

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

April 26, 2007
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Yuen, Vice Chair Northey, Commissioners Glass, Wendle

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Bell, Holler

STAFF PRESENT: Kevin McDonald, Kristi Oosterveen, Eric Miller, Jen Benn, Maria Koengeter, Vangie Parico, Transportation Department

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting began without a quorum at 6:33 p.m. A quorum was reached at 6:49 p.m. at which time Chair Yuen called the meeting to order.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Bell and Holler, both of whom were excused.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Transportation Planner Kevin McDonald noted that upcoming meeting dates and the items to be discussed has been added to the back of the agenda. He reminded the Commissioners that the May 10 meeting will be held at the Crossroads Community Center instead of at City Hall.

Chair Yuen said it would be helpful to have a calendar that looks out three months. Commissioner Northey thought the calendar should highlight action items.

Mr. McDonald provided the Commission with copies of an email from a homeowner requesting a sidewalk on NE 5th Street between 99th Avenue NE and 100th Avenue NE; he noted that the writer indicates that the Windsor House homeowners association has endorsed the call for the sidewalk. Mr. McDonald said the segment requested is too small to fit the

criteria for the Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization process; it may be a better fit for the Pedestrian Access Improvement Program.

Mr. McDonald also provided the Commissioners with copies of a letter requesting that a sidewalk project on Somerset Avenue, which is included in the Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization process, be made a higher priority on the list.

Kristi Oosterveen, CIP Coordinator, distributed a memo comparing the Commission's recommendation for the 2007-2013 CIP against what was adopted by the City Council. She noted that the budgets were adjusted for inflation and program management costs. At the time the package was forwarded to the Council it was known that the NE 40th Street project between 140th Avenue NE and 145th Avenue NE would be removed based on the cost. Two other projects were subsequently added to the list.

Capital Programming Manager Eric Miller clarified that it was the inflation adjustments to the budgets that caused the NE 40th Street project to fall off the funded list.

A. 2007 Overlay

Mr. McDonald reported that 14 projects were selected for the 2007 overlay program. The Council awarded the contract for those projects to Watson Asphalt. Many of the projects are already completed. The projects are being tackled in two phases. The concrete phase involves the curb and gutter and ADA curb ramps, and the asphalt phase is focused on the actual roadway overlays. The entire project is expected to be wrapped up by the end of July.

For 2008, the concrete and asphalt components will be let in separate contracts. The thinking is that the concrete portions can be done in the winter months.

Mr. McDonald informed the Commission that a trial project is under way that involves the application of a special asphalt that is supposed to keep snow and ice from building up on the roadway. The application is being made to the roadway on 145th Avenue SE to the north of Forest Drive.

Commissioner Northey asked staff to report on whether or not the amount of money allocated to the overlay program is sufficient to keep the pavement rating at a satisfactory level, and if less could be spent on the program without causing an overall degradation in the pavement ratings.

Commissioner Glass reported that there is a series of potholes in the roadway on 112th Avenue between Main Street and Bellevue Way. To the south of SE 8th Street some of the potholes that have been patched are giving way, and the roadway is bad on SE 1st Street between 120th Avenue SE and 116th Avenue SE is bad just before the curve. Finally, on 120th Avenue NE near NE 8th Street the ruts in the lane are very bad. Mr. McDonald said there is a maintenance hotline on the transportation website where problems can be reported.

Chair Yuen asked when the West Lake Sammamish Parkway project will be getting under way. Ms. Oosterveen said CIP project R-141 will begin in 2009, unless priorities change or the Council directs acceleration of the project.

Mr. Miller added that in discussing the supplemental CIP the Council has considered allocating some of the first bond issuance dollars to the early survey and design work for the West Lake Sammamish Parkway project.

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

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Glass said he attended the April 26 Bel-Red corridor steering committee meeting where the group was continuing to zero in on a preferred alternative, which favors the most aggressive approach with regard to intensity. He noted that quite a few transportation projects are included in the proposal. The projects are very expensive, however, which is a concern. Most landowners who have testified approve of the approach under consideration, but some residents of Bridle Trails are concerned that they will experience impacts due to traffic, loss of views, and loss of local services.

Chair Yuen said he attended the recent Sound Transit meetings in City Hall and in Overlake. He noted that the Surrey Downs community is well organized in opposition to having the rail line come through their neighborhood to access the downtown. The East Link project will carry with it a number of impacts for the city that will need to be kept in mind in planning the future of the city.

Chair Yuen said a new steering committee has been appointed by the Council which is focused on Meydenbauer Bay. The city owns quite a lot of property on the waterfront and intends to create a large park with connections to Downtown Park, which may affect some of the streets.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Vicky Orrico, 13702 SE 51st Place, said the Somerset homeowners association has been trying for a number of years to get a sidewalk along Somerset Avenue. The issue has been raised directly with the City Council, including presentations by children. There is a great deal of support for the sidewalk within the neighborhood. The desired project is ranked on the Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization process matrix as Number 15, but it should be given a much higher priority. Somerset Avenue is a steep and winding hill near the lower entrance to Forest Ridge; people who live in Forest Ridge drive very fast along the road and pay little attention to pedestrians. The ADTs used to rank the project are from 1997, which was prior to the expansion of Forest Ridge. People must use Somerset Avenue to get to Somerset school and Tyee; many drive their kids just to keep them from having to walk along Somerset

Avenue. In addition to the high volume of cars on Somerset Avenue, there are a large number of pedestrians because of the views. It appears that it was the hard work and testifying on the part of the Somerset community that got the City Council to create the Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization process in the first place, and it is ironic that everyone else's sidewalks will be funded ahead of the one in Somerset. She urged the Commission to move the project up on the list so that it can be funded.

7. STUDY SESSION

A. 2008-2013 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)

Ms. Oosterveen reminded the Commissioners that the public hearing on the TIP is slated for 6:30 p.m. on May 10 at the Crossroads Community Center. She distributed copies of the draft project list containing 93 projects.

Ms. Oosterveen reviewed with the Commission a number of work program items shown both on the TIP and the 2007-2013 CIP, including project descriptions and justifications.

Ms. Oosterveen called attention to TIP project number 91, Bellevue Community College Campus Transit Improvement/Snoqualmie River Road Reconstruction in response to a question from Commissioner Northey at the last meeting, and explained that the non-local project will improve transit service. She shared with the Commission a map of the project and noted that the existing roadway pavement is very poor. The project involves Bellevue Community College, King County Metro, and is on the TIP list because it will benefit the campus and the surrounding neighborhoods. The project has been in the TIP for the last couple of cycles.

Commissioner Northey asked if having 93 projects on the list will make it difficult to winnow down to the projects for which grants will actually be applied. She said if she were asked to trim the list down, she would take a more serious look at the projects shown in blue, which are unfunded local projects identified or scoped by completed alternative analyses and planning or pre-design studies. The Commission and the Council have identified through the TFP and the CIP a set of priority projects, not all of which will be funded.

Commissioner Wendle commented that the blue projects are not necessarily those for which grant applications will be made. Commissioner Northey pointed out that all of the projects in the TIP are possible grant candidates.

Commissioner Wendle noted that the Commission has in the past asked to be kept informed with regard to which projects are being submitted for grants. Ms. Oosterveen responded by saying that much depends on grant application timing. Jen Benn, Grants Coordinator, explained that the TIP has multiple values, of which making projects grant candidates is one. The TIP is also a tool used by WSDOT to identify infrastructure needs within the state, which is why the state mandates having the TIP. Most of the unfunded projects in the TIP are

unlikely to be advanced as grant candidates, but as grant opportunities arise the list is reviewed to see if any stand out.

Ms. Oosterveen reviewed with the Commission the public hearing notice which included a diagram showing how the TIP fits into the overall transportation planning and capital programming process. She noted that the public notice went out on April 19, with a separate notice to indicate that the Transportation Commission will not be meeting at City Hall.

Commissioner Northey voiced concern that those who attend the public hearing will mistake the TIP for the CIP. Ms. Oosterveen said that is why there will be no large displays at the public hearing; there will be a table with information and contact information. It will be clear that the process of adopting the TIP does not equate to funding all of the projects on the list.

B. Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization Process

Mr. Miller told the Commission that the Council has seen the preliminarily ranked list of sidewalk projects in association with its discussion of the supplemental CIP. He suggested that because the Council is considering a supplemental CIP, getting the completed Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization list to them in a timely manner will be important. The Council has discussed the notion of having the supplemental CIP come out in four waves, with the first at the end of 2007 valued at about \$14 million, the second and third in 2009 and 2011 respectively, each valued at about \$13 million, and the fourth in 2016 valued at about \$28 million. The Council has considered allocating \$10 million of the first issuance to the downtown, \$3 million to neighborhood sidewalks, and \$1 million to the West Lake Sammamish Parkway project.

Changes to the criteria and project list have been made as directed by the Commission in the previous discussions of the topic. The criteria does not include a factor for community input, primarily because each project on the list has strong neighborhood support. The criteria also does not factor in project cost or cost per foot.

Mr. Miller shared with the Commission photographs of several of the projects on the list. He pointed out that several of the roadways have pedestrian facilities in the form of wide shoulders, while others have very narrow shoulders or other obstructions that deter pedestrian movements.

Commissioner Wendle suggested some consideration should be given to projects that have the potential for other partnerships or grants. One such partnership would be neighborhoods willing to form an LID to pay at least some portion of the overall project cost. Priority should also be given to projects that address roadways that offer no opportunity at all to walk along them safely. He noted that SE 16th Street has a very substandard facility pedestrians can use; it is less than ideal but is usable. The NE 40th Street project, however, has nothing at all for pedestrians to use safely. Mr. Miller said the suggestion was made at a previous Commission meeting that projects lacking any pedestrian facilities at all should be given a negative score,

but that direction was not accepted by the full Commission.

Commissioner Wendle commented that large investments have been made in some neighborhoods, particularly on 148th Avenue NE. Projects in neighborhoods where there has been a lot of investment already could be given a lower rating.

Commissioner Glass voiced concern over sidewalk projects going in and wiping out existing bicycle facilities, thus favoring one type of transportation over another. He cited SE 26th Street as an example. Mr. Miller explained that where there are planned bicycle facilities, which SE 26th Street has, the intent is to design in a way that will accommodate those facilities. Where there are no planned bicycle facilities, a sidewalk project could be constructed in such a way as to impinge on use by bicycles.

Commissioner Glass commented that from the pictures many of the neighborhoods have a rural character which will be changed by putting in sidewalks. He added that when he runs he often will use the street rather than the sidewalk to avoid having to negotiate the curbs.

Commissioner Northey agreed that projects that have pedestrian facilities on at least one side of the roadway should be given a lower priority. She suggested the Council should be asked to double the \$7.5 million allocation to the Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization program so more projects can be done. Just moving down on the list the projects that already have some pedestrian facilities could bring the Somerset project up high enough to get funded.

Mr. Miller stressed that the Council has made no decisions yet about the supplemental CIP bond issuance. At their last meeting, the Council directed staff to come back with more details on how the money could be spent in the coming two years and what the funds could buy for the city. Having the money is one thing, but allocating the staff resources is another.

Commissioner Wendle suggested that the projects with a total score in the 60s should not be moved down on the list even if they have pedestrian facilities on one side of the roadway. The way the priority ranking works, a number of factors are brought into play and it would not be right to demote projects for the one reason only. Projects with scores in the low 50s, however, could more appropriately be moved down.

Commissioner Wendle asked if the final list will be forwarded to the Council with the criteria attached. Commissioner Northey suggested the Council will want to know what criteria were used to prioritize the list. Mr. Miller proposed sending the Council the criteria along with a statement saying no criteria system is perfect given the universe of factors that could be considered. Where projects have been moved up or down irrespective of ranking, the Council should be told why the move was made.

Motion to revise the list by moving down in priority the projects that have existing pedestrian facilities on one side of the roadway, and to recommend funding at least \$15 million worth of projects in the Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization project, was made by Commissioner

Northey. Second was by Commissioner Wendle.

Commissioner Wendle noted that the criteria of whether or not a project is on the TFP skews the final score considerably given that most of the projects are not on the TFP. Mr. Miller explained that the criteria was used because TFP projects are already in the plans and therefore have a citywide high priority.

Ms. Oosterveen noted that with the projects having pedestrian facilities on at least one side of the roadway moved down in priority, the funding cut-off line falls between project SO-1, Somerset Avenue SE, and E/CM-1 , 150th Avenue SE.

Ms. Oosterveen pointed out an error on the matrix regarding BT-2, 148th Avenue NE, noting that the project is not in the TFP and should have a total rank score of 44 rather than 54. The change moved the project down five places on the list.

As maker of the motion on the floor, Commissioner Northey agreed to bifurcate the motion into its two component parts for voting purposes; seconder Commissioner Wendle also agreed.

The motion to revise the list by moving down in priority the projects that have existing pedestrian facilities on one side of the roadway carried unanimously.

Speaking to the second part of the motion, Chair Yuen pointed out that the number of priority projects exceeding the available dollars is high and more funding would help.

Commissioner Wendle suggested the transmittal memo to the Council should compliment them on taking the initiative to set aside dollars for sidewalk projects while highlighting the need to take an even bigger step. The Commissioners concurred.

The motion to recommend funding at least \$15 million worth of projects in the Neighborhood Sidewalk Prioritization project carried unanimously.

Motion to swap the rank order for projects S/ELH-1, 158th Place SE, and SO-1, Somerset Avenue SE, was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Chair Yuen and the motion carried 3-1, with Chair Yuen and Commissioners Glass and Wendle voting yes, and Commissioner Northey voting no.

Motion to approve the list as amended was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Commissioner Northey and the motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Wendle recommended adding to the transmittal memo a statement explaining that the Somerset project was moved up on the list because of communications received from the neighborhood.

It was agreed that as many Commissioners as possible should be present at the May 7 Council

meeting at which the list will be presented.

****BREAK****

C. Downtown Circulator Briefing

Senior Planner Maria Koengeter explained that the passage of Transit Now in November 2006 has enabled service improvements, five rapid ride corridors, and partnership programs in which agencies or employers can leverage King County dollars to develop specific projects. The partnerships come in two flavors: direct financial partnerships, and transit speed and reliability partnerships. The financial partnerships aspect applies to the circulator. The financial partnerships require a one-third match, and one of the priorities is to connect urban centers and improving circulation within urban centers. In 2006 the City Council set aside \$1 million over five years as a placeholder for partnership program exploration.

Downtown growth offers another opportunity for a circulator service. There are currently 5000 residents and 36,000 employees in the downtown; by 2012 those numbers are expected to increase to 8500 residents and 46,000 employees. A significant increase in transit usage is being seen in the downtown, so the opportunity to add more service is attractive.

Ms. Koengeter said the city last studied the idea of a circulator beginning in 2001. In 2002 the citizen advisory committee (CAC) concluded that a circulator service would need to use small vehicles, have 10- to 15-minute frequencies, offer the service free of charge to users, and have a unique identity. The estimated cost at that time was \$1.5 million per year, or between \$4 and \$20 per trip depending on the time of day. The CAC recommended delaying implementation until such time that the cost would be in the range of \$2 to \$3 per trip. The CAC recommended that in the meantime the city should pursue other options, such as increasing FlexPass purchases in the downtown and promoting transportation demand management measures. The City Council adopted the recommendation of the CAC.

The increasing number of downtown residents and employees has sparked a renewed interest in the circulator. The current study has looked at different circulator routes, evaluated other options to improve downtown mobility, and prepared an analysis to support a partnership program proposal.

The first part of the study included outreach focused on stakeholder groups, including interviews with eight specific stakeholders, conversations with the Bellevue Downtown Association Land Use Forum and the Chamber of Commerce/Bellevue Downtown Association Joint Transportation Committee. The various groups pointed out the need for frequent service from early morning to late evening; said the circulator should operate at no charge to the users; should have a distinct identity; and should serve the major activity centers.

Ms. Koengeter said the stakeholder group conversations yielded a general lack of understanding of current transit services, where the routes go and how to use them. Concerns

were voiced about whether or not there is really a need for a circulator in a downtown with such a compact core, especially in light of the push to promote walking in the downtown as part of a vibrant urban place. There was agreement that if a circulator service is instituted, it should be done only when the population and employment numbers will make it successful.

The 2002 study indicated that the desired service level to get people to use transit in the downtown was 15-minute frequencies. Ms. Koengeter shared with the Commissioners a map of the downtown streets showing the existing services, color-coded to indicate the headway frequencies. The 550 and 271 routes are the only two offering 15-minute frequencies. The map also showed the areas within an eighth of a mile walking distance from transit stops, indicating generally adequate coverage.

Eligibility for the partnership program requires the use of existing fleets, so the study focused on rubber-tired technology. Vehicle size will depend on ridership levels. Branding will be necessary to differentiate the circulator from other transit services. Better signage is one amenity at transit stops that will help users know how to access the system.

Ms. Koengeter said six routes were studied in the current round, each based on development under way and anticipated through 2012, stakeholder input, and the 2002 recommended route. The evaluation criteria used included the ability to serve underserved areas, employment, population, activity centers, travel time, ease of routing, vehicle needs, and layover locations. The six routes were narrowed to the two most promising routes. Additional ways to improve mobility downtown were also studied, including modifications to existing routes to see if a loop could be created by extending a route; modifying existing service to provide better coverage; extending the Bellevue to Redmond Rapid Ride Corridor to see if a loop could be created through the downtown; creating a Ride Free area, which yielded a number of challenges; and the influence improved transit signage can have on user understanding.

Three implementation scenarios were developed based on intra-downtown service connecting major downtown destinations; an easily understandable route; providing attractive service to potential users; competing for Metro partnership program participation; and the feasibility for implementation in the short term, 2008-2009.

Implementation Scenario #1 involves a downtown core route combined with a restructuring of Routes 222 and 233. The clockwise core route utilizes 110th Avenue NE, Main Street, Bellevue Way, and NE 10th Street. The two-mile route would have a travel time of 15 minutes; would operate on ten-minute headways from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekdays, 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. on weekends; would make 15 stops; and would utilize 19-passenger vans. The operating costs are estimated at \$870,000 annually. With an average ridership of 156,000, the per rider cost works out to \$5.59. Restructuring Routes 222 and 233 would bring service between the hospital and Bellevue Transit Center to six times an hour. The scenario has certain drawbacks, including the fact that it does not provide stand-alone services to the hospital, and the route is one directional, which may deter some riders.

Implementation Scenario #2 builds off the core route and includes services to the hospital. From NE 10th Street, the route would continue east to 112th, north on NE 12th Street, cross over the freeway, go south on 116th Avenue NE and then west across the freeway on NE 8th Street to connect again with 110th Avenue NE. Once the NE 10th Street overpass is completed, the route could use that street instead of NE 8th. The route would operate in two directions on ten-minute headways with the same operating hours. It would include 38 total stops using the 19-passenger vans. The operating costs are estimated at \$2.6 million annually. With an estimated ridership of 218,000 per year, the cost per rider works out to \$11.94. The most significant drawback is the significant operating cost increase owing to the route being bi-directional.

Implementation Scenario #3 does not provide a stand-alone circulator. Rather, it restructures Routes 222, 230, 233, 231 and 240 to provide better circulation within the downtown and a simpler routing structure. The modified routes reinforce transit circulation on the core streets resulting in headways averaging 10 to 15 minutes. The operating headways vary but result in 10 trips per hour in each direction and includes ten new stops. Significant new signage would be needed to educate riders on how to use the system. The estimated operating cost is only \$55,000 per year, with additional startup costs of \$40,000. Current ridership figures would increase by between 35,000 and 50,000, which puts the cost per trip at between \$1.10 and \$1.60. The constraints are that the modified route would be less easily understood than a stand-alone circulator, would provide less predictable service, and the fares charged may deter intra-downtown riders.

Commissioner Wendle asked how the transit ridership estimates were made. Ms. Koengeter said the study included four circulator case studies in cities with comparable employment and population.

Chair Yuen noted his preference for Scenario #2, suggesting that it covers the downtown area better while maintaining a stand-alone system. Circulator systems provide downtown workers and residents a way to get around without using their cars. However, the route should be expanded to 120th Avenue NE. With the expansion of park facilities along the waterfront, a way will need to be found to get people from downtown to the waterfront. Ms. Koengeter said the circulator route in the 2002 study envisioned a rather lengthy route serving all of 116th Avenue NE, including the old City Hall site. It was quite costly, had long travel times, and was not easily understandable. The primary focus was on serving the downtown core. Chair Yuen pointed out that the downtown core area is starting to expand out to 120th Avenue NE. Ms. Koengeter said the route could be staged over time as new development comes online.

Commissioner Wendle suggested that the bulk of the employees in the downtown are in the channel running east and west and a circulator service would not be adequate to serve the peak lunch hour; most employees could get to where they wanted to go faster by walking. More market research about who would use a circulator system is needed before a final decision is made. He suggested that most who live or work in the downtown choose to walk where they need to go; when they use their cars, it is to go outside of the downtown. There is a successful circulator operating in Denver, but it has very high frequencies and is easy to understand given

that it runs up and down a single street. The primary problem in downtown Bellevue affecting transit ridership is how confusing the existing signage is. He suggested the city should not give up on the notion of creating a ride free zone. The primary focus should be on finding ways to make the existing infrastructure more effective.

Commissioner Glass concurred. He pointed out that the proposed hours of operation are not very conducive to downtown residents, many of whom will be getting home in the evening about the time the circulator stops running. Serving the hospital and Whole Foods area is a good idea, but only if the service will continue to operate after 7:00 p.m.

Commissioner Northey agreed as well. She suggested there is no strong market for a circulator, and the high cost is a red flag. Given all of the other transit services needed in the city, the circulator should not be given top priority. The demand may not even be high enough to justify a ride free zone.

Commissioner Wendle suggested the idea should be tested with potential users through a survey.

8. OLD BUSINESS – None

9. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Northey proposed starting all Commission meetings at 5:30 p.m. instead of 6:30 p.m. to facilitate getting out at an earlier hour. The suggestion of Chair Yuen not to make such a decision until after the new Commissioners are onboard was accepted.

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 8, 2007

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

12. REVIEW CALENDAR

A. Commission Calendar and Agenda

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

B. Public Involvement Calendar

13. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Yuen adjourned the meeting at 9:27 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date