

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 27, 2005
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Bell, Vice Chair Young, Commissioners Elliott
Matthew, Northey, Wendle, Yuen

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Karen Gonzalez, Mike Ingram, Maria
McGarry, Eric Miller, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Bell who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Planner Franz Loewenherz reported that staff is following up with legal counsel about the comment made by Chair Bell at the January 13 Commission meeting suggesting that the city may not be in compliance with the Growth Management Act with respect to impact fees. Unless the legal counsel concurs with the assessment of Chair Bell, no changes will be made for another two years.

Mr. Loewenherz announced that the third and final Factoria Area Transportation Study meeting is slated for February 16.

The Commissioners were informed that Sound Transit is seeking volunteers to serve on the citizen oversight panel.

A free walkable communities workshop is set to be conducted in Port Townsend.

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

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Young reported that he attended the I-405 corridor study open house event. He noted that there is still a lot of analysis going on, including environmental analysis.

Chair Bell said he and Commissioner Wendle also attended the open house. The level of detail shared at the event was very high.

Noting that no Commissioner had been able to attend the most recent pedestrian/bicycle citizen advisory group, Chair Bell asked staff to provide the Commissioners with either the meeting minutes or a quick report.

Commissioner Elliott reported that he has been appointed to the King County Metro citizen oversight committee. He said he was recommended by former King County Councilmember Rob McKenna, now the state Attorney General.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Neighborhood Traffic Calming

Karen Gonzalez, Neighborhood Traffic Calming Manager, said the program has been in operation for 20 years. Since its inception, a number of program modifications have been made. When a citizen has a concern in their neighborhood with regard to speed, volumes or accidents, they can call the city. Staff will then go out to conduct some studies and develop some recommendations. The two-year approach focuses first on education, enforcement and signing. In cases where those measures are not effective, the second year of the program can focus on physical changes to the roadway.

The Commissioners were shown a map of neighborhood traffic calming projects previously completed, and were informed about upcoming projects.

Ms. Gonzalez said she has a staff of 3.8 FTEs that deals with neighborhood traffic, the Neighborhood Enhancement Program projects, all traffic safety programs, and the residential permit parking zones in the city, of which there are now 16.

Commissioner Elliott commented that the entrance into the Spiritridge area just past Spiritridge Park is an excellent example of a neighborhood traffic calming project.

Commissioner Young offered praise for the radar signs, both those mounted permanently and those that are mobile. He said he often travels along 128th from SE 8th Street toward Wilburton. Since the signs have been installed, brake lights can be seen as soon as the traffic goes around the corner. The radar signs are very effective and should be used as much as possible. Ms. Gonzalez said the city has 16 radar signs in use. The evaluations of their use to date have determined that reductions in speeds from three to five miles per hour are being seen. Often drivers will try to match their speed exactly to the speed limit.

Commissioner Matthew agreed that the signs are effective. He suggested that even where the signs have been permanently mounted, they still subconsciously draw the attention of drivers and keep them from speeding.

Commissioner Wendle concurred as well. He asked if staff works with local property owners in the siting of permanent radar signs. Ms. Gonzalez said locating the signs can be tricky; many homeowners prefer not to have the sign mounted adjacent to their homes. An attempt is always made to mount the signs on the property line, but even then the signs can create glare for the adjacent home, even with shields. The signs must also be located as close to power as possible to avoid a lot of trenching. The cost of the signs is between \$6000 and \$7000, and installation costs can run between \$5000 and \$6000. Maintenance and operating costs are minimal.

Commissioner Wendle commended staff for the Walk Your Kids to School Day program. He said that has been very effective and has had a long-term positive impact on many.

Commissioner Northey asked what the city's thresholds are for physical devices such as speed humps and traffic circles in terms of speeds and volumes. Ms. Gonzalez said the volume threshold is 3500 vehicles per day. For speed it is 85 percent traveling at 35 miles per hour, or less near schools and parks. For medians and curb extensions, the threshold can be as high as 6500 vehicles per day. Minimum thresholds have not been established, though the unspoken rule is 300 vehicles per day.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Wendle, Ms. Gonzalez said enforcement is the best approach for arterials such as Bellevue Way. Radar signs do not work well at all on multiple lane roadways.

Chair Bell commented that the program is very important. He agreed that the evaluation period should be two years, and urged forging a close tie with the police department to maximize efficiencies.

B. TDM Update

Senior Planner Mike Ingram said the goal of the transportation demand management program is to reduce the number of single occupant vehicles on the road and the overall number of

vehicle miles traveled. The program is beneficial for increasing the efficiency of the transportation network and reducing the adverse impacts associated with traffic. It is focused primarily on commute trips in that they are easier to steer toward alternative forms of transportation.

The Commute Trip Reduction program is a state-mandated program requiring all employers with 100 or more employees arriving at a single worksite between 6-9 a.m. to provide encouragement for using non-SOV travel modes.

FlexPass is an employee commute benefit package offered by King County Metro and Sound Transit to employers. Bundled together are an annual transit pass, a vanpool fare subsidy, and a home free guarantee provision. The program is marketed by Metro to CTR-affected employers, though there is no sustained marketing plan in place. The purchase of the passes has been shown to be associated with increases in transit use by employees.

Mr. Ingram said efforts at branding and messaging have been primarily arranged around the One Less Car Bellevue program. The program is focused on providing a central resource for information on travel alternatives. The information on the OneLessCarBellevue.org website is kept up to date; the website includes an online version of the Bellevue Transit Map.

Developers of large buildings in the city are required to have transportation demand management plans.

The Commissioners were told that there are more jobs in the city, 120,000, than there are residents, 117,000. Some 30,000 of those jobs are in the Downtown. The Commute Trip Reduction program affects 22,000 employees at 54 sites in the city. That compares to 71 affected worksites in 2002. Some employers in the city, of which Key Bank is a prime example, do remarkably well in achieving a reduction in SOV trips; about 60 percent of their employees use a means other than SOV to get to and from work in Bellevue.

Commissioner Wendle asked how the cost of parking relates to an increased use of transit options. Mr. Ingram said parking is a key factor in the decisions made by commuters to use transit. Where parking is free, SOV commute trips are the highest, and where parking is expensive, transit trips are the highest. There are codes that prohibit owners and managers of buildings in Downtown from bundling parking with leases; parking must appear in leases as a separate line item, and each stall must be priced at or above the rate of a two-zone Metro pass, which is currently \$72. A different approach was used for the older buildings in downtown in that the city put very strict limits on the amount of parking allowed. The city is now having to deal with that issue itself in that the new City Hall building was constructed under the limited parking provisions.

Commissioner Elliott noted that the rate for parking in downtown Seattle is running in the range of \$200 to \$250 per month. Bellevue's rates are comparatively low; most places on the

Eastside are running between \$80 and \$100 per month.

Associate Planner Maria McGarry said the Club R program is a commuter rewards plan the city implemented in partnership with King County Metro. The program was in place from May 2003 to April 2004 and was open to all Downtown Bellevue employees. The objective was to reward commuters for taking any alternative commute mode. Over 800 commuters registered for the program and submitted monthly commute calendars to document how they got to work. Those who met a certain threshold became eligible for monthly and quarterly prize drawings, including a \$200 Mastercard gift card, and gift certificates to Downtown Bellevue restaurants and stores. Over 75 percent of those who initially registered submitted monthly reports for the full year. Over 38 percent received a prize of some sort. The program reported a reduction in the number of drive-alone commute trips from a high of 12.3 percent to 11.0 percent. The conclusion was that those who participated in the program are those who were already taking alternative commute modes and that the program did little to induce mode shift from SOV to alternative modes.

Continuing, Ms. McGarry said the Bellevue Trip Reduction Incentive Program was an employer-based program offering cash incentives to employers who could get their employees to shift from driving alone to taking an alternative commute mode. The program ran from August 2003 to December 2004. For each employee converted from driving alone, employers were paid \$175. They were also paid \$500 for administering three surveys over the course of the year; those surveys were aimed at measuring the change in commute mode over the program period. Employers were also offered the opportunity to purchase a \$50 FlexPass per employee. Forty-one employers participated in the program representing over 850 employees; many of the employers were small. The most dramatic changes occurred where the employers elected to purchase the \$50 FlexPass. The first measurement survey was conducted in April 2004; all of the sites completed the survey, and collectively reduced their drive-alone trips by 27, a 4.6 percent reduction from the baseline survey. Some employers participated because of their sense of civic responsibility; others participated because their employees wanted to; still others participated for the monetary reward, though clearly that was not the driving force. The conclusion reached was that absent having parking on the table, it was difficult to affect any meaningful changes. The October survey indicated a reduction of an additional three trips. The overall five percent reduction is comparable to the reduction a CTR site sees in its first two years of being affected by the law.

Commissioner Wendle suggested that those who work in the suburban areas may be enticed to try taking the bus if they are given something like the FlexPass. The fact is, however, they may only try it once or twice, and if they find themselves stuck Downtown or waiting for 30 minutes in Factoria or some other outlying area, it is very unlikely they will keep trying. The success of such programs is directly tied to the infrastructure providing alternative travel modes. To some degree, funding used to operate experimental program should be put into getting specific new routes and infrastructure in place.

Ms. McGarry said the intent of the Bellevue Trip Reduction Incentive Program was to offer an entrepreneurial approach as opposed to a regulatory approach, and in that respect the program was successful. The state recently released a CTR performance grant built on the same principles; it is open to organizations and the state is offering up to \$460 for each trip reduced. Issaquah and Redmond have both implemented similar trip reduction incentive programs offering \$300 per trip.

Mr. Ingram explained that the price of a Flex Pass ramps up over time. The first year the pass costs \$100 for employers in the Downtown; in the second year the cost is \$175, and the third year the cost is \$204. The same Flex Pass for the outlying areas of the city ramp up from \$45 to \$60 to \$81.

Commissioner Wendle asked if the city could supplement the Flex Passes as an incentive to keep riders. Mr. Ingram said there has been a conscious effort to avoid using city resources to subsidize the passes, but through other incentive programs the cost of the passes can be reduced. He added that about nine percent of the employees in the city use a Flex Pass.

Commissioner Elliott commented that the transit system needs to match more than just the nine-to-five crowd. Shopping centers are open until 10:00 p.m., and those workers should have a way to get home using the bus.

With regard to marketing efforts, Ms. McGarry said there was one associated with the FlexPass initial buy-down in conjunction with Access Downtown. Marketing is also conducted as part of the CTR regime. The Bellevue Downtown Association acts as a broker for the FlexPass program for employers with between 20 and 99 employees. King County Metro markets programs to firms with 100 employees or more. The FlexPass is not available for employers with 19 or fewer employees, which excludes about 90 percent of the Bellevue employers. Efforts are under way to make the FlexPass or some equivalent product available to all Bellevue employers. A more sustainable marketing effort is also needed. There is an increasing interest among Downtown employers for more TMA-type services. The BDA is interested in growing its capacity and providing more services to Downtown Bellevue stakeholders, and the city is working with them to conduct a two-month study to identify and evaluate opportunities for increased TMA services throughout the city, not just in the Downtown; the study will kick off in February.

Mr. Ingram said 15 buildings in Downtown Bellevue currently have transportation management plan agreements in place. Over time there has not been any regular monitoring of the plans for compliance.

Commissioner Young asked if there is a goal in terms of mode split associated with the State of Mobility Report. Mr. Ingram responded that the mode split goals are tied to the individual Mobility Management Areas. Later in the year the Commission will be given a status report regarding how well the goals are being met.

Turning to the issues being faced by the new City Hall, Mr. Ingram said the parking supply in the main garage will be 327 spaces for employees, and another 100 or so spaces for fleet vehicles. In order to make that work, the transit modeshare will have to be grown from seven percent to 26 percent in about three years. An additional parking garage with 350 spaces is being constructed; two-thirds of those spaces will be for police vehicles and police staff, and it may be possible to allow some regular staff to park in the visitor spaces. The City Manager's office is working to identify other opportunities for overflow parking, likely on remote lots along Bellevue Way. Higher parking prices will tend to drive an increase in transit ridership over time; the city currently charges only \$35 per month. The monthly fee will be increased, and the income will be used to pay for the operation of the garage and other program expenses, including Flex Pass for employees.

Chair Bell asked if having limited transit services available is a detriment to successful TDM programs. Mr. Ingram said that is not the case in the Downtown, though it is in the outlying areas. Factoria and Eastgate both have limited transit service. In Overlake express service is limited to one route. In addition to available transit services, travel time is of great importance in determining ridership patterns.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Chair Bell asked the Commissioners to provide their retreat discussion suggestions to staff as soon as possible.

9. NEW BUSINESS

A. Public Involvement Calendar

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Bill Serr, 1412 153rd Place SE, said all he hears from the Commission and the city is a lot of talk, but much of it does not make sense. Many folks in the community are not happy with what is going on with the traffic calming programs. Part of it is a staff attitude. The city is allowed to put up radar signs, some of which have flashing lights, when businesses are not allowed to have signs with flashing lights. It may not even be legal under the sign code. There is also a sign clutter associated with speed bumps. The street that really needs help is Main Street between 156th and 164th. No traffic problems will be solved until all transit is free to anyone who wants to use it. People are paying a lot in property taxes but they are not satisfied with what they are getting in return. Government workers are getting paid way too much.

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

12. REVIEW OF CALENDAR

13. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Young. Second was by Commissioner Elliott and the motion carried unanimously.

Chair Bell adjourned the meeting at 8:24 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date