

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 25, 2007
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Yuen, Commissioners Bell, Glass, Holler, Wendle

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Chair Young, Commissioner Northey

STAFF PRESENT: Kevin McDonald, Fred Liang, Department of Transportation; Alex O'Reilly, Kathy VonWald, Parks & Community Services; Doug Whalen, United Way; Francois Larravee, Hopelink; Doug Hoople, Berta Seltzer, Human Services Commission

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Vice-Chair Yuen who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Chair Young, who was excused, and Commissioner Northey.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Transportation Planner Kevin McDonald provided the Commissioners with copies of the quarterly investment update for the Capital Investment Program. He reported that the Bel-Red Corridor Project Steering Committee will meet again on February 1 at 4:00 p.m., and that on February 15 the city will host an open house and public hearing for the Bel-Red Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Bell said he attended a recent joint meeting of the Bellevue Downtown

Association and Chamber of Commerce transportation committee. The meeting was very productive and provided an opportunity to explain to the group what the Transportation Commission does. He stressed the need to form a strong bond with the two groups. There was recognition of the fact that there needs to be increases to the impact fee program, but they want to be sure to be in the loop.

Commissioner Glass said the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Bel-Red corridor study was released earlier in the day. The steering committee will be working toward selecting a preferred alternative by early April.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Eastside Easy Rider Collaborative

Alex O'Reilly, Human Services Planner, introduced Doug Hoople, chair of the Human Services Commission; Berta Seltzer, Human Services commissioner and member of the Bellevue Network on Aging; Kathy VonWald, Aging Services Manager, Parks & Community Services; Doug Whalen, Community Impact Manager, United Way of King County; and Francois Larravee, Associate Director of Transportation for Hopelink.

Ms. VonWald said the collaborative was formed in November 2005 following participation by several human service agencies in a national coordinated transportation forum training workshop hosted by Sound Transit. The stated mission is to address the mobility needs of transportation disadvantaged individuals, which includes older adults, people with disabilities, youth, and low-income individuals. The list of partners includes the city of Bellevue, Sound Transit, United Way of King County, Seattle/King County Area Agency on Aging, King County Metro, and Hopelink. The Bellevue Network on Aging, which was formed in the summer of 2006, is also a partner.

Mr. Whalen said there were four processes that contributed to the formation of the collaborative: 1) the finding of the Bellevue Human Services Needs Update that there are transportation barriers affecting the ability of special needs populations to access services; 2) the finding of the United Way East Council Eastside Profile that transportation barriers are impacting special needs populations; 3) research completed by the city's Department of Transportation and outlined in the 2001-2007 Transit Plan published in June 2003 that reveals gaps in service of Metro's fixed-route system; and 4) observations by the transportation department of Hopelink, which serves as Metro's DART contractor and as the regional DSHS Medicaid transportation broker.

Continuing, Mr. Whalen said he served for a period of almost 15 months as a volunteer on Metro's Eastside Sounding Board, a group of some 22 citizens focused on strengthening the efficiencies of the fixed route and Sound Transit processes. He said in pouring over transit maps of Bellevue and the Eastside it became apparent that the system is limited to the major

arterials, and restricted during many hours of each day and on the weekends.

Mr. Larravee said the first success of the collaborative was in bringing the partners together to address the issues. From the start it was clear the data needed to begin proposing projects was not available. The group concluded it needed to narrow its focus and reached consensus to zero in on projects of specific interest to aging citizens. Accordingly, a survey was developed and sent out to households in all Bellevue zip code areas that have at least one person over the age of 60; the return rate for the survey was very high and the data generated was very helpful.

A series of efforts at the local and regional level to prioritize special needs projects was undertaken in the fall of 2005. The collaborative submitted proposals to the Puget Sound Regional Council, King County and Sound Transit. One proposal involved the creation of a brochure for residents of the Eastside to inform them regarding public transportation options. A second proposal was for a bus buddy program involving individuals working one-on-one with residents to help them understand the public transportation system. A third proposal involves a dial-a-ride program that would permit individuals in the East Bellevue area to call for a van ride to connect to a fixed route.

Mr. Larravee said additional steps are being taken to follow-up on the survey data. Focus groups will be developed to explore in-depth the needs and concerns so that a targeted project can be proposed. Funding obviously will be a big issue, and the collaborative intends to seek creative ways to fund projects through creative partnerships.

Commissioner Bell praised the group for the collaborative effort which he said will be critical in getting to solutions. He suggested the Transportation Commission should be kept informed as the process moves forward and pledged to provide assistance to the degree possible. He said the transportation needs of aging citizens cannot be overlooked, but stressed that there are other transportation-deprived groups that are also in need of services; in a community the size of Bellevue, it is not uncommon for up to 25 percent of the population to be grouped in one special needs group or another. Mr. Larravee agreed and said while the collaborative has elected to focus on older adults, the idea behind the collaborative is to keep the vision broad and open to finding opportunities for efficiencies in addressing the transportation needs of all special needs groups.

Commissioner Holler said one of the challenges for the collaborative will be in reaching the special needs populations with information. One of the best ways to achieve that goal will be through grass roots community organizations. The greater Seattle area has a very large population of deaf/blind citizens who have a very difficult time accessing transportation services.

Commissioner Wendle asked what kind of responses Metro and Sound Transit have offered to some of the findings about transit use for the targeted population. He allowed that Metro recently sent out a flyer proposing a number of service changes throughout the region along the lines of understandability, but it remains very difficult to compare the proposed changes to the existing services. Mr. Larravee said Sound Transit and Metro have both been very active

partners in the collaborative. However, they have fixed resources and are attempting to serve as many people as possible. Their focus on the Eastside has been on the commuter routes.

Ms. O'Reilly added that Metro is looking for less expensive alternatives to its Access program, which costs about \$35 per trip; they would like to develop fixed routes, which are more cost effective. That will not, however, meet the needs of everyone. Both Metro and Sound Transit have contributed real dollars for a pilot dial-a-ride program, and they both contributed funding to defray the costs of the survey. A number of studies and plans have been released over the past couple of months as a federal requirement for special needs transportation projects funding. The King County Coordinated Special Needs Transportation Steering Committee final report will be online in the next week or so; it includes the goals and objectives and possible projects, including projects proposed by the collaborative. The collaborative's projects are also in the Puget Sound Regional Council plan, which is a requirement for applying for Washington State Department of Transportation dollars. Department of Transportation staffers Jen Benn and Franz Loewenherz have been very helpful in ferreting out other transportation funding sources.

Commissioner Yuen asked what major issues were highlighted by the survey. Mr. Larravee said it was very enlightening to learn the extent to which individual ownership of automobiles is the primary means of transportation for seniors; some 92 percent of the survey respondents indicated they rely on their car to get around. When those persons lose their ability to get around using that means, they will become even more isolated. Mr. Whalen added that 40 percent of the respondents indicated they do not use bus services because it is not accessible to them. A third of the respondents listed poor connections and transfers as the reason they do not use public transportation.

Commissioner Holler shared that her aging mother has found it difficult to get to her various medical appointments. She has tried using Access, but there is no warm place to wait and there is no surety with regard to when the appointments will end and the ride home will be needed.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Wendle, Mr. Hoople said no requests for funding have been submitted to the Human Services Commission. Ms. Seltzer added that the Human Services Commission primarily focuses its funding allocations on programs offered by non-profit human service agencies; projects outside that scope may not fit with the mandate of the Commission. Commissioner Wendle suggested there may be room for the Transportation Commission to serve as a partner in some manner. He said he would like to see an innovative approach to helping consumers use transit.

B. Real-Time Traffic Map Presentation

Fred Liang with the Traffic Signals Division of the Transportation Department commented that Bellevue has a population of 117,000 and a workforce of 121,000; those passing through Bellevue to get to jobs at Microsoft adds another 20,000 or so daily trips. The city operates some 200 traffic signals, all connected to a centralized signal system.

Mr. Liang said many agencies around the region provide online access to traffic condition cameras, but very few cities in the nation or the world offer a real-time online traffic map. In a recent Washington State Transportation Center survey, more than 95 percent of the respondents indicated they would like to know the location of incidents, and more than 90 percent said they would like to see a web-based real-time traffic map showing the levels of congestion on city streets.

Bellevue began the effort to develop a real-time map since 2002. However, most of the efforts prior to 2005 were fruitless. The system relies on data from detectors installed some 300 feet back from intersections, but unfortunately there are not enough detectors in the system; it was estimated that it would take \$500,000 or more to install the needed number. It was concluded that absent a system upgrade it would not be possible to perform reliable calibrations for individual system detectors. Additionally, the proprietary signal system with its mix of interfaces made the transfer of data to the server very difficult.

In the spring of 2005 a different approach was charted. Instead of using the detectors located 300 feet back of the intersections, the existing advanced detectors located between 100 and 140 feet from the intersections was used to measure volume and occupancy data and estimate congestion levels on all roadway segments. Without a major investment, more than 850 detectors were connected in a six-month period. The occupancy data is transmitted once per second to a signal server in the traffic management center. The intersection cycle length is used as the interval for processing the raw data. The resulting data is both reliable and consistent. About \$30,000 was needed to upgrade the signal software, it was possible to generate a table of threshold values to define the congestion level of each roadway segment. Each congestion level is assigned a color code. The information is saved once each minute to an output file, and the GIS server displays the congestion-level color on the map. Internet users can access the map and see the most recent congestion data.

Mr. Liang demonstrated the real-time traffic map for the Commissioners. He noted that the response of the public has been very positive. During the recent snowstorm, the number of webpage hits doubled. Staff is working on making the map available on PDAs, and is considering linking traffic cameras and the map and incorporating WSDOT freeway data on the map. Roadways that are closed or under construction can be indicated on the map as well.

From the traffic management center, staff uses cameras to monitor various intersections. Along with the real-time traffic map, adjustments can be made to signal timing to alleviate congestion.

Commissioner Yuen asked if the data could be made available on GPS units. Mr. Liang said it cannot because the systems are different, though there are companies working on making congestion levels show on GPS units to help keep traffic moving.

Commissioner Glass asked if the system can be made to average the data over a couple of cycles to avoid sending wrong information in the event a car sits too long on a sensor, or does

not pull up all the way and trip a sensor. Mr. Liang said that would be possible. He explained that the problem is not significant at multilane intersections because the data from each lane flows into a single data output.

C. Bel-Red Corridor Study Briefing

Mr. McDonald explained that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) evaluates the impacts of adopting different alternatives for redevelopment of the Bel-Red corridor. He said the information contained in the document will help the steering committee analyze the alternatives and come up with a preferred alternative for recommendation to the City Council. Ultimately, the study will require revisions to the Comprehensive Plan, the Bel-Red/Northup subarea plan, the Crossroads subarea plan, the Wilburton/NE 8th subarea plan, and the Land Use Code. In addition, there will be need for a variety of transportation infrastructure improvements to support the new land uses.

The DEIS includes three action alternatives and one no action alternative. The action alternatives all incorporate significant increases in the intensity of office and retail uses, a loss of industrial square footage, and increases in the number of housing units. The document concludes that each of the alternatives originally recommended for study by the steering committee is feasible; none of them is fatally flawed. There are considerable differences between the alternatives in terms of the environment, land use, population and housing, economics and transportation, but very little difference in terms of air quality, noise, aesthetics and public services.

The no action alternative contemplates no capital improvement projects over the next 30 years beyond those already funded. In addition, light rail travels through the area but does not stop. The three action alternatives include a number of transportation system improvements, including significantly more north-south capacity, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, NE 16th Street as a new roadway, and light rail transit stations in various locations.

Mr. McDonald said all of the alternatives create opportunities to improve the natural environment. As redevelopment occurs, energy and natural resources can be conserved, and through coordinating land use and transportation new transportation choices will be made available to serve the new development.

The watershed resources chapter of the DEIS describes existing conditions and identifies potential adverse impacts to them. More importantly, the document identifies improvements that could be made as redevelopment occurs. By direction of the Council, opportunities to enhance the habitat, beyond simply following all applicable regulations, are described. Those opportunities include increasing stream buffers to provide better habitat values along the streams; reducing the amount of impervious surfaces in the corridor and increasing the degree to which storm water runoff is treated; purchase by the public sector of park land where it will do the most good for improving habitat and bettering the built environment.

Because the area has an industrial history, there will be environmental hazards to deal with as

redevelopment occurs. The DEIS identifies those hazards, where they are, and the potential for them to be a problem at the time of redevelopment. The document includes an inventory of hazardous materials sites in the corridor, many of which are in the vicinity of potential light rail transit stations. No unavoidable adverse environmental impacts are brought to light by the document.

Land uses vary by alternative. The no action alternative includes no new residential units. Alternative 1 contemplates 4.2 million square feet of new residential uses; Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 both have six million square feet of residential in some 5000 total units. Mr. McDonald stressed that the figures are not based on the build-out capacity but what the market says is likely to occur in the next 25 years or so.

A number of different development mitigation strategies are under review. On the land use side, the focus is on station-area planning that includes higher intensity for both housing and employment, and on mixing land uses in a way that does not happen in Bellevue currently outside of the downtown. The residential areas to the north and south of the corridor will need to be protected by not locating high-intensity land uses near them. On the environmental side, the strategies for sustainability include providing developers with incentives to achieve LEED certification, and acquiring land for habitat and recreation.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Bell, Mr. McDonald said the DEIS indicates that there is adequate capacity in the Bellevue School District to accommodate the 5000 new housing units without constructing new schools.

Mr. McDonald said the DEIS makes a distinction between housing targets and forecasts. The city has adopted targets through 2022, which are 10,000 new households and 40,000 new jobs. The city is committed to accommodating the targets through zoning. Forecasts project the future beyond the target range.

One of the mitigation measures identified in the DEIS involves softening the blow associated with a loss of industrial jobs by looking at other areas of the city where displaced light industrial uses could relocate. Relocation assistance may be necessary along with looking at creative ways to integrate light industrial and service-type uses within the new development that occurs in the corridor.

Mr. McDonald said the transportation chapter of the DEIS takes a true multimodal approach. It identifies the existing system and current peak hour traffic volumes, and the existing transit system with its gaping hole in the middle. As the area redevelops with more density and more mixed uses, the surface transit system will have to be integrated with the new land uses and the new transit stations to feed the light rail system. Under the most intensive alternative, there is a corresponding decrease in overall level of service for the corridor by 2030, even with a big investment in transportation infrastructure. Either the land use assumptions will need to be backed off, or the transportation infrastructure needs will have to be ramped up to accommodate the traffic.

Mr. McDonald pointed out that currently there are five intersections in the corridor that operate at LOS E or F. Under the no action alternative, by 2030 there will be 22 intersections at LOS E or F; by funding all transportation improvements assumed in the action alternatives, that number falls to 17. The action alternatives assume completion of all modeled transportation infrastructure improvements, and Alternative 3, which has the highest employment and housing levels, has 22 LOS E and F intersections, the same number as the no action alternative without the infrastructure improvements.

With regard to volumes at screenlines, Mr. McDonald explained that looking to the west the total existing volume is 4000 trips. The no action alternative shows 6800 trips across the same screenline, and the action alternatives increase the number of trips slightly above that.

No modeling was done in the DEIS for the surface bus transit system, though it was done for the light rail boardings. There will be a phase during which development is ongoing without light rail serving it, and during that time the anticipation is that surface transit will provide the necessary capacity. Once light rail is in place, it will generate far more daily boardings than the surface system.

Commissioner Wendle asked if the DEIS identifies the specific routes and levels of transit service that would be needed to accommodate the envisioned land uses. Mr. McDonald allowed that it does not. Commissioner Wendle said the surface transit system, including the park and ride lots, that serve Issaquah and other places happened because the developers were explicit about what they needed and lobbied to get them. He suggested that some effort should be put into identifying the service levels that will be needed in advance of light rail so they can be included in the system plans as development is coming online.

Mr. McDonald said the 45-day public comment period on the DEIS closes on March 12. Comments can be made through a variety of means, including online, in writing, and by attending the public hearing. During the month of March, the steering committee will have at least one and possibly more focused meeting to distill the information. After the public comment period closes, the steering committee will review the comments received before beginning its work to craft a preferred alternative.

Commissioner Bell asked what building heights are contemplated for the corridor. Mr. McDonald said the steering committee has not suggested anything over six stories. However, at the last steering committee meeting the proposal was made to go a little higher, possibly up to ten stories, in certain locations.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Bell said he and Chair Young spoke following the recent windstorm event and concluded that there are some things in need of improvement. Certainly communications with the public could be improved. In addition there is the issue of having gasoline available during

power outages. The state of Florida is considering legislation to require all service stations on major routes to have backup power systems. The Commission should think about the issues and forward a recommendation to the City Council.

Commissioner Glass observed that following the freezing weather some sections of roadway are showing cracks in the asphalt. Mr. McDonald allowed that the 2007 overlay program will be getting under way soon and hopefully it will address those degraded roadways.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. October 12, 2006
- B. November 9, 2006

Motion to approve both sets of minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Bell. Second was by Commissioner Wendle and the motion carried unanimously.

12. REVIEW CALENDAR

- A. Commission Calendar and Agenda

The Commission reviewed the items scheduled for discussion in upcoming meetings.

- B. Public Involvement Calendar

13. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Yuen adjourned the meeting at 8:52 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date