

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

February 10, 2005
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Vice Chair Young

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Mark Poch, Hillary Stibbard-Terrell, Department of Transportation; Lt. John McCracken, Police Department; Emil King, Department of Planning and Community Development

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 with the exception of Commissioner Wendle, who arrived at (?) p.m.; and Commissioner Young, who was excused.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Planner Franz Loewenherz highlighted upcoming outreach activities, including two events on February 16th, the third and final update for the Factoria Area Transportation Study, and a legislative dinner with the 41st and 48th legislators. He noted that the West Lake Sammamish Parkway open house is slated for March 12 at Vasa Park from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Mr. Loewenherz said he attended the Park Board meeting on February 8 at which a presentation was made regarding the I-405 corridor. The Park Board was very excited about what was presented to them.

4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCILS,

BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS – None

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS – None

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. David Plummer, 14414 NE 14th Place, asked the Commission to direct staff to seriously consider putting a traffic signal at the intersection of NE 14th Street and 140th Avenue NE. During peak traffic hours, and increasingly during the day, it is difficult to enter or leave the neighborhood. The distance between Bel-Red Road and NE 14th Street is slightly more than the distance between NE 20th and the stop light that allows people to access Safeway. The city has previously said the intersections are too close to permit having a light at each, which is nonsense. As soon as the new NE 29th bypass comes into existence, it will be even more difficult to get into and out of the neighborhood using the intersection. The city should seriously consider the need for a signal at the intersection.

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS)

Traffic Engineering Manager Mark Poch said ITS involves the application of advanced technology, management techniques and real time information to enhance productivity and safety in the transportation system. ITS is often thought of as a means to reduce congestion, but at its heart it is much more than that. It allows commuters to make better choices about route and mode choices; it helps transportation technicians and engineers work in a smarter and more productive way; it helps school kids get to and from school more safely; it helps manage construction zones; it helps people with disabilities have more mobility within the overall system; and it helps cities coordinate in ways that better serve the citizens.

Bellevue looks at ITS as a way to continue providing leadership throughout the region. The city moved into the ITS arena in the 70s with the first signalized traffic computer system in the country. Since that time the city has continued to build on the original foundation. Having a strategic plan helps the city develop a strategic outlook, establishes a framework for future improvements, provides a structure for prioritizing resources, assists in identifying opportunities, and makes the city eligible for federal funding.

Mr. Poch said ITS has played a major role in determining how to respond to growing traffic within the city. The city has built new roadways, has improved existing roadways, and has acted to wisely manage its investments. Using ITS has allowed the city to squeeze maximum productivity out of the investments.

There are 172 traffic signals in the city that are wired back to a central traffic computer. That allows for coordination of those signals, and as problems arise allows for adjustments in real

time. There is an extensive traffic camera system in place to assist in observing current traffic conditions. The system includes a remarkable communication structure between the devices and the management center in the Leavitt Building.

There are a number of portable message signs used throughout the city. They are a relatively simple but very effective way of getting messages to the traveling public. The city also has an extensive emergency vehicle preemption system that assists first responders get through congested areas.

Mr. Poch said the ITS plan was developed using an extensive visioning process. An assessment of existing conditions was made, then a needs assessment was conducted that involved all city departments. The last step was to develop a deployment plan, which is essentially a list divided into high, medium and low priority projects. High priority projects are those that could reasonably be implemented within a zero- to five-year time frame; medium projects are those in the six- to ten-year time frame; and low priority projects are those in the eleven- to twenty-year time frame. Each category has capital costs totaling some \$4.5 million; the associated operations and maintenance costs vary from \$150,000 to \$400,000 annually. Finding funding for capital projects is relatively simple; the more difficult part is finding the ongoing operations and maintenance funds.

Mr. Poch shared with the Commissioners a few of the high priority projects in the plan. He highlighted first moving the management center to the top floor of the new City Hall location adjacent to the new 911 center. The move will provide an excellent opportunity for some modernization and more efficient space. The main new feature of the center will be a video wall which will be capable of receiving video input from multiple sources. The grant-funded project is estimated at \$150,000. The move is scheduled to occur in late 2005.

There are ten traffic cameras located in the Downtown area, and another ten traffic cameras scattered around the city. The plan calls for a total of 72 traffic cameras in the city, with an initial build-out to 35 cameras. The installation of 15 additional cameras will be funded by a grant from the federal Homeland Security Department; the cameras will focus on the city's evacuation routes. Ten miles of fiber optic cable will be needed for the new cameras. The project will be completed in late 2005 or early in 2006.

Commissioner Northey asked why the new cameras will be sited so close to the existing Washington State Department of Transportation cameras. Mr. Poch said the city has no control over those cameras; they can be viewed, but they cannot be panned, tilted or zoomed. Commissioner Northey suggested that it might be less expensive for the city to seek a partnership with the Washington State Department of Transportation in which their cameras would be replaced with cameras that can be remotely controlled. Mr. Poch said there could be some cost savings with that approach, but then the Washington State Department of Transportation and the city would be competing for use of the cameras.

Mr. Poch allowed that there are a number of reoccurring flood locations throughout the city. The plan envisions the placement of monitoring stations wired back to the management center to allow for the monitoring of multiple locations simultaneously. The current approach is for a staffer to drive around and personally monitor each location. By installing monitoring stations, the city will be able to improve its response times and at the same time improve safety for motorists.

The Commissioners were informed that the plan calls for having a map of the city that shows current congestion levels, much like what the Washington State Department of Transportation does with the freeway system. No city in the state has such a mapping system open and available to the public. The color-coded map would be generated from information flowing from the loop detection systems and could be posted to the web in real time. The system could be made to send alerts to engineers when there are problems. A contract has been negotiated with the software company to make the necessary changes to enable the system to generate the map. It is reasonable to assume the new system could be operational by the end of 2005.

Mr. Poch said the city has an excellent traffic counting program. It is used to calibrate the model, time traffic signals, and provide information to the public on street volumes. The counting is done using pneumatic counters attached to tubes stretched across roadways. The vision calls for using the vehicle detection systems to count pulses and generate automatic vehicle counts. The number of count locations could be increased, and staff time could be freed and reallocated to other important projects. Currently staff is comparing the tube counts against the loop counts to check for accuracy.

Dynamic message signs are signs on which the message can be easily updated by staff in the management center. For Bellevue the signs could inform motorists about holiday traffic, special events, flooding, or any type of emergency event. Four high-priority locations have been identified for the placement of dynamic message signs, including NE 8th Street as it enters the Downtown off of I-405. Such signs can also be used as variable speed limit signs and to alert drivers to the temperature of the roadway to warn of icy conditions.

Mr. Poch explained that interagency integration is the notion of providing center-to-center communications to coordinate congestion, signal timing, ramp metering and other pertinent information.

All traffic camera video feeds back to the management center. Mr. Poch said transportation staff are constantly receiving requests from other city departments to have the video feeds shared. With the City Hall move, equipment will be installed that will permit encoding of the video images digitally so they can be posted to the city communications network and be available to every desktop in the city. In a second phase, the details of which have yet to be worked out, camera control could actually be turned over to another department, such as the 911 center, after the management center is closed down.

Traffic signal priority (TSP) is a system that adjusts signal timing to accommodate the flow of buses on arterial roadways. There are a couple of TSP applications in place in the Crossroads area, a new one will be installed at the South Bellevue park and ride lot, and another as part of Access Downtown project. The ITS plan calls for the implementation of a TSP system on a corridor basis throughout Bellevue, and improving the traffic computer to allow for better handling of the TSP requests. TSP systems can also be tweaked to generate better information about bus schedule adherence and occupancy; buses that are behind schedule and full could be given a higher priority than those running on-time and empty.

The ITS plan also calls for the installation of real time bus arrival signs at the transit center. Such signs inform riders with regard to where their buses are currently and when they will arrive. Such signs could also be installed at each park and ride lot, at shopping centers, and wherever commuters congregate.

Mr. Poch said a basic communication layout for the city has been drawn up. It involves trunk and lateral fiber optic lines to support all of the devices in the ITS plan. As the system develops, it will become a citywide asset, not just a transportation department asset. Over time it could be leveraged to help reach other goals in the city.

Commissioner Wendle asked if any of the projects in the plan are funded in the CIP. Mr. Poch answered that the deployment plan has not been taken for funding through the CIP. Some of the projects can be addressed with the M2 minor capital funding that is funded through the CIP, and by seeking outside grants.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Wendle, Mr. Poch explained that the crosswalk pedestrian call is tied to the controller logic. It does not generally allow for a signal preemption. Commissioner Wendle noted that during peak hours, pedestrians often have to wait a long time for a crossing signal. Mr. Poch said that is one of the tradeoffs associated with coordinating traffic signals for peak vehicular flow.

Chair Bell asked if cost/benefit analyses are done as part of determining which projects on the list should move forward to implementation. Mr. Poch said performance measures for some of the projects have been discussed. For some projects, like transit signal priority, the benefits will be far more measurable. It is difficult, however, to measure the benefits of a traffic camera that allows staff to make signal timing adjustments on a random basis. Chair Bell encouraged staff to evaluate the benefits whenever possible, adding that having such information in hand makes it easier to justify specific projects to both the Council and the public.

B. Speed Enforcement / Neighborhood Action

Lt. John McCracken said he has been responsible for the Neighborhood Action Team program since August 2004. He said there are four motorcycle officers that make up two teams that

rotate around the city. The primary goal of the program is to reduce residential speeding.

In the first phase of the program radar trailers are placed in selected neighborhoods by tow truck companies. That is followed up two weeks later with the placement of radar trailers by police support officers. In the third phase, which follows the second phase by two weeks, motorcycle officers conduct an emphasis patrol in the neighborhoods. Drivers doing between four and six miles per hour over the speed limit are issued verbal warnings; drivers exceeding the speed limit by six miles per hour or more are ticketed. Over the course of the week, the officers will see the overall speeds drop to where very few tickets are issued. The patrol emphasis is carried out at least once or twice each quarter in each neighborhood previously targeted.

Lt. McCracken allowed that speeding is more of a problem in certain neighborhoods. Some of the areas include school zones where as much time as possible is spent enforcing the speed limit. Officers focus on both the before and after school hours, as well as the early release days and during school hours. Anyone stopped for doing more than four miles per hour over the speed limit is ticketed, and the ticket prices are substantial.

The Commissioners were informed that special emphasis patrols are also carried out in high traffic areas during peak volume times. There are also officers assigned to responding to individual complaints, most of which come from residential areas.

Commissioner Wendle asked how well the permanently mounted radar signs work in keeping speeds down. Lt. McCracken said the signs give drivers an additional visual feedback on what their speeds are. Like anything, however, repeated exposure to them limits their effectiveness. The signs are generally effective and should continue to be used.

Lt. McCracken said he believes in the program because he has seen how well it works. The Council believes in the program as well and backed that up in the last budget cycle by adding two officers and bikes.

C. Speed Setting in Bellevue

Traffic Engineering Manager Hillary Stibbard-Terrell shared with the Commissioners a map showing the posted speed limits on roads in the city. She said her division is responsible for non-electrical traffic operations, signing, striping, access management, crosswalks, and speed limits.

Governments regulate speed for a variety of reasons, and with the setting of limits come certain tradeoffs. Speed limits provide motorists with information about the appropriate speeds for roadway conditions, a common set of rules for the motoring public to follow, and are established for reasons of safety. Motorists tend to drive the speeds at which they feel comfortable based on their values, their knowledge and their driving skills. Changing a posted

speed limit will not necessarily translate into a change in the speeds traveled on a particular roadway. Speed control can be difficult, especially where the roadway environment does not give the driver visual feedback that matches the posted speed.

Ms. Stibbard-Terrell said the 85th percentile is the speed driven by 85 percent of all drivers on a given roadway section. It is the most commonly used speed measurement. Posting a roadway with a speed limit matching the 85th percentile will in most cases result in 85 percent of the drivers driving the posted speed. In certain areas where there are higher traffic volumes as well as pedestrians and bicyclists, there are safety and policy reasons for setting the speed limit below the 85th percentile.

In California the 85th percentile speeds are routinely used as the standard on which to base speed limits. In Oregon speeds are set based on the recommendations of the state speed review board, even in local jurisdictions; the approach brings with it statewide consistency and keeps local politics out. In Washington, local governments determine speed limits within their jurisdiction.

Reviews of speed limits on roadways in Bellevue is conducted for all new roadways, and for existing roadways that have new lanes or other major revisions made to them. In addition, speed reviews are done whenever the public requests it. The studies are conducted by the Transportation Department. If the results of the speed studies show that a change is warranted, a proposal for a new ordinance is written and taken to Council for approval. If a change is not warranted by the study, the person making the change request is notified of that finding; unless so directed, the issue is not taken any further up the line. In all cases, the City Council has the sole and final authority to set and change speed limits.

Ms. Stibbard-Terrell said an engineering judgment is less rigorous than a full speed study. It is the approach used most often to review speeds on existing streets for which an individual request has been made. The more formal study is conducted when there is a greater need to document a recommendation, which is always the case where new roadways are concerned. The studies take into account roadway geometry, classifications, the number of driveways, the presence of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and the enforcement level that can reasonably be expected to be provided.

The Commissioners were shown the speed studies done on 124th in the Mockingbird Hill area of Factoria. Ms. Stibbard-Terrell noted that the improvements for 124th were pushed through in order to have them completed before work began on the Factoria Boulevard project. The first study was done in 1999; the second was completed in February 2004. The study showed the 85th percentile speed to be 39 miles per hour northbound, and 38 miles per hour southbound. The conclusion reached by staff was that dropping the speed limit to 30 would be an artificial lowering and therefore ineffective.

Commissioner Matthew said there was a perception in the neighborhood that improvements to

Lakemont Boulevard would have a significant impact on other streets in the neighborhood. After the fact, some have the perception that that has in fact occurred, though in some cases the perception is not matched by the reality. He suggested that when speed studies are conducted concerning new or updated roadways, they should be broad enough to establish baselines for conditions prior to the improvements.

Chair Bell said the approach used in Bellevue for establishing speed limits appears to be quite solid, consistent and supportable.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Wendle, Ms. Stibbard-Terrell said as nice as it is to have a bike lane or additional left-turn lane added to a roadway, often the visual message sent to motorists is that the roadway is safer to be driven at a higher speed. Often striping is used to create the optical illusion that a roadway is narrower than it actually is and therefore should be driven more slowly.

Commissioner Matthew noted that along some roadways the speed limit changes from one speed to another. The manner in which the change occurs does not always appear logical to drivers. He added that the traffic calming approaches used in the city are very effective.

D. Downtown Design Charrette

Department of Planning and Community Development Senior Planner Emil King said the purpose of the Downtown design charrette that was held in late September 2004 was to build on the “great place” strategy of the Downtown Implementation Plan. Over 50 local design professionals were involved in the two-day event, at the end of which each participant indicated a great deal of support for the process. The Commissioners were shown a short video of the charrette and were told that the six-hours of video shot at the event will be edited into a half hour presentation piece to help stir public involvement. The keynote speaker for the charrette was Fred Kent with Project for Public Spaces in New York.

The participants were divided into six teams. Each was challenged to develop ideas for differentiating Downtown into a series of distinct neighborhoods by creating great people places which, taken together, will form a strong image and identity. It was noted from the start that some of the ideas generated may not be feasible for financial, political or land ownership reasons. A public process would be used to select the ideas with merit. All the drawings that were produced have been posted on the web and published in a charrette sketch book.

Mr. King said there were a number of important givens. He said there was no intent to rethink the transportation framework established by the Downtown Implementation Plan. The zoning envelope was also held sacred. Some teams made attempts to push the limits as far as possible, but that was not unexpected. One city staff person assisted each team.

Each team was assigned a third of downtown to work on. Two teams were assigned to the

NOMA (North of the Mall) district; two teams were assigned to the Pedestrian Corridor area; and two teams were assigned to the SOMA (South of the Mall) area. The teams came up with their own names for each neighborhood within the district, and each developed concepts and drawings for the districts on which they were focused. The common themes were placemaking at the neighborhood, street and individual feature levels; opportunities for branding to create a powerful and memorable identity; green streets; extending the character of parks; coordinated open spaces, both public and private; adding life to the streets; creating pedestrian walkways through the superblocks; and residential uses as a key to urban vitality.

Mr. King said during 2005, staff will be taking the concepts to the community, including the Bellevue Downtown Association and various stakeholders. The best ideas will be carried in three ways. They will be used to help the city plan and design public projects. The ideas will serve as fodder for updating the Land Use Code incentive system. Private developers and property owners may also see ideas in the sketchbook they would like to incorporate into their projects. There is a lot of growth potential in the Downtown given that some 50 to 60 percent of the total area can be considered to be underdeveloped.

The NOMA area was dubbed by some as the “Northwest Village” and by others as “New Bellevue.” The area has some access roads cutting through the superblocks, and during redevelopment those roads could become alleys with addresses, curbside streets with bollards delineating the sidewalk. Such streets could easily be closed down for events.

Commissioner Wendle asked if the city has plans to develop a park in the northern section of the Downtown. Mr. King said there are plans for a park one and a half or two acres in size somewhere in the northwest quadrant. The charrette concluded that each of the distinct neighborhoods should have an open space component. As more people move into the Downtown, including young families, it will become more important to provide amenities such as open space, fountains, and possibly even a school.

What the Downtown Implementation Plan terms “City Center North,” the charrette teams dubbed “Hidden Gardens” or the “Tower Row Cultural District.” The teams highlighted opportunities to take the hidden open spaces that currently exist and make them more evident to pedestrians and available for cultural uses such as outdoor cafes. Mr. King said the development community is interested in constructing office, residential and retail in the district, but for the next two years the bulk of the Downtown development will be focused on the residential market and retail component associated with Lincoln Square.

The Commissioners were shown a concept drawing for what could be done for the 106th/108th Ave. one-way couplet. Mr. King noted that the shifting of traffic to a one-way pattern can gain as much as the width of a travel lane which could be used for a variety of amenities, including wider sidewalks, a bike lane, planter strips, or on-street parking.

Mr. King said alternative names proposed for the Ashwood Neighborhood were “Ashwood

Park” and “Library Quarter.” Those who live in the neighborhood presently say there is little to do there besides walking their dogs and going to the library. The few restaurants and cafes that have opened up in the district have approached the city wanting on-street parking, especially on 110th Avenue and NE 10th Street. The charrette participants felt what they really need to do is work together to develop a synergy for the whole area, not just their individual establishments.

The “City Center” teams offered up some rather exciting ideas. The district includes the length of the Pedestrian Corridor. Compass Plaza, which is not yet finished, will in the years to come serve as the central gathering place for the entire Downtown. One concept proposed had the area developed as a high-tech communications core, with outdoor gathering places and free wi-fi throughout the area. At its full configuration, Compass Plaza will take up about an acre.

When Bellevue Square is redeveloped in the future, consideration should be given to opening it up and making it more transparent to the Pedestrian Corridor. Kemper Development has expressed an interest in reconfiguring the plaza space so that it is better connected to both the Bellevue Art Museum and Lincoln Square.

The designers held that NE 4th Street and NE 2nd Street are very important as east-west green streets. Green space and waterways running throughout the Downtown core could provide more active recreational opportunities for Downtown residents. A “Charles Street Promenade” configuration on NE 2nd Street was suggested by one of the teams. Charles Street was the original name of NE 2nd Street, and the concept included green space oriented primarily to the north side of the street to take full advantage of solar access.

As currently developed, Bellevue Square effectively turns its back on Downtown Park. The teams offered examples for how to create a better connection, with retail uses focused on the park. The teams also proposed creating a better gateway to Downtown Park by opening up visual access from Bellevue Way at NE 4th Street. The teams supported the notion of completing the park slightly different than the master plan, with tweaks to provide space for a farmer’s market and possibly other uses.

The teams focused on the SOMA neighborhood came up with names such as “Spanish Steps,” “Artery,” “Brew Town,” “Funky Town,” and “New Bellevue.” Their vision for Main Street included a landscape median, off-peak on-street parking, and an active pedestrian environment. As more residential is developed in the Downtown, the need for green north-south pedestrian and bicycle friendly streets will become evident.

The teams were not asked to get too deeply into suggesting concepts for connecting the Downtown with Meydenbauer Bay because of the host of planning, transportation and park related issues that will need to go into it. A few sketches of what could happen were drawn, however.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Chair Bell asked Mr. Loewenherz to develop a response from the traffic section to the call for a signal at the intersection of NE 14th Street and 140th Avenue NE.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

A. Public Involvement Calendar

The Commissioners were reminded of the Factoria Area Transportation Study open house on February 16 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. in Council Chambers. Commissioner Northey indicated that she might be able to drop by.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Bill Serr, 1412 153rd Place SE, stressed the importance of planning for ITS in Bellevue. The purpose and goal should be concurrency. Funding should be through the CIP.

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None

12. REVIEW CALENDAR

13. ADJOURNMENT

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

Chair Bell adjourned the meeting at 9:08 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date