

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 12, 2009
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Northey, Commissioners Kiel, Larrivee, Simas,
Tanaka, Wendle

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioner Glass

STAFF PRESENT: David Cieri, Philip Harris, Kevin O'Neill, Kevin
McDonald, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: Torsten Lienau, Carol Hunter, WSDOT

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Chair Northey who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Larrivee, who arrived at 6:34 p.m., and Commissioner Glass, who was excused.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Transportation CIP Construction Manager Dave Cieri reported that construction on the Northup Way project between 120th Avenue NE and 124th Avenue NE is scheduled to begin on March 23.

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

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Tanaka said the Meydenbauer Bay park steering committee will be conducting a walk-through at the park site on March 14 from 10:00 a.m. to noon. The event is for the steering committee members but is open to the public. He allowed that while the public continues to be concerned about the possible closure of 100th Avenue NE, the overall project

involves far more than just that one roadway. If the decision is made to close the roadway, attention should be turned to issues of mitigation, but the notion of closing the roadway should not be dismissed out of hand.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

7. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

8. STUDY SESSION

A. I-90 Bellevue to North Bend Corridor Study Update

Senior Transportation Planner Philip Harris introduced Carol Hunter and Torsten Lienau from the Washington State Department of Transportation.

Ms. Hunter explained that WSDOT does corridor planning as part of developing long-range visions for the corridors. She said the focus is on determining where there are issues or concerns, both presently and looking out 20 years, and identifying ways to solve them. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) model is used as the base but is customized to the specific study area. The model returns data about expectations based on the assumptions.

Ms. Hunter said the I-90 corridor plan work is being done in part because the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has required it. The communities that front I-90, including Bellevue, worked together with the legislature to obtain funding for the study. Those communities along with the FHWA, King County Metro, Sound Transit and the PSRC are all involved in the corridor study.

WSDOT is facing significant financial constraints so has had to develop a strategy for how it will provide benefits for the important regional corridors. The Moving Washington strategy has three components: strategically identifying areas where capacity can be added to make a true impact; operating the system as efficiently as possible with new technology; and managing demand.

Ms. Hunter said the schedule for the study was revised to allow the modeling to take into account important regional decisions about tolling on SR-520 and I-90. A determination has been made that even if tolling is implemented on I-90 it will not have any impact on the Bellevue to North Bend segment.

The I-90 corridor that lies between Eastgate in Bellevue and North Bend is very diverse. It includes high-density urbanized areas with congestion and safety issues on the west side, and

the entrance to the Cascade mountains on the east side. In between there are developing communities such as Snoqualmie Ridge that have high density development surrounded by open land.

Commissioner Larrivee asked if the segment of I-90 in Bellevue under study extends to the I-405 interchange. Ms. Hunter said WSDOT has a study area that incorporates the whole of I-90 all the way out to North Bend. However, the specific project area is Eastgate to North Bend. WSDOT understands the relationship of the intersection of the two major freeways but has other projects focused on that specific part of the study area.

Chair Northey asked if any improvements are being planned for westbound I-90 to northbound I-405. Ms. Hunter said there are improvements for that movement included in the master plan.

Mr. Lienau said the study included six screenlines within the urban portions of I-90, two in Bellevue, two in Issaquah, and two along the corridor. The largest growth in traffic was seen in the Issaquah screenlines for the 2030 forecast. During the morning peak, the heaviest traffic flow is westbound, while in the evening peak it is eastbound; the forecast showed no change in that even though there will be employment growth in Issaquah and toward the east. Congestion levels in the morning peak will last beyond three hours by 2030 between Front Street in Issaquah and Eastgate in Bellevue, with travel speeds of less than 30 miles per hour. In the evening peak most of the congestion will be in the Eastgate interchange area, which is the way it is currently.

Mr. Lienau said the study also documents local intersections off of the I-90 corridor to determine impacts to local street systems.

In late 2008 WSDOT began initiating agency-specific meetings to talk about some of the near- and long-term improvements that had been developed. The focus was on gathering staff input about the improvements.

When the corridor study was started in 2006 there was a set of regional improvements that WSDOT had decided should be included in the analysis. They included a number of funded projects along I-405, such as the addition of two general purpose lanes in each direction, which add capacity and therefore additional demand for the I-90 corridor. A toll on SR-520 was not initially assumed. HOV-3 Plus was assumed by 2030 in the modeling, as was the widening of SR-18 to four and five lanes on the northernmost section of that roadway.

Mr. Lienau noted that it appears the likelihood of the state imposing a toll on SR-520 is much greater than first anticipated. WSDOT has conducted a study regarding tolling SR-520, tolling both SR-520 and I-90, and not tolling at all. The results of the study as they apply to the I-90 corridor study show virtually no change in demand.

Chair Northey suggested that tolling may in fact increase demand on roads such as 148th

Avenue. Ms. Hunter said drivers will understand it will take them a long time to get to alternate facilities and that paying the toll will in fact be faster.

There are a number of transit improvements assumed for the corridor. They include the East Link light rail project with service from downtown Seattle to Overlake via I-90, and the addition of 100,000 service hours along the corridor. Part of the ST-2 package includes looking at light rail between Bellevue and Issaquah, but the I-90 corridor study model does not assume that there will be light rail running between those two jurisdictions.

There are additional proposed improvements along the corridor that are not yet funded, including a new park and ride lot at the interchange with SR-18; a revision to the access for the Eastgate park and ride direct access ramp; and some elements of bus rapid transit in the corridor.

Chair Northey asked if consideration has been given to a new park and ride facility at Lakemont. Ms. Hunter said WSDOT is trying to get out of the park and ride lot business. There are ongoing internal policy discussions about how to approach that issue in the future. Ms. Hunter said she was not aware of any current plans for a park and ride lot at Lakemont.

Mr. Lienau said as funding became tighter during the course of the study, focus was given to lower cost improvements that could be made in the near term that would gain some immediate relief. The four options looked at were increasing transit services and/or park and ride facilities along the corridor; converting the current HOV lane on I-90 to a hot lane; active traffic management brought about by investments in technology; and queue warnings and hard shoulder runnings.

Ms. Hunter said some countries in Europe actively manage their freeways in ways not generally used in the United States. One way they do that is to impose variable speed limits and communicating to drivers when a lane ahead is closed. They have found that when drivers are given enough warning, the number of secondary incidences is reduced. It is known that about 25 to 30 percent or more of freeway congestion is related to collisions, so if the number of collisions can be reduced, the result will be a gain in overall capacity. In 2010 WSDOT will use \$25 million from the Alaska Way Viaduct project to implement signs on I-5 between the Boeing access road and I-90 in the northbound direction in an attempt to better communicate to drivers what is happening ahead; electronic signs will be put up every half mile. When the traffic is free flowing, the boards will be blank, but when it is necessary to slow traffic, WSDOT will have the ability to do it in five mile increments, and will have the ability to close a lane and inform drivers as to the reason why.

Ms. Hunter said what soon will exist on I-90 currently is a scaled-down version of what active traffic management can be. It will include a variable speed limit. FHWA will require a variable speed limit on the bridge when the HOV lanes are moved to the outer roadway and the width of the lanes and shoulders are reduced. In the next month or so the system will be

activated and the speed limit will be varied depending on traffic conditions as determined by loops in the roadway. The variable posted speeds will not be advisory; they will be enforceable by the State Patrol.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Simas, Ms. Hunter said Washington state has one of the best incident response programs in the country. As a result, the time required to clear incidents has been reduced by half.

Ms. Hunter said about five cities in the nation were conditionally awarded money to test active traffic management for the purposes of managing congestion. Minnesota is testing a variable tolling program as well as variable speed limits. A similar approach is being taken in California and Washington.

Answering a question asked by Chair Northey, Ms. Hunter explained that increased capacity does not equate to an increase in throughput. A speed limit of about 45 miles per hour has been shown to be the most effective at increasing throughput. Mr. Lienau stated capacity is the amount available, but it is not necessarily used; throughput is what is being used. Chair Northey suggested that increases in capacity that do not result in increased throughput would be a waste of investment. Mr. Lienau disagreed. He said adding a lane to a four-lane road is a 20 percent increase in capacity, but it will only increase volumes by about seven percent.

Commissioner Simas asked if the European traffic control model will result in a need for more people operating a command center. Ms. Hunter said WSDOT has a transportation center from which traffic can be monitored. The center receives feeds from cameras located along the freeways. She said some additional investment will need to be put into that system, specifically more fiber optics and cables systemwide. To get to where the center can be operated 24/7 will require some additional staff as well as investments in infrastructure.

Mr. Lienau said projects for the near term include auxiliary lanes, one in the eastbound direction to address the evening peak congestion in Eastgate connecting Eastgate to Lakemont, and one westbound between SR-900 and Issaquah connecting all the way to Eastgate. Ms. Hunter added that federal criteria will determine whether or not the auxiliary lanes warrant sound walls.

The I-405 at I-90 interchange improvement project is under construction. It does not include any specific improvements to I-90, but the I-405 improvements will improve congestion on I-90 considerably, primarily the morning queue of westbound vehicles waiting to get onto I-405.

Commissioner Larrivee asked what the cost estimates are for the various projects, and Mr. Lienau said those have not been completed yet. Chair Northey asked if a cost/benefit analysis has been done to determine which projects are the most cost effective. Ms. Hunter said that will be done once the cost estimates are in hand.

Mr. Lienau noted that the estimated traffic growth in the Eastgate area is ten percent by 2015. The low percentage increase is evidence of the fact that the area is already near capacity and is being utilized fairly well, including by transit. The forecasts show that between 17 and 38 percent more people than vehicles are being carried along the corridor. The SOV/HOV mix changes by the peak hour, with about 88 percent SOV in the morning peak and about 80 percent SOV in the evening peak, and about 17 percent HOV in the morning peak and 20 percent HOV in the evening peak. The truck mix is quite low, less than six percent, in the corridor. The peak periods growth is forecast to be eight percent in the morning peak and 14 percent in the evening peak.

Mr. Lienau shared with the Commissioners graphics indicating speed profiles along the corridor for specific time periods and by direction under the no action approach. The charts depicted the forecasted speeds in 2015, and the Eastgate area was shown to be operating at an acceptable level. Mr. Lienau noted that there will be continued congestion spots in the corridor, beginning in Issaquah and continuing to about the SR-900 corridor, and again at the Lakemont Boulevard interchange.

The creation of the HOV lane in Issaquah causes some amount of congestion in and of itself in the corridor; it is the only HOV lane in the entire region that is a conversion. Traffic in the outside general purpose lane must change lanes once the HOV lane starts. It is not an ideal situation.

In the eastbound direction the situation by 2015 will be very similar to current conditions. Between Richards Road and Eastgate congestion builds, and at Eastgate the congestion is the worst. Once the cars have merged and move beyond Eastgate, traffic is mostly free flowing to Issaquah.

Two options were studied to address the westbound morning peak period traffic going into Seattle from North Bend, Snoqualmie and Issaquah through Bellevue. One was to construct an auxiliary lane connecting the on-ramp at SR-900 to the off-ramp at Eastgate, and changing the way the HOV lane is created in Issaquah to make it an add lane rather than a conversion, extending it back to between SR-900 and Front Street. The second westbound alternative is the same except the way the auxiliary lane ends at Eastgate is altered to change the way traffic merges on and off the interchange.

For eastbound traffic in the evening peak period, the options include an auxiliary lane between the Eastgate interchange and Lakemont Boulevard.

The modeling shows that a traditional connection of the off-ramp in Issaquah to the on-ramp at Eastgate will only move the congestion to Bellevue, though it does improve conditions along the corridor. Changing how the lanes merge on and off at the Eastgate interchange can significantly reduce congestion along the entire corridor; though it would create some additional congestion in the immediate vicinity of the Eastgate interchange over the no action

alternative, the congestion would be significantly less than what is currently experienced at that location.

The auxiliary lane between Eastgate and Lakemont Boulevard will virtually eliminate the congestion along the corridor. There is congestion on the local street network currently which the option will significantly clear up.

Mr. Lienau said for the long term a number of conceptual alternatives along the corridor will be included. The alternatives will include the notion of a hot lane and capacity improvements that could include an additional general purpose lane.

Every interchange along the corridor was studied. In Bellevue that included the Eastgate and West Lake Sammamish Parkway interchanges. One option would be to convert the existing HOV lane to a hot lane and create an additional managed lanes. One extra general purpose lane could also be in the mix.

Ms. Hunter allowed that not all of the concept options have been fully vetted, and some of them are likely to drop off. She added that one of the agreements WSDOT has with Sound Transit is that they can use the rights-of-way but not in ways that preclude WSDOT from bringing online future projects. If Sound Transit uses I-90 for light rail out to Issaquah, it appears the best option will be to use the median.

Mr. Lienau said there are two concepts that will be included in the corridor study for the Eastgate interchange, neither of which has been analyzed yet. One involves a split diamond that would retain the two flyover ramps but eliminate the loop ramp. A second alternative involves a single point urban interchange. For the West Lake Sammamish Parkway interchange the focus is on creating a multilane roundabout where there is currently only a single lane roundabout.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Simas, explained that a while the traditional diamond interchange has a signal where the ramps come off both sides of the freeway, the single point urban interchange has a single signal location in the center over or under the freeway; all left-turn movements are pulled to the center, and all right-turn movements have a separate ramp.

Chair Northey asked staff to come back at a future meeting to discuss whether or not sound walls are needed as part of the auxiliary lanes between Lakemont Boulevard and Eastgate. Ms. Hunter said there is a WSDOT group that specializes in sound issues; she said she would get city staff in contact with the group.

Commissioner Tanaka suggested that what happens along I-90 relative to sound attenuation is not necessarily an issue for the Transportation Commission to take up. Chair Northey said she would at least like to have a memo from staff outlining the relevant issues.

Mr. Lienau said some low-cost improvements have also been looked at. They include restriping a portion of the local street network at the I-90/150th Avenue SE interchange. Another possibility is an option that would include some minor widening of the local street network in Eastgate.

B. Bellevue/PSRC Multimodal Concurrency Pilot Project Update

Senior Planner Kevin McDonald reminded the Commissioners that the level of service for the Bel-Red MMA is to be changed from D to E+ to better relate to the land use character and available transportation options anticipated for the corridor. As currently calculated, level of service is simply a ratio of the traffic volume to the capacity of an intersection. This approach complies with the concurrency requirement of the Growth Management Act; concurrency is intended to link the transportation system capacity with land use.

Mr. McDonald said it is generally acknowledged that the current level of service approach has little to do with moving people given its focus on moving cars through intersections. For better or worse, level of service drives the city's transportation investment decisions. The higher standards A, B and C translate directly into more pavement to accommodate the flow of traffic, while the lower standards D, E and F have the opposite effect by allowing for more congestion. The legislature is currently looking at different ways to think about concurrency, but until there is a new authorization in place the current system will be the system used. The intent is to move toward a multimodal focus.

Mr. McDonald said a new project has been kicked off by the city in partnership with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), King County Metro and Sound Transit focused on multimodal concurrency. The legislature in 2008 authorized \$150,000 for the pilot project aimed at different ways to quantify non-SOV commute modes and incorporate them into how concurrency is measured. Downtown Bellevue was selected as the regional growth center for the pilot project. The expectation is that at the end of the pilot there will be a new methodology for predicting the capacity for all available modes of transportation to move people to and through an area in the peak periods.

The pilot project will compare different multimodal policies and procedures. A number of states, including California and Florida, have implemented multimodal concurrency methodologies; the study will look at their approaches to determine how effective they have been. Some modeling to analyze total person trips in Bellevue specifically will be done based on current and projected land use. There will be a focus on both a short- and long-term horizon, possibly 2011 or 2013, and long-term horizon of 2020 or 2030. The second step will be to identify the number of those trips that could be accommodated in the different available modes. The information will feed into a process to identify where there might be gaps in the existing service. Currently, where there are gaps in the volume/capacity ratio, it usually means too many vehicles are trying to move through an intersection at once; where the intersection

fails, the only option is to widen the intersection. The pilot project will look to see if some of the total trips could be accommodated through different modes of transportation instead of adding roadway capacity.

Commissioner Larrivee asked if increases in telecommunicating capability will feed into the study. Mr. McDonald allowed that having more people telecommute would mean fewer trips to be accommodated by any mode.

Mr. McDonald said in addition to making sure there are enough seats on buses to accommodate commute trips, it will be necessary to make sure the buses are accessible to people where their commute trips begin. The PSRC has developed a model based on land use characteristics and other infrastructure characteristics that shows where in the metropolitan region where people live and where they would have the most propensities to ride a bus if coming to downtown Bellevue. The information can be used by transit agencies in adding services in places where it will have the most positive effect. The model has shown that there is demand between northwestern Seattle and downtown Bellevue, but there is a gap of transit service between those places.

In many cases, the roadway system that is focused on accommodating cars cannot also accommodate all the buses that may need to run. The pilot project may help to identify where improvements could be made to enhance transit operations to and through the urban area.

One way to look at the multimodal concurrency pilot project will be from a regulatory approach and how new development can be conditioned to mitigate its impacts. Another way will be to look at what future projects might be needed to accommodate vehicle concurrency as well as transit or pedestrian/bicycle trips and including them in the TFP and ultimately the CIP.

Mr. McDonald said the prototype that comes from the pilot project may or may not be directly applicable in Bellevue or anywhere else, but it will stimulate discussion. The project must be completed and submitted to the legislature by July. The Commission will be kept informed as the process moves forward but will not be asked to take any direct action.

Commissioner Tanaka noted his support for taking a multimodal approach to concurrency.

Strategic Planning Manager Kevin O'Neill said he has been in conversations with PSRC about the project for the past year and a half. He said there are two key drivers that are moving the project along. The first is making sure that all trips through the system are accounted for and measured. The second is the fact that regional growth centers will be mixed use, transit- and pedestrian-friendly places. The deliverable will be a report from the PSRC to the state legislature about a methodology that deals specifically with regional growth centers, with downtown Bellevue used as a pilot. What the city will potentially get out of the study will be a methodology that could conceivably be applied to downtown Bellevue and other Bellevue growth centers. The city will not be obligated to take any action at the end of the pilot project.

What the legislature is interested in is making sure that local land use plans can be implemented, and making sure the transit agencies will put assets in place to meet the transit modesplit goals needed to meet the land use growth goals. The project will be largely academic but will involve a number of policy implications.

Commissioner Simas asked if there is an existing theoretical model with underlying algorithms or if something new is to be generated fresh from whole cloth. Mr. O'Neill said there is a travel demand model that forecasts trips across modes, though it admittedly does not do a very good job on the non-motorized side. What the PSRC is trying to add to that is a sketch planning tool that will take a different approach at forecasting transit to identify underutilized transit markets. In that sense, the result may ultimately be a new methodology.

9. OLD BUSINESS – None
10. NEW BUSINESS – None
11. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None
12. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. January 22, 2009

Mr. Cieri called attention to the motion in the eighth paragraph on page 11 and noted that "...actually create trip reductions in their develops..." should read "...actually create trip reductions in their developments...."

Motion to approve the minutes as amended was made by Commissioner Simas. Second was by Commissioner Kiel and the motion carried unanimously.

B. February 12, 2009

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

13. REVIEW CALENDAR

A. Commission Calendar and Agenda

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

Chair Northey stressed the need to make sure the Commission's time is used to discuss items of top priority or to provide policy direction at the appropriate times. Mr. Cieri said several of the items shown as upcoming agenda items will serve as background information for items that

will come up down the road.

Chair Northey also stressed the need to have the agenda items addressing issues identified by the Commission as top priority, including local transit service.

14. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Northey adjourned the meeting at 8:22 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date