to preserve the Winters House, and mitigation.

Segment C - Downtown

The Sound Transit Board selected the at-grade alternative (C4A) as its preferred alternative and advanced a deep-bore tunnel (C3T 108th Tunnel) for further consideration, subject to supplemental funding. Both C4A and C3T were advanced for

further engineering. It also directed that the City join Sound Transit in a peer review of the downtown at-grade alternative and develop a financing plan with Sound Transit for the cost increment of the downtown tunnel alternative. The City initiated a number of work items in support of identifying an agreeable downtown option:

- At-grade traffic modeling – The city initiated a modeling effort to evaluate the transportation implications for a downtown at-grade light rail alternative. This work is underway and results are expected in the first quarter of 2010.
- Peer Review Panel – Sound Transit formed a Peer Review Panel to make observations about the transportation implications for the C4A at-grade alternative in downtown. The Panel has met once and will meet again in early 2010. The focus of the first meeting was learning about the downtown Bellevue transportation system and land use vision and the East Link analysis to date.
- Financial Plan – City staff have developed and submitted to Sound Transit a list of possible funding sources that could be used to enable a tunnel option. Work is ongoing to determine the potential magnitude of the sources and the implications for other City efforts.

There have been many issues and concerns raised by City of Bellevue and its citizens about the C4A (at-grade couplet) alignment. In February 2009, the City Council selected the C2T tunnel as its preferred alignment through downtown. C2T would surface on NE 6th east of the Bellevue Transit Center and cross over I-405 at that point. The tunnel preference indicated by the Sound Transit Board (C3T), subject to supplemental funding, would be a bored tunnel through downtown from Main Street to NE 12th, surfacing in McCormick Park and crossing over I-405 at NE 12th north of Overlake Hospital. Based on feedback from the public, the City, and expert panels assembled by Sound Transit, there are four new alternatives that are under consideration by Sound Transit.

Two of the new alternatives are at-grade, one is elevated and one is in a tunnel. All of the new alternatives cross I-405 at NE 6th (rather than NE 12th). Both at-grade alternatives (C9A, C11A) and the tunnel (C9T) are elevated over 112th south of Main. Sound Transit would likely need to purchase all of the properties on the south side of Main from 112th to either 110th (C9A, C9T) or 108th (C11A). Another feature common to these three alignments is that they are elevated over 112th on NE 6th and I-405 to the BNSF right-of-way and then north along the BNSF with an elevated station straddling NE 8th behind Whole Foods.

- C9A travels north from Main in the median of 110th to NE 6th with a station platform partially elevated in the median of NE 6th between City Hall and Meydenbauer Convention Center;
- C11A travels north from Main in the median of 108th to NE 6th with a combined light rail and bus transit center at the current Bellevue Transit Center site. The proposed East Main Station, located at Main Street and 112th Avenue could be moved to the south side of Main Street between 108th Avenue and 110th Avenue with this alternative;
- C9T follows the same alignment as C9A, but goes underground on the south side of Main and resurfaces in the median of NE 6th between City Hall and

Meydenbauer Center. The underground station would be under the intersection of 110th and NE 4th with access at either end of the station (approximately City Hall and NE 3rd Place); and

- C14E travels up 114th along I-405 with an elevated station just south of NE 6th and an elevated pedestrian connection, including moving sidewalks, to the City Hall plaza. It would then cross over I-405 north of NE 6th and connect to the BNSF right-of-way with an elevated station north of NE 8th, behind Whole Foods. This is the Downtown portion of the alignment proposed by Councilmember Wallace.

Segment D

Sound Transit advanced the NE 16th At-Grade Alternative (D2A) for further engineering, consistent with the City Council's and Sound Transit Board of Director's preference. This alternative is consistent with the City's Bel-Red plan. The Board also directed evaluation of alternative station profiles for the 124th Station in the Wright Runstad-owned "Spring District." The Spring District will be developed as a mixed use office/commercial/residential district on the old Safeway distribution site. City staff has been working closely with Sound Transit and the developer to determine the station location and address various engineering and design issues in the area. In addition to the Spring District, the City has been focusing on developing concepts for a multi-purpose trail that will connect the Bel-Red area and the light rail stations to the regional trail system. The City is also concurrently advancing the NE 15th/16th Street Design Project, including coordinating between this project and the ongoing light rail work as well as future station area planning in the Bel-Red corridor.

Next Steps

Because of the new downtown options and the significant design variations in Segments B and D, Sound Transit has determined it is necessary to prepare a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) to document the potential impacts of these new alternatives and seek public comment. The SDEIS is expected to be released in late spring or early summer 2010. These new alternatives and the comments on the SDEIS will be included in the FEIS, expected to be published in late 2010.

The City is participating in a Sound Transit led evaluation process of the four new Segment C alternatives. The evaluation is not the same scope or level of analysis that will be done in the SEIS. It is intended to provide a side-by-side comparison of the alternatives based on several criteria – cost, ridership, visual assessments, traffic operations, environmental impacts, construction effects and risks and consistency with land use and transportation plans. The consistency criterion will incorporate a review of relevant policies in Bellevue's Comprehensive Plan – including policies from land use, transportation, environmental, urban design and economic development elements as well as subarea plans for Downtown, Wilburton, Southwest and Bel-Red. The Light Rail Best Practices policies adopted by Council in August 2008 are included in the Transportation Element.

A report on the evaluation is expected to be completed in late January or early February. Sound Transit will be reviewing and soliciting comments from the many downtown stakeholders and the City Council in early 2010 in order to narrow down the Segment C alternatives to one of the new alternatives for analysis in the SEIS. This is anticipated to result in the Sound Transit Board revisiting and possibly revising its LPA for purposes of the FEIS.

The SEIS will have a 45-day comment period once it is issued and the Council may seek public comment during that time as well – similar to what was done for the DEIS. The Commission can also be notified of the public workshops Sound Transit will conduct on the Segment C alternatives during the month of February.

City Council continues to receive updates from Sound Transit and City staff as the process moves forward. The City Council has consistently indicated its strong desire to remain at the forefront of this process rather than delegate responsibility to other city boards or commissions. While there is no formal role for the Planning Commission at this point of the process, there will be several opportunities for individual commissioners to participate in the process as Bellevue citizens.

The Light Rail Best Practices report anticipated additional amendments to the Comprehensive Plan policies and the Land Use Code once a final alignment has been determined. The planned land uses around most of the stations has, for the most part, been established through the Comprehensive Plan and subarea plans (e.g. Downtown Plan, Bel-Red Plan). Additional refinement of the plans and new development regulations may be needed. For example, the Bel-Red Plan incorporated planning around the 122nd (Spring District) and 130th stations. However, additional, more specific planning may be appropriate once the final alignment and station locations have been determined. No land use changes are planned for the area near the South Bellevue Park and Ride. If the final alignment locates the hospital station next to Whole Foods, the City may consider land use changes in the vicinity of that station. Neither the Bel-Red nor the Wilburton planning efforts fully took into account the potential for a station at that location because there have been two potential sites for that station.

The current project schedule has the final alignment decision by the Sound Transit Board toward the end of 2010 with final design moving forward at that time to obtain permit approvals for beginning of construction in 2013. Under that schedule, the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code amendments would likely be initiated in 2011. All of those amendments would be subject to Planning Commission review and recommendation. The City will have other planning efforts (e.g. station area planning) related to East Link over the next several years that may also involve the Planning Commission.

Staff will be available at the meeting to answer any questions from the Commission.