

NE 5th Street Neighborhood Traffic Plan



NE 5th Street Traffic Committee Meeting #5 Meeting Summary

Date: June 14, 2011

Location: Bellevue City Hall, Room 1E-120

Attendees:

Karen Gonzalez, City of Bellevue Transportation Neighborhood Services Manager
Eric Vargo, Westridge Apartments
Jack McLeod, Bellevue School District
Carolyn Harris, Wilburton Community
Bre Goss, Wilburton Community
Dan Renn, Wilburton Community
Carolyn Maxim, Wilburton Community
Ron Griffin, Wilburton Community
Hal Scott, Wilburton Community
Pat Sheffels, City of Bellevue Planning Commission
Briana Bennitt, Three Cedars Waldorf School
Ara Swanson, EnviroIssues

Committee members not in attendance:

Vangie Garcia, City of Bellevue and NE 5th Street Project Manager
Nancy LaCombe, City of Bellevue Transportation Capital Projects Manager
Michael Shovlin, Bellevue Police Department
Mike Remington, Bellevue Fire Department
Leann Hopwood, Wallace properties
Bob Shay, Wilburton Community
Jon Pascal, Transpo Group

Welcome and Introductions

Ara Swanson, with EnviroIssues, is sitting in for Kristine Edens who is on maternity leave. Ara welcomed the committee and reviewed the draft agenda and purpose of the meeting, which was to:

- Report-out on and discuss the results from the NE 5th Street questionnaire.
- Discuss and determine a committee recommendation for NE 5th Street.

Ara also went over quick housekeeping items and the expectations for conduct at each committee meeting.

Report-out on Results from NE 5th Street Questionnaire

Karen Gonzalez presented the results from the NE 5th Street Questionnaire:

- The City of Bellevue sent out approximately 830 surveys and received 207 total entries back, a response rate of 24.9%, which is nearly double the typical response rate the City receives (10-12%). Karen congratulated the committee on their efforts in getting their friends and neighbors to respond.
- The City received 16 responses from Area I (which included both residential and commercial respondents), 41 responses from Area II, 85 responses from Area III and 65 responses from Area IV. There was also good representation from each neighborhood.
- There were few surprises in the travel modes that respondents cited:
 - o By Car: Most respondents in all areas cited that they either use NE 5th Street once a day or 2-3 times per week.
 - o By Foot: Most respondents in all areas traveled on NE 5th Street on foot either less than once per week or not at all.
 - o By Bike: Nearly all respondents in all areas said they never traveled on NE 5th Street by bike.
- When asked to state the highest priority for NE 5th Street, the responses showed that the neighborhood wants the best of both worlds – they would like to both maintain access to/from NE 5th Street as well as reduce cut-through traffic.
- The results showing support and opposition of the four possible options for NE 5th Street were as follows:
 - o Option A – Full Closure: Results showed fairly strong opposition to this option, across all geographic areas.
 - o Option B – Partial Closure with Westbound Access: Results were more mixed with this option, but still, most respondents were opposed to this option.
 - o Option C – Restricted Access, Two-way Traffic: This was added to the options for consideration as a “happy medium” option and the results showed that respondents seemed to support this option over others.
 - o Option D – No Closure, Full Access: Results for this option showed strong support in most areas except area II.

General Discussion of Questionnaire Results

Following the report-out on results and initial discussion, Karen posed the two key decision questions to the group:

1. Which is the most viable option that the committee would like to move forward with?
2. How would the committee like to move forward with the selected option?

Based on the results from the questionnaire, the committee generally focused discussion on Options C and D, with much of the discussion focusing on the feasibility and possibilities of moving forward with Option C.

Comments/Discussion:

- o Is Option C like 128th Ave. NE at NE 5th Street? Option C is similar, although 128th Ave. NE and NE 5th Street is a yield sign and has very low traffic volumes. Historically, this was started as a partial closure, but over time the restrictions have been eased.
- Have the options had specific designs/plans created?

- Not yet. That will be part of the next steps for the City, after the committee chooses an option to move forward with.
- I'm concerned Option C might affect safety due to site distance between the two stop signs?
 - This is likely not an issue, because traffic will be moving relatively slowly, but will be reviewed as part of design.
- It is difficult to get a full sense of the preferences of respondents when many did not note a preference, and many of the write-in comments are not quantifiable in the tallied results.
- Is Option C viable for the Bellevue School District? It seems like Option B or Option C is essentially a full closer for the school district.
- What are the peak hours for school district bus operations?
 - Jack McLeod noted that the school district's bus operations are all day long, but that the most difficult times for busses to get on 120th Ave. NE from NE 5th Street are from 10:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.
- There are two entrances to the school district property – can buses use either entrance to access the maintenance facility?
 - Jack noted that buses could not use either entrance because the upper lot is not connected to the lower lot.
- Has Transpo Group analyzed delay times for Option C?
 - Not yet. This analysis will come in the next steps.
- As exemplified in Seattle neighborhoods with similar traffic situations, if there are viable alternatives for drivers, the type of controlled access like in Option C is not effective. If there are no viable travel alternatives, these types of measures are effective.
- If a lot of people cut-through on NE 5th Street, Option C may reduce cut-through traffic quite a bit because it will make an overall slower trip. People like to keep moving if they are taking a cut-through.
- The intersection at 120th Ave. NE and NE 5th Street is already at a low level of service.
 - Keep in mind that level of service will be changed at 120th Ave. NE and NE 8th Street
- The City has also done demonstrations of these types of projects in the past to see how effective they are, and to test them out with the neighborhood.
- It seems like it would be difficult for emergency vehicles to get through NE 5th Street with Option C.
 - The City has consulted with the Bellevue Fire Department and they didn't feel it would be an issue. There is enough room with the stop control for fire trucks to get around cars.
- Speeding on 124th Ave. NE is atrocious and pedestrian safety, especially for Three Cedars Waldorf School, is important.
- In the write-in comments, some people recommended a roundabout at the corner of 124th Ave. NE and NE 5th Street.
 - Karen clarified that a roundabout is somewhat different than a traffic circle, and that a traffic circle was not viable because City guidelines limit them on low volume streets because of the need to maintain emergency access.
- Is a traffic circle a possibility for NE 5th Street, mid-block, at the top of the hill?
 - The City has installed speed dots on some other neighborhood streets. They must be designed to accommodate larger vehicles, and there is not a lot of right of way space on NE 5th Street.
- I would like to see a right turn only lane from 124th Ave. NE to NE 8th Street (eastbound)

- I would find this difficult because of the speed at which traffic moves eastbound on NE 8th Street.
- We could just wait and see what happens to traffic on NE 5th Street after construction begins on the Wilburton Connections projects.
- I don't support a wait and see approach. It seems like Option C is the best compromise and has the least strong opposition. It will still allow traffic to flow, but may help reduce cut-through traffic. Keeping NE 5th Street as-is is too dangerous.
- Instead of a demonstration of Option C, what about a pilot project? A pilot gives a better chance of re-evaluation and would be more permanent than just a demonstration.
 - I am concerned that a pilot project might make financing a permanent project more difficult.
 - Karen noted that she has discussed financing with Nancy LaCombe, City of Bellevue Transportation Capital Projects Manager, and that they discussed setting aside money from the NE 4th Street project for NE 5th Street, so that financing is available for NE 5th Street when the committee decides what they'd like to move forward with (if they don't decide right away).
- A reasonable, moderate approach would be to time the changes to NE 5th Street after 120th Ave. NE is under construction, but before 120th Ave. NE is connected to NE 12th Street.
- I support Option C. It still allows for full access, but helps improve safety and noise. I don't want to wait until it's "too little, too late."
- When I look at the absolute numbers in the raw data, it seems to me that from the total number of respondents, more in the community support Option D and to keep NE 5th as-is.

Karen noted that she was hearing that Option C was the most balanced approach, and that it addressed the community's dual concerns of maintaining access and reducing cut-through traffic. Karen also noted she would like very much for the committee to move forward with a decision. There will be another round of Wilburton Connections open houses in September or October for the committee to share their recommendation. She understood the difficult task of the committee to decide on an option moving forward, but that at some point, a decision must be made.

Karen asked the group if all on the committee were on board with Option C.

Comments/Discussion:

- I'm not quite on board yet with Option C. I'm not sure this would be effective.
- While it's hard to change habits, and the raw data do indicate slightly more support for Option D, there is also clear support from the neighborhood for Option C.
- My preference would be to realign where NE 4th Street comes into 120th Avenue NE at NE 6th Street. If those improvements were made, we wouldn't have the issues we have on NE 5th Street. However, I don't see much other choice than Option C.
- Is there a disadvantage to starting improvements on NE 5th Street before 120th Ave. NE is finished?
 - Karen noted that while the financial picture is changing, there is not a clear advantage/disadvantage to starting improvements on NE 5th Street before 120th Ave. NE is finished.
 - Karen also reviewed the current Wilburton Connections schedule:
 - 120th Ave. NE widening from NE 4th Street to NE 8th Street is scheduled to start construction later this year.

- 120th Ave. NE widening from NE 8th Street to NE 12th Street is scheduled to start in early 2012.
- NE 4th Street extension from 116th Ave. NE to BNSF Railway is scheduled to start early in 2012.
- NE 4th Street extension from BNSF Railway to 120th Ave. NE is scheduled to start in early 2013.
- What about sidewalk and pedestrian improvements for Option C?
 - This is not specifically called out in Option C at this time, but that doesn't preclude the committee from recommending the City look at these types of improvements for Option C.
- I support Option C, but would like to see it sooner rather than later and not wait until after 120th Ave. NE has been started.
- I'm concerned that if we wait too long, a new City Council may change things and the money set aside from the NE 4th Street projects may go away.
- I'm concerned that once construction begins on 120th Ave. NE, traffic may detour onto NE 5th Street.
 - This would be one of the best reasons to move forward earlier with NE 5th Street improvements.
 - Karen noted that one of the City's priorities for construction is to always maintain two-way traffic and to avoid detours on neighborhood streets whenever possible(i.e., non-arterials).
- It seems like most are supporting Option C, but it feels pretty fuzzy at this point. I'd like to see more details first before fully committing to Option C.
- It also seem important to value the responses from Areas I and II slightly more than from Areas III and IV, simply because they will be more directly affected.
- It feels irresponsible to support Option D, but pedestrian and sidewalk improvements are very important. Would like to see pedestrian improvements considered with Option C.
- What is the budget allocated for any of these options?
 - The budget ballpark figure is approximately \$750,000.

Committee Recommendation

Dan Renn initially moved that the traffic committee support Option C and implement Option C after construction on 120th Ave. NE begins but before it is fully connected to NE 12th Street. Bre Goss seconded the motion.

After further discussion, the motion was modified by the committee to direct the City to move forward in studying Option C on a temporary and permanent basis, and to include pedestrian improvements in the design. This option was put forth and voted upon, with nine traffic committee members voting in favor and one member voting against.

Karen noted that she will direct City staff and Transpo Group to further study Option C on both a temporary and permanent basis. She also suggested that traffic committee reconvene in late September so that the City can report-out on the detailed findings which allow the committee to further discuss Option C with their friends and neighbors.

Next Steps and Action Items

Ara recapped the action items moving forward.

- Per committee vote, the City will move forward with planning both permanent and temporary designs for Option C, will examine pedestrian improvements in these designs.
- The committee will reconvene in late September to discuss the detailed plan for Option C.

The committee agreed to these next steps. Karen thanked the committee and acknowledged that their commitments have extended beyond what was originally planned. The committee members collectively acknowledged that they plan to stay committed to their charge and will stay with the process until their final decision has been made.

Adjourned at 7:30 p.m.