

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 11, 2010
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Tanaka, Commissioners Glass, Jokinen, Lampe, Larrivee, Northey

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Simas

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Krawczyk, Goran Sparrman, Nancy LaCombe, Eric Miller, Mike Ingram, Franz Loewenherz Kevin O'Neill, Department of Transportation; Mike Bergstrom, Department of Planning and Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Chair Tanaka who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Simas who was excused.

Chair Tanaka took a moment to introduce new Commissioner Scott Lampe. Commissioner Lampe said he has lived in Bellevue for the past 13 years and as a member of the Surrey Downs community has been involved in the Eastlink project as it relates to the neighborhood. He said his background is in finance and civil engineering.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Project Manager Paul Krawczyk said an update on the red light camera program will be given to the Commission in May.

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

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS – None

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Cathy Hodge, 10047 Main Street, spoke on behalf of the Meydenbauer Bay Neighbors Association. She pointed out that the EIS for the Meydenbauer Bay park project included no letters in support of the approved alternative plans, but many letters disapproving the preferred alternative. She said her home is near the intersection of Main Street and 100th Avenue SE and from every window and her deck she can watch the traffic on both of those streets. She said she was shocked to read the low traffic figures included in the EIS and decided to conduct her own count during the third week of July 2009 between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. from the corner of Main Street and 100th Avenue SE. School was out, it was the week before Seafair, and there were no scheduled events at the yacht club. Each day, the count exceeded the EIS counts by between 19 percent and 78 percent. There was no counter tape placed on 100th Avenue SE during the time the park planning effort was under way. It is unknown how the transportation department can continue to justify closing 100th Avenue SE without a current accurate count. The consulting firm EDAW neglected to consider the residential communities surrounding the park and the significant need for access to and from 100th Avenue SE. The logical alternative would be to keep 100th Avenue SE open, remove the Bayview Apartment complex and developing the property into a parking lot for 50 cars with access from Main Street. That would alleviate the clustering of vehicles at the bottom of 100th Avenue SE planned as the entrance to the 50-stall underground parking lot, the Meydenbauer Yacht Club parking lot, and the access to the View condominiums and the Ten Thousand Meydenbauer condominiums.

Ms. Sandra Boyd, Ten Thousand Meydenbauer Way, provided the Commissioners with copies of materials she said she provided to the Park Board. She said the steering committee and the designers are set on having a grand entry way to the Meydenbauer Bay park. That could be accomplished at the upper area between Main Street and Lake Washington Boulevard. The plan calls for a large pedestrian walkway beginning on the city-owned property directly below the Chevron station. The local residential uses there could get by with a one-lane, one-way road providing access. The main entry to Ten Thousand Meydenbauer condominiums is on 100th Avenue SE, and the only access from Meydenbauer Way is to and from the garage.

7. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the agenda as published was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Commissioner Larrivee and the motion carried unanimously.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Meydenbauer Bay Park Update

Capital Project Manager Nancy LaCombe presented the Commissioners with copies of the

letter drafted by staff at the direction of the Commission regarding the Meydenbauer Bay park plan.

Department of Transportation Director Goran Sparrman allowed that the issues involved in the park planning process have been of interest to a large number of people, and the citizens advisory committee struggled with balancing some significant tradeoffs, namely providing adequate access for local residents and park users, while seizing the opportunity to connect the waterfront to Downtown Park. While the transportation issues have not been at the center of the balancing act, they certainly became a significant side issue.

Continuing, Mr. Sparrman said it must be recognized that the transportation issues are part of the broader urban infrastructure. Main Street leads to Lake Washington Boulevard which unfortunately serves as a community cut-through facility which is contrary to city policy; the city does not want commuters to use Old Bellevue to get to and from Bellevue, Seattle, Medina and other areas. The city has put a lot of energy into protecting the small-scale, old-town atmosphere of Old Bellevue. The closure of 100th Avenue SE makes sense from that point of view.

It will be some time before work to develop the park begins. When that work does begin, the city will focus on the issue of mitigation. The EIS identifies some mitigation measures, but the real decisions will be made by the City Council as the park development process ramps up.

The letter from the Commission to the Park Board tries to put those details in context of the broader issues dealt with by the citizens advisory committee and how the department deals with the operational decisions. The decision to close 100th Avenue SE is not currently in front of the department.

Answering a question asked by Chair Tanaka, Mr. Sparrman said the city is facing some very large transportation issues for the long term, not just for the downtown but for the broader city. The city will need to do a lot of work in the next few years to determine how to position itself for the long term, and that will include dealing with the broader congestion issues for people getting in and out of the downtown, including Old Bellevue.

Commissioner Larrivee suggested that keeping 100th Avenue SE open would be consistent with the vision of not using Lake Washington Boulevard as a cut-through route. Closing the roadway would actually encourage throughput on Lake Washington Boulevard. Mr. Sparrman said closing 100th Avenue SE will not contribute to making Lake Washington Boulevard a commute facility. The current volumes of traffic on 100th Avenue SE are relatively low. With continued growth, there will be continued demand for traffic coming from the downtown heading to points west, and closing the roadway or not will be insignificant in the context of the broader issue. The more pedestrian connection between Downtown Park and the waterfront is strengthened, the less the focus will be on the route as a commute facility.

Commissioner Lampe asked if there are any projected plans for changes in the Old Bellevue/Main Street area in terms of lane configuration. Mr. Sparrman said there are no plans to take that approach. When the park development issue is on the department's plate, the focus will turn to how to deal with the existing traffic patterns. City policy calls for keeping the area as it is currently and discourages cut-through traffic.

Chair Tanaka reminded the Commissioners that the intent in directing staff to draft a letter to the Park Board was not to take a position one way or another with regard to closing 100th Avenue SE but rather to pass along concerns raised by the public and the Commission.

Commissioner Northey commented that the letter is well written and carefully crafted. She said she would prefer to see somewhat stronger language, however, and call for addressing the corridor and surrounding side streets concurrent with the adoption of the master plan. While that is not the way the city usually does things, accelerating the study is warranted. At the very least the study should be done within three years of adoption of the master plan.

Commissioner Larrivee said he could support strengthening the letter as proposed by Commissioner Northey. He said he would like to see something stronger to address the impact of closing 100th Avenue SE. He said he was personally not comfortable with the tone of the letter that the closure of the roadway is a foregone conclusion. An up-front analysis would be beneficial for everyone.

Chair Tanaka said it would be unusual for the city to conduct such traffic study focusing on mitigation absent having a specific project in mind. He pointed out that if the study were to be done up front, it could have to be replicated later after a project-specific EIS is prepared. Mr. Sparrman agreed and said at the very least any study done up front would have to be updated later when there is a specific project on the books.

Commissioner Glass asked if an EIS is necessary in making the decision to close 100th Avenue SE. Mr. Sparrman said normally a project level analysis would be done for a specific project and all associated actions. The closure of 100th Avenue SE would be part of the broader project and as such would be subject to an EIS. A road closure in and of itself does not require an environmental analysis.

Commissioner Glass agreed with the suggestion of Commissioner Northey. He said he wanted the letter to memorialize the concerns voiced by the public about the recommendation to close 100th Avenue SE. The language of the draft dances around the issue but does not come right out and say the Commission has heard repeated concerns from all of the local neighborhood groups.

Mr. Bergstrom said the type of environmental review undertaken at the master planning stage is specifically provided for under SEPA. At the master plan level, such reviews are intentionally broad. The type of analysis that will happen at the project level is also spelled out

by SEPA; it is not possible to aim in advance for a specific type of environmental review. The city has an environmental coordinator designated under SEPA to make those calls. In all likelihood, the type of review at the project level will be supplemental to the work done at the master planning level.

Mr. Sparrman stressed all actions taken by the transportation department that involve controversial issues include working with the local neighborhood. The notion that the city could simply get away with closing a roadway without engaging in a public process is invalid. The department always works in a transparent fashion with the community and always involves stakeholders before taking action.

Motion to strike the first sentence of the last paragraph on the first page of the letter and have the paragraph begin with “Concurrent with the adoption of the master plan, the corridor and surrounding side streets...” was made by Commissioner Northey. Second was by Commissioner Larrivee.

Commissioner Larrivee said the concern he has heard voiced by the community is the level of uncertainty surrounding the proposed changes that will significantly impact them. To the extent that those concerns can be proactively eliminated, the community as a whole will be put in a better position for moving forward.

Chair Tanaka said he would oppose the motion. He said his participation on the steering committee including hours of listening to testimony. The steering committee operated under a larger context and thoroughly vetted the various issues. Even with the diverse makeup of the steering committee, there was unanimous approval of the preferred alternative, even in the face of strong opposition by those members of the public against the closure of 100th Avenue SE. The closure of the roadway is part of a master plan which will be revisited yet again before final plans for developing the park are adopted.

Commissioner Jokinen concurred. Development of the park is at least ten years out, and requiring additional environmental study concurrent with adoption of the master plan has the potential for creating unnecessary process.

The motion failed 3-3 with Commissioners Northey, Larrivee and Glass in favor, and Chair Tanaka and Commissioners Jokinen and Lampe opposed.

Motion to approve the letter as drafted and forward it to the Park Board was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Commissioner Jokinen.

Commissioner Northey said she would vote against the motion. She said the city should be conducting corridor studies aimed at protecting the neighborhoods with as much energy as is being put into serving the downtown business community.

Commissioner Lampe said his vote would be predicated on differing to the work of the steering committee and the unanimous decision they reached.

The motion carried 4-1, with Commissioner Northey voting against, and Commissioner Larrivee abstaining from voting.

B. Transportation Improvement Program Annual Update

Senior Transportation Planner Mike Ingram explained that the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) includes projects in the funded seven-year Capital Investment Program (CIP), projects in the 12-year financially constrained Transportation Facilities Plan (TFP), projects identified through various processes that are not included in any adopted plan, and regional projects the city may have an interest in. The local TIP feeds into the regional TIP managed by the Puget Sound Regional Council, and into the state TIP.

The role of the Commission is to engage the public and develop a recommendation for the City Council. The final TIP must be submitted to the state by the end of July.

Mr. Ingram said the projects highlighted in green are those that have moved from the TFP to the CIP. He said one project, SE 60th Street, was moved from the CIP to the TFP because its funded portion was completed.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Larrivee, Capital Programming Manager Eric Miller said the Eastlink analysis project was created to do the initial analysis work needed to position the city to be able to coordinate with Sound Transit. It could continue to be a project in the CIP until Eastlink is fully implemented, but that is still to be determined.

Mr. Ingram said the projects highlighted in red will be deleted in the version of the list that will be the subject of the upcoming public hearing. For the most part they are CIP projects that will have been completed.

Commissioner Glass said he had heard talk about adding a lane on Bellevue Way southbound from 112th Avenue SE to the freeway. He asked if it was included on the list. Mr. Miller said it is included as a part of project 106, which involves I-90 HOV system implementation and local connections to it. The city will not necessarily have the lead in the I-90 HOV system implementation project.

Commissioner Northey asked if the HOV system implementation project will come before the Commission at all for comment. Mr. Miller said the project has been in the TIP for many years, though the project description edits are new. The intent behind having the project on the list is to leave the door open to outside funding.

Motion to approve the list as presented for review at the public hearing on April 8 was made by

Commissioner Glass. Second was by Commissioner Northey.

Commissioner Northey pointed out that the TIP serves as a wish list for projects the city might seek grant money for. To the extent that there are projects that are not necessarily part of the funded CIP, identified and funded CIP projects may be supplanted if grant dollars are obtained. She further voiced concern that the Commission is becoming irrelevant to the CIP programming process as evidenced by some big ticket items put on the list at the direction of the Council that did not go through the Commission review process.

The motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Larrivee agreed that for political expediency the Council is circumventing a process that has existed for quite some time.

Commissioner Northey said she is less concerned about the substance of what the Council is doing than the process by which they are doing it. The Commission has been tasked with accomplishing certain duties, but some of those duties are gradually being reduced. If that is to be the trend, it should be done explicitly. It would be appropriate to consider drafting a letter to the Council liaison seeking clarification on the process.

Commissioner Lampe commented that the financial constraints facing the city the last two years have been unprecedented. He said every project on the list was undoubtedly very carefully put together over time, but the city's deficit has triggered a need to make some very difficult choices.

Commissioner Northey said the decisions to include the projects on the list were made when the economy was far more robust. The tough decisions are still to be made, and the Commission should have a voice in determining what should be done.

C. Eastgate/I-90 Land Use and Transportation Project

Assistant Director Kevin O'Neill said the City Council officially launched the Eastgate/I-90 land use and transportation study in February. They established the project scope, the planning principles, and approved the boundaries of the study area.

Mr. O'Neill explained that the last major Comprehensive Plan update in 2004 included a policy in the Land Use Element that addressed reviewing all of the major employment centers in the city. Since then the city has updated the downtown plan, updated the Wilburton/NE 8th plan, updated the Bel-Red plan, and conducted a site-planning exercise for Crossroads Shopping Center. The Eastgate/I-90 study is the last of the major employment areas to be updated. The 2001 transportation study that involved the Eastgate/I-90 area was focused only on transportation improvements; it did not assume much in the way of land use change. The current study is intended to look both at land use change and transportation improvements for

the corridor.

Senior Planner Mike Bergstrom with the Department of Planning and Community Development said the Council approved the study principles that will help guide staff, the citizens advisory committee, and the boards and commissions as the study progresses. The guidelines will serve as touchstones for making sure things do not get off track. The scope of work approved by the Council will result in the identification of a preferred vision for the Eastgate/I-90. The project map identifies the primary areas in which land use changes might be considered. The public involvement plan is intended to reach out to stakeholders within the study area as well as residents in the areas around the study area.

The primary study area extends along the I-90 corridor to the east and southeast to include the Lakemont Boulevard interchange. The Council included that area because of its strong transportation relationships to the study area, not because they are anticipating land use changes there.

Commissioner Larrivee asked why the study area does not extend along Factoria Boulevard. Mr. Bergstrom said the Factoria Mall area was studied only recently and there is no intent to go back and open that issue. The area does, however, have a bearing on what might happen within the study area given that it is a primary retail draw.

Mr. Bergstrom noted that the unincorporated areas of King County that lie just to the south of I-90 and the study area lie within the city's Potential Annexation Area. He said the actual annexation of those areas will not be part of the Eastgate/I-90 study. The anticipation is that the annexation activities will kick off in 2011 and could be completed by 2012.

In recent years several property owners have approached the city with formal requests for Comprehensive Plan amendments so they can use their properties in ways other than what the Comprehensive Plan currently allows. Others have simply come forward to talk to staff about possibilities. The decision was made to look at the area holistically rather than to respond to individual requests as they come forward.

There is a concern about the erosion of neighborhood services in the Eastgate/I-90 area. The study will keep that in mind and seek to head off further erosion if possible.

The Mountains-to-Sound Greenway extends from central Washington to the Puget Sound waterfront. There is a significant piece of the greenway missing I-90 in Bellevue. The study will take that into consideration.

Mr. Bergstrom allowed that achieving a coherent urban design image for the area will be a challenge. The corridor in its current configuration is not overly cohesive, partly because I-90 splits it, partly because of topography, and partly because of large established uses throughout the corridor, including Bellevue College in the middle of the study area.

A grant has been applied for to conduct a health impact analysis, which is an emerging planning tool that recognizes the public health impacts of planning decisions.

The zoning as it exists in the corridor currently is predominantly Office/Limited Business, Community Business and Light Industrial. Those land use districts have been in the code for decades and are primarily suburban in their construct; they yield fairly low floor/area ratios in the form of office buildings surrounded by parking. There is some residential in the study area. The development patterns in the area have generally followed the zoning. For the most part, the office developments were constructed within the last two or three decades so a lot of redevelopment is unlikely.

Senior transportation planner Franz Loewenherz said he has been appointed co-lead project manager for the study representing the transportation department in the joint effort. He noted that there a number of known transportation choke points in the study area. Geography, freeway conditions, traffic volumes and lack of continuity in the street network all contribute to out-of-direction travel and congestion in the corridor. The major north/south corridors of Richards Road, 150th Avenue SE, Factoria Boulevard and 148th Avenue SE all experience travel delays under current conditions and are projected to become increasingly problematic in the future. The study will include developing land use scenarios and identifying multimodal solution sets to address the traffic issues.

I-90 experiences congestion three hours in the morning commute and two hours in the evening commute between the Eastgate interchange all the way to Front Street in Issaquah. In Bellevue, the Eastgate and Lakemont interchanges both operate at or near capacity, which results in spillover into surrounding arterials and general congestion. There are three projects identified in the current TFP related to the Eastgate interchange. The Washington State Department of Transportation has identified a number of mainline improvements for the freeway as well as ideas for addressing the areas surrounding the interchanges. The study will work closely with the state in contemplating if their suggestions are adequate to meet the future needs of the area.

Mr. Loewenherz said the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway has a significant missing gap in the study area. The section of the greenway that passes through the Eastgate/I-90 area is the most notable ped-bike barrier. The exercise will include a review of what was adopted in the 2009 ped-bike plan and determine in greater detail how those facilities might be realized. The Mountains-to-Sound Greenway serves as a hot topic for the Council as well as for City Manager Steve Sarkozy who on the Board of Directors of the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway Trust. The Greenway is intended to serve recreational and mobility functions, a gateway function, and serve to enhance and unify the corridor.

Between 2000 and 2008 the study area experienced significant public transit ridership growth. The growth has in part been due to the expansion plans of Bellevue College, the expanded park

and ride facility, and general employment growth. Weekday transit ridership stood at 2400 in 2000 to 8700 in 2008, a 260 percent increase. The city has been contemplating ideas for improving transit services in the area and looks forward to meeting with Sound Transit and King County Metro to explore ideas.

Mr. O'Neill pointed out that while transit ridership is up generally in the Eastgate/I-90 area, the transit modesplit for employers in the area is still anemic. Building on the park and ride and other strengths will be important.

Mr. Loewenherz said the Council spent two meetings deliberating and refining the study principles, which he noted were included in the Commission packets. He noted that the overarching principle focused on the concept of fiscal constraint.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Larrivee, Mr. O'Neill said intensification of land uses in the corridor could create additional spillover traffic impacts, particularly in the surrounding residential neighborhoods to the north and south, and in the Factoria area. The Council wants the study to look at the big picture, not just at what is happening in the study area.

Commissioner Larrivee informed the Commission that Councilmember Wallace was specific in approving the principles that the study should include getting an early start on the Sound Transit III work, which Sound Transit has on its work program and which has a significant amount of funding even though it is not slated to kick off for three or four years. There is a complementary effort under way in Issaquah, the central Issaquah land use/transportation study, and through that they have made it known that the high-capacity transit designation should be light rail and that Sound Transit should get started on that as soon as possible.

Commissioner Glass asked what benefit will flow from the proposed health impact analysis. Mr. Loewenherz said Pew Research put out a call for interests and the city submitted an application. The intent is to merge the greenhouse gas assessment with the health impact assessment. Whether or not the city will move ahead with that element absent receiving grant funding is subject to additional discussion.

Mr. O'Neill explained that the two analyses are related but different. Health impact assessments typically get into a lot of factors that relate to all aspects of human health. There are specific mandates in the state with regard to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle travel out to 2020, 2035 and 2050, and as such greenhouse gas assessments will likely become a key component of all planning work.

Commissioner Glass said he would not want to see the city gather statistics and develop great ideas but never get around to doing anything.

Commissioner Larrivee applauded the city for getting a jump start on what probably will

become a regular planning tool.

Mr. Loewenherz said the early needs assessment phase is already under way. Needs and conditions are being analyzed and future issues are being identified. That will be followed by the alternative development and evaluation phase. The intent is to wrap up the project by the spring of 2011, thus allowing Council to work through the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code amendment processes throughout the remainder of 2011. A citizen advisory committee will be appointed by the Council; it will include representation from boards and commissions as well as interests from the study area and surrounding communities. A full public involvement program has been outlined, including open houses, print and electronic media, workshops, and an online survey. A flyer announcing the study has been mailed to 25,000 addresses.

- D. Pedestrian and Bicycle Program Progress Report 2009 – Memo Only
9. OLD BUSINESS – None
 10. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Glass asked staff to supply the Commission with information regarding which streets are set to be overlaid.

Commissioner Larrivee said he would be interested in receiving a report on the I-90 study done by WSDOT.

11. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None
12. APPROVAL OF MINUTES
 - A. January 15, 2010

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

13. REVIEW COMMISSION CALENDAR AND AGENDA
14. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Tanaka adjourned the meeting at 8:42 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date