

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

February 9, 2006
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Kevin McDonald, Wes Kirkman, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Chair Bell who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

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

3. STAFF REPORTS – None

4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

Councilmember Balducci reported that there is a great deal of activity in Olympia concerning transportation issues, including what will happen with Sound Transit and RTID in the next year or so. She said it appears the legislature is leaning toward a package that will promote or require a joint ballot; that issue will be decided soon since the session is reaching the cut-off point. It is still not known whether or not there will be a ballot measure during 2006. The position the Council is taking is the momentum that began in 2005 should be kept going by moving toward a 2006 ballot.

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Young said he will be attending the Surrey Downs Community Club meeting on March 2 along with Commissioner Wendle. One of the concerns of the members is the noise generated by I-405.

Commissioner Yuen said he attended the nickel project open house regarding the Wilburton tunnel project. The project involves widening the freeway and bringing it closer to the residential area, which has some property owners concerned.

Commissioner Northey reported that she attended the Women's Transportation Seminar annual gala at which Governor Gregoire was the keynote speaker. She said there were some 300 who

attended.

Commissioner Glass said he has been regularly attending the Bel-Red corridor steering committee meetings. He said recently there was a briefing on high-capacity transit in which the recommendation of the consultant was to run a transit line from the Downtown transit center to a site near the hospital, then over to about NE 16th Street before heading north and east toward the Microsoft campus. The consultant recommended having a stop by the hospital and another roughly midway through the corridor. The group was also given a presentation by CH2MHill that included an inventory of the streams and wetlands in the study area, and a presentation by the parks department with regard to how the parks and open spaces in the area could be expanded and improved.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Curb Ramp Inventory and Investment Recommendations

Senior Transportation Planner Kevin McDonald explained that curb ramps are a key component of pedestrian mobility and as such are identified in the ped/bike plan as an important part of the sidewalk system. The ped/bike plan includes specifications for how curb ramps are to be installed, but it does not provide specific guidelines as to the priorities to be used for making investments in curb ramps. All new sidewalks associated with new construction must be built to current standards, but there are a lot of substandard curb ramps existent in the city, more than the city has resources to deal with in the short term.

Mr. McDonald said Transportation Planning intern Wes Kirkman has been developing a system to help with identifying and prioritizing the curb ramps that might yield the best results for the community in terms of enhancing mobility.

Mr. Kirkman said an evaluation of curb ramps in the city was conducted in 2005 using photos taken by interns in 2001. Using those photos, every corner of every intersection in the city was rated and mapped. It was decided that an update of the inventory was necessary for several reasons: the photos used in the 2005 inventory were from 2001 and there has been additional sidewalk construction since then; the inventory did not include the directional locations for each intersection, which resulted in some scoring discrepancies; some intersections were missing from the survey, including midblock crossings; and there are problems associated with using averages.

Mr. Kirkman shared with the Commissioners photos of the intersection at SE 23rd Street and 108th Avenue SE. He noted that the two southern corners score 6 on the rating scale, which is the highest score possible. On the northern corners there are no sidewalks at all, which is a score of 1 on the rating scale. Averaged together, the intersection yields a 3.5.

On the rating scale, a zero is given to corners that have no ramp and where it is impractical or infeasible to install one. Examples of such corners include those with steep slopes abutting the roadway and blind corners at uncontrolled intersections. A zero is also the score for corners where curb ramps are not needed, such as where the sidewalk is level with the street. A score of 1 is given to intersections where there are either no sidewalks, or sidewalks without a ramp. Intersections that have sidewalks with ramps that are in need of repair are given a score of 2; the same score is given to corners that have a sloping surface that is not necessarily wheelchair accessible. A score of 3 is given to corners that do not have curb ramps but which do have a

driveway; in those instances, pedestrians and people in wheelchairs are relegated to using vehicle space. Usable curb ramps that do not meet current code are scored at 4. Often the slope angle is too steep, too small, or is not flush with the joint at the roadway. A score of 5 is given to corners that meet all ADA standards, except that there is only one curb ramp for each crossing direction. The highest score, 6, is given to corners that meet all current standards.

Mr. Kirkman said he used the 14 subareas to break down the projects, and Southwest Bellevue was used as the case study. A four-point symbology was used to display the score for each corner, and the maps were color coded with red marking the worst-scored intersections and green marking the best-scored intersections. An initial sweep of updates was done using the 2001 CIP and all known sidewalk construction projects. It was assumed that any construction done at a corner since 2001 includes a score of at least 5. The balance of the update was done via a field survey; where scores changed from the original inventory, the photos were updated.

In order to direct the city's scarce resources, it was necessary to develop recommendations for where to focus investments in curb ramps by neighborhood. Mr. Kirkman said he began by assuming one-half mile to be a reasonable walking distance. Half-mile networks were then calculated around pedestrian destinations, including parks, schools, employment and shopping areas, and bus stops on principal routes. The Commissioners were shown a map of the Southwest Bellevue subarea with the color-coded scored intersections and every street segment within half a mile of a pedestrian destination. The segments located within half a mile of all four pedestrian destination categories were highlighted as the best places to invest in curb ramps.

Mr. Kirkman allowed that the updated survey serves as an objective measuring tool. The tool should be used in conjunction with subjective observations by city staff, neighborhood residents or both, always keeping in mind the need to construct a cohesive and connected network, and other variables, such as locations of medical centers, affordable housing developments, and the like.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Wendle, Mr. McDonald said the Neighborhood Enhancement Program and the Neighborhood Traffic Control Program are related to the curb ramp program, but not directly; the ramp program is not connected to or dependent on either of those programs. There is an independent source of funding available just for constructing curb ramps, and the intent is to aim those funds at the corridors where there is the greatest potential for pedestrian activity. The other programs, including the Pedestrian Access Program, are all driven by different priorities. The curb ramp program stands alone in that it is currently without policy guidance and direction for making investments.

Commissioner Northey suggested the purpose for having curb ramps should be continually revisited. While they are certainly needed by those in wheelchairs, they are also useful for those who are pushing strollers. The primary user group should be the wheelchair community and as such some destinations should be weighted heavier than others. Access to the principal bus stops is important, but so is access to Metro Access vans and stops along some of the smaller routes.

Mr. McDonald said the curb ramp program is allotted \$50,000 annually. Curb ramps cost in the neighborhood of \$5000 each to construct. The ADA requires jurisdictions to establish a transition plan outlining how to get from current deficient conditions to fully compliant conditions. The plans must include a priority and identification system and a monetary allocation to ensure that over an unspecified period of time progress will be made toward full ADA consistency. The curb ramp program funding is not sufficient on its own to rapidly make

changes in upgrading the deficient intersections in the city; however, there are ample opportunities to upgrade corners through other city programs and with new development and redevelopment.

Commissioner Glass asked when it is a requirement to have curb ramps going in both directions at each intersection as opposed to a single curb ramp pointing toward the center of an intersection. Mr. McDonald explained that much depends on the curb radius described in the city's standards. Where there is a broad curb radius, the standards allow for a single ramp pointing toward the middle of the intersection; for intersections where there is a tight curb radius, it makes more sense to continue pedestrians on a straight line to a crosswalk. The preference is for two ramps at each street corner whenever possible.

Chair Bell observed that within the city there are curb ramps constructed on street corners that go nowhere and connect to nothing. Mr. McDonald said those locations will eventually be linked as part of the ped/bike plan. He allowed that the public often does not understand that when they see a segment that does not seem to have any apparent reason.

B. Bellevue Transit Plan Implementation Update

Mr. Loewenherz acknowledged the role of transit in helping the city meet its modesplit objectives. He noted that transit also plays a very important role economic development in that it figures prominently in decisions made by employers in locating their businesses in the Downtown area. Accordingly, the city has worked collaboratively with King County Metro and Sound Transit to undertake projects that help improve the speed and reliability of transit operations on city streets, and which provide enhanced passenger shelters. The Bellevue Transit Plan was adopted in 2003; it lays out a vision for where services and capital investments should occur. Since its adoption, the city has been working collaboratively to implement the various elements of the plan.

Continuing, Mr. Loewenherz said one of the first endeavors staff worked on was to support the Council in lobbying the King County Council to get a greater share of Metro's six-year transit allocation. The effort included articulating the needs and a vision for how improvements should occur. The upshot was the county agreed to increase the allotment of new resources from 28 percent to 40 percent for East King County. Unfortunately, sales tax revenues have not tracked as Metro had hoped, and fuel costs have increased, thus the investment of 110,000 new hours by 2007 anticipated in Metro's six-year plan is tracking at less than half. The percentage targets are on track, however, and the 18,390 service hours added to the East King County area since 2003 are in addition to the 70,000 service hours that came online in the fall of 2001 with the investment of the Sound Transit banked hours.

The creation of an urban-quality transit network necessitates frequent service connections between key activity centers. A significant step forward was achieved in the fall of 2001 with the addition of 70,000 new service hours, but a great deal more is needed to achieve the full vision contained in the Bellevue Transit Plan.

Despite the fact that there have been limited increases in service investments, there has been a steady increase in overall ridership throughout Bellevue. That has been witnessed in nearly every Mobility Management Area (MMA), but particularly in those areas where significant transit investments have been made. In MMA 10 there was a 69 percent increase in ridership between 2003 and 2004 as a result of the Eastgate park and ride lot. The Bellevue Transit Center ridership figures are tracking upwards as well following the recent economic downturn.

In 2006 the Council acted with regard to the site at NE 6th Street and 112th Avenue NE known as Coco's site. Staff was directed to work with King County Metro to realize the site as an off-street bus layover facility to help mitigate the future needs for on-street layover locations. There is \$7.6 million in Metro's 2006 budget identified for the project. Right-of-way acquisition can be expected in 2006, and the facility has an anticipated opening date of 2008. The site will accommodate up to 18 buses at a time.

The city has also been working to speed up the permitting process for bus shelter projects in the city. The effort is particularly important given that the majority of ridership increases in the city have occurred in the neighborhoods on the arterial network. While progress has been made in getting permits ready faster, and while Metro has applied for and received the necessary permits, actual construction is not tracking accordingly.

Mr. Loewenherz informed the Commissioners that during 2005 the city participated in speed and reliability improvements at the South Bellevue park and ride lot. The project has helped buses in getting into and out of the facility and is anticipated to save over \$29,000 annually in operating costs for the five routes serving the facility. Progress has also been made in getting some turning radii improvements and pavement surface improvements at a number of arterial locations; the Bellevue Transit Plan identifies 15 locations for such improvements, and progress has been made on six of those.

The Crossroads in Motion project is geared at increasing ridership in that part of the city. A helpful user guide was mailed to all households in the Crossroads area.

Mr. Loewenherz said the currently underway Central Eastside Transit Study is intended to look at the existing route network, much of which is an existing legacy system dating back 20 years that has not been revisited in a very long time. King County Metro realizes that it needs to make some difficult choices with regard to eliminating some routes and consolidating others to make better use of their resources. One thing the study is looking at is the fact that between Downtown Bellevue and Redmond there are six different routes; there may be a better and more efficient way to serve the two activity centers. A sounding board has been developed to conduct the reviews; the board members include citizens from the affected areas. A newsletter will be sent to all households in East King County in April summarizing the route considerations, and there will be open house events scheduled. The public comments will be reviewed by the Council before a final recommendation is made.

Commissioner Wendle commented that King County Metro routes can be very frustrating for users, especially where transfers are necessary. He said he hopes the sounding board and the public will provide comment on that point. Sound Transit routes tend to be easier to understand and use. Mr. Loewenherz allowed that many of the routes that are in place have been in place for many years; development patterns have shifted over time and some of the routes no longer make sense. That in part is what the study is intended to address. At stake is about 40,000 service hours which could be cut and reallocated, and 30,000 new service hours. Some 1300 riders could be affected, some of which could end up with longer commute times and some of which could end up with no bus service at all. There will be ample opportunity for feedback from those who will be negatively impacted. The ultimate decision will be made by the King County Council.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Young, Mr. Loewenherz said both Sound Transit and King County Metro are at the table for the project. The bulk of the resource allocation will be by King County Metro, but some of the decisions are contingent on whether or not Sound Transit is willing to reroute certain services in some areas.

Councilmember Balducci observed that when King County Metro and Sound Transit does outreach in Bellevue's backyard, they often do not know the specific needs of the city. She said she hopes the city will be working with them throughout the study and that contact will be made with the affected neighborhood organizations to ensure a good turnout at the open house events. Mr. Loewenherz noted that in addition to the mailer to go to all East King County households, King County Metro is working on a video to be aired on BTV and other public access channels summarizing the recommendations and highlighting the upcoming open houses associated with the study. He added that Metro staff is slated to brief the Commission on the project on March 9. Bellevue staff intends to very carefully review all comments offered by Bellevue residents and weigh in as necessary.

Commissioner Wendle pointed out that Metro effected a reallocation of service hours some three years ago. The changes were made to routes which by their measures were unproductive. For the most part, however, the routes were unproductive because they were not competitive and the penalties for riders who missed their transfers were significant. Many were reluctant to even try using the service for those reasons even though they were interested in utilizing transit. By the time the public weighed in, Metro had already made its decision. Metro does not have a good history of reaching out to better understand the big picture, and it has a tendency to act unilaterally. Metro needs to open the doors to citizens who will be affected and really listen to them before making their decisions.

Mr. Loewenherz noted that there are no resources available to implement the findings of the study and will not be for a number of years. Once the planning effort is wrapped up, if in the eyes of the Bellevue City Council and others the study is a failure there will be no reason why Metro could defer acting on it until after reappraising their findings. He added that the Commission should take the opportunity to weigh in on March 9 when Metro is scheduled to provide an update.

Councilmember Balducci asked if it would make sense for the city to raise concerns with the King County Council transportation committee about how the study is going forward. Mr. Loewenherz stressed that he is not raising an alarm and calling the study a complete and utter failure. There have been no formal decisions made and as such there is nothing official to respond to. Metro's traditional approach to service planning is to create a sounding board to review the various options, take those options out to the public for comment, and then further refine the plans with the sounding board before transmitting a final recommendation to the King County Council for consideration. Bellevue staff intends to monitor the process and compare the Bellevue Transit Plan recommendations against the final study recommendation.

Commissioner Northey said it would be helpful to be supplied with a list of the top five priorities from the Bellevue Transit Plan that Metro has not yet addressed. Those issues could at least be put on the table at the March 9 meeting with Metro staff.

Mr. Loewenherz commented that earlier in the day the Sound Transit board discussed its 2006 service implementation plan. Councilmember Balducci attended the meeting. Representatives from T-Mobile, Bellevue Community College and Bentall spoke in support of the recommended route modification to 532 to serve SE 36th Street. The recommendation was approved by the board as an amendment to the service implementation plan.

Mr. Loewenherz said the city has been actively working with the Regional Transit Committee which recently released its 2006 work program. It includes a lot of items the city would like to see discussed, including a policy on demonstration projects. Metro has a number of

demonstration projects in play currently, but there is no real guidance as to what their duration is and what their funding should be. The Elliot Bay water taxi is being operated as a demonstration project and has been for the last eight years at \$500,000 per year. The King County budget for 2007 includes funding to construct a new ferry terminal for the water taxi, all without any clear direction in the six-year plan that waterborne transit is a priority. There is a clear need to clarify how long demonstration projects should retain that status, especially since demonstration projects are paid for off the top, not with 40/40/20 allocations. Metro also does not have any clear policy guidance in its six-year plan relative to capital program priorities. The bus shelter program needs to be reviewed; the majority of bus zones are without shelters, and the city is recommending modifying the threshold from 25 boardings per day to something less.

8. OLD BUSINESS

A. Commission Ordinance Memo from Ron Matthew

Chair Bell suggested that the changes necessary are very minor; some are housekeeping matters related to ordinance references, and some of the items listed as the powers and duties of the Commission no longer apply.

Commissioner Northey said she periodically wonders whether the Transportation Commission should actually be a subcommittee of the Planning Commission given that there may not be enough substantive work to warrant having a separate commission. She suggested the Transportation Commission should steer clear of getting into the business of project design review; the Commission should stay at the policy level. With regard to the length of office for the chair and vice-chair, she said in her opinion it is a good idea for each to serve for at least two years given the learning curve involved.

Commissioner Young agreed the Commission should be focused on policy rather than technical reviews. It is appropriate for the Commission to play a major role in prioritizing project lists, and for the Commission to serve as the Council's eyes and ears in gauging public opinion. He added that the city does a great job in terms of community outreach, so the Commission is not the only opportunity for the citizens to get involved. He agreed that the Commission was established to bring some order, structure and formality to transportation planning and implementation, to develop transportation standards, and to ensure that badly needed improvements were actually made, but the Commission has no oversight with regard to construction budgets so has no particular role to play in ensuring that funds are spent effectively.

Chair Bell said the Commission initially brought up the issue of its charter, following which the Council concluded that the powers, duties and bylaws for all boards and commissions should be reviewed. He said the Commission's primary purpose is to provide policy advice and assistance to the City Council, and the Commission has played that role effectively.

Chair Bell agreed that each chair should serve at least two years, but allowed that it should not be mandatory.

Commissioner Yuen said his preference would be for each chair to serve only one term given that there are eight Commissioners and each should have an opportunity to serve as chair; if each chair serves for two years, some Commissioners will not be afforded the opportunity to fill the post. The vice-chair should work hand-in-hand with the chair and be ready to assume the chair after a year as vice-chair.

There was agreement not to suggest any changes relative to the length of the chair and vice-chair terms.

Chair Bell called attention to Item L on page 4 of the original ordinance and said to his knowledge the Commission has not focused at all on construction design standards from anything other than a public policy standpoint. He suggested the issue should be discussed with staff to see if it could be worded differently.

Chair Bell also noted that Item J on page 4 of the original ordinance needs to be clarified in that it does not make mention of the Transportation Facilities Plan along with the Capital Investment Program and the Transportation Improvement Program.

Commissioner Wendle pointed out that the ordinance includes no role for the Commission to play relative to regional transportation and transit programs. He said he understands the fact that such services are provided by non-city entities but asked if the Commission could suggest it should have input in that arena. Chair Bell said historically the Council has held that all regional issues fall under its jurisdiction.

Commissioner Northey held that the Commission should at least have some input relative to local transit issues. Chair Bell pointed out that the Commission was involved in the development of the Bellevue Transit Plan which outlines transit needs within the city. He suggested the Commission should be kept in the loop with regard to regional transportation and transit planning efforts through regular briefings.

Councilmember Balducci said the Council has reserved regional issues for itself to avoid confusion with regard to who is speaking for the city. That is not to say that the Commission does not have a role to play in planning for transit and implementation, especially where there are special circumstances. Due to the crush of big issues facing the city and the region, it may be necessary to conduct open houses focused on regional projects. If that occurs, the Commission likely will be asked to become involved.

There was agreement to recommend to the City Clerk the proposed changes to the Commission ordinance, and to make sure the Commissioners have opportunity to review the final changes.

Chair Bell reported that former Commissioner Ron Matthew has been tapped to take over the Neighborhood Enhancement Program.

Chair Bell reiterated his concern that the boardwalk along 156th Avenue NE between SE 11th Street and SE 16th Street has been constructed to within about 200 feet of the end but no more. In November it was indicated that the utilities needed to go in and then the project would be wrapped up, however the project remains unfinished. At a minimum a gravel path should be provided to connect to SE 9th Street. He asked staff to provide a report at the next Commission meeting.

Commissioner Northey proposed that at the very least a sign explaining why the project has not yet been completed should be posted at the site.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 12, 2006

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Young. Second was by Commissioner Yuen and the motion carried unanimously.

12. REVIEW CALENDAR

A. Commission Calendar and Agenda

Mr. Loewenherz reminded the Commissioners that the retreat slated for February 23 will be rescheduled, and informed them that the Commission meeting on March 23 will be held at the Botanical Garden.

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

Commissioner Northey said she has been hearing rumors of hiring freezes and staff cutbacks and asked if they will affect the implementation of the CIP recommendations, or some of the subarea transportation studies the Commission is interested in seeing completed. Mr. Loewenherz said he has not heard of any cutbacks, though a restructuring of the design section has occurred. Chair Bell commented that the issue is not a policy level decision and therefore outside the purview of the Commission.

B. Public Involvement Calendar

13. ADJOURNMENT

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

Chair Bell adjourned the meeting at 8:43 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date