

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

March 26, 2009
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Kiel, Simas

STAFF PRESENT: David Cieri, Mike Ingram, Kate Johnson, Mark Poch,
Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 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 6:35 p.m., and Commissioners Kiel and Simas, both of whom were excused.

3. STAFF REPORTS – None

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

Councilmember Lee noted that he has been appointed to serve as Council liaison to the Transportation Commission. He said as a former member of the Commission he knows that the work is both difficult and important. The work of the Commission is respected by the Council. He promised to do whatever he can to make the Commission successful, including filling the vacant seat.

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Tanaka reported that the Meydenbauer Bay park steering committee conducted a walk-through on March 14, then held a subsequent meeting to discuss the different

alternatives for expanding the park. The issue of closing 100th Avenue SE came up again and remains an emotional topic for the public.

Chair Northey said she and Commissioner Larrivee attended the March 23 Council meeting to present the TFP documents. The Council adopted the TFP, though there will be one amendment brought back for consideration involving a pedestrian linkage on Lake Hills Boulevard between 143rd Avenue SE and 148th Avenue SE.

Chair Northey said she and Commissioner Tanaka met prior to the meeting with Councilmember Lee to review the 13 candidate applications for the vacant Commission seat, and to discuss the Commission priorities determined at the annual retreat.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

7. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

8. STUDY SESSION

A. Downtown Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center Survey and Implementation Update

Senior Planner Mike Ingram said there are currently 38,000 jobs and 5000 residents in downtown Bellevue. Twenty-four of the worksites are large enough to be affected by the Commute Trip Reduction regulations; affected sites have 100 or more employees reporting during the peak hours. The number of downtown employees reporting to large worksites is trending upward.

Mr. Ingram said the city has had a longstanding policy target in the Comprehensive Plan of having 40 percent of all commute trips into the downtown occurring by some mode other than drive alone. With that goal accomplished, the existing roadway capacity could be utilized by non-commute trips. The analysis done about five years ago for the Downtown Implementation Plan update indicated that in the future it will be necessary to reach a number even higher than 40 percent, possibly as high as 49 percent or higher by 2020.

The Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center (GTEC) plan, which is called Connect Downtown, focuses on the medium term. It focuses primarily on commuters and seeks to shift 5000 daily commute trips to a non drive-alone mode by 2011.

A survey was conducted in the summer of 2008 that was sponsored by the Washington State Department of Transportation. Bellevue's GTEC is one of ten in the state, and a survey was

conducted at each. The survey was modeled on surveys conducted in Bellevue a number of times over the years. The outcomes for Bellevue were very positive in that it found 39 percent of the trips into the downtown happening by some mode other than drive-alone. While 61 percent continue to drive alone, 19 percent take the bus, 11 percent carpool, three percent vanpool, and the balance split among various modes, including motorcycling, walking and biking.

Mr. Ingram said the substantial reduction in the drive-alone rate was encouraging. The number of commuters taking the bus increased from the previous survey. Carpooling has remained fairly stable over time, but the survey showed an increase in vanpooling.

Large worksites traditionally have had a lower drive-alone rate. Conversely, more people drive alone to small worksites. The large worksites have CTR regulations in place and have people in place to communicate commute options and often have Flex-passes to hand out. More people generally travel by bus during the peak hours than in the off-peak hours. In part that is because transit services are better during the peak times.

By design, parking is more constrained in the core of the downtown and more plentiful in the outlying areas. By the same token, parking is more expensive in the core and less expensive elsewhere. The percentage of people driving alone is also smaller in the core where parking is more expensive and less plentiful. The issue of supply has implications for what can be achieved relative to commute modeshare. Those who construct parking garages have an inherent need to see all the stalls filled because that generates revenue. Where parking is more plentiful, more people elect to drive alone. In Seattle parking is restricted to one stall per thousand square feet, which will accommodate only one quarter of the people in the building. Bellevue's code allows for parking that will accommodate up to half to two-thirds the people in the building.

Mr. Ingram said the survey asked those who indicated they commute by carpool, vanpool or bus how often per week they use those modes. Vanpoolers indicated they regularly commute by that mode, as did the transit riders. Those who indicated biking as a commute mode indicated they did so once or twice a week, though the total number of respondents who indicated they ride their bikes four or five times per week was up over the previous survey.

The survey data was consistent with past surveys with regard to where people are coming from to work in the downtown. Less than 20 percent of the commuters actually live in Bellevue. The percentages of non-Bellevue residents commuting from the south, north and west were fairly equal. Only 15 percent of the Bellevue residents indicated they commute by bus at some point during the survey week, whereas 33 percent of those commuting from Seattle use the bus at some point. Of those coming from the north, 21 percent indicated they use the bus at some point.

Mr. Ingram said while 19 percent of the trips are being made by bus, 25 percent of the people

say the use the bus at least occasionally, and 35 percent said they were likely to use it at some point. The interest in telecommuting and having a compressed work week is very high, but the numbers of those actually able to do it remains relatively low. Of those who drive alone, 46 percent said they would be willing to take the bus.

The Commissioners were told that the final report summarizing the modeshare results for the downtown and the other employment centers in Bellevue will be available soon.

Associate Planner Kate Johnson said her entire focus is on transportation demand management. The downtown TDM program is operated in partnership with King County Metro and TransManage, the transportation service of the Bellevue Downtown Association. The program has for a number of years received an annual allocation from the CIP; it also receives funding from a state Commute Trip Reduction Act grant, a state GTEC grant, a federal Congestion Mitigation Air Quality grant, and recently I-405 construction mitigation funds. For 2008, the program received about \$600,000. Some elements of the program are implemented by the city, while other aspects are handled through contract with TransManage and by Metro.

The state Commute Trip Reduction law generally affects large employers with 100 or more employees at a worksite. Each employer is required to put forth a good faith effort toward reaching certain goals. Currently 24 employers in the downtown alone are affected by the law, and other large employers are poised to move into the downtown soon.

Commissioner Larrivee asked if the hospital area is included. Ms. Johnson said the hospital is located outside the designated urban center area and so is not included in the downtown numbers or the GTEC plan.

Ms. Johnson told the Commissioners that in 2006 when the state legislature updated the Commute Trip Reduction Act, they appropriated about \$2.4 million statewide for an additional program that is not exclusive to the CTR-affected employers. The opt-in program is focused on the activity centers in the state. As part of becoming a GTEC, Bellevue drafted a four-year plan which is aimed at reducing drive-alone trips by ten percent by 2011, which for the downtown translates to a reduction of 5000 daily trips. The grant funding is distributed every two years. There are ten GTECs established statewide, but only seven of them are currently funded. Bellevue received \$300,000 in state money for the current biennium and had to pony up a fifty percent local match. The future of the GTEC program funding is dependent on the legislature.

Each jurisdiction is permitted to develop its GTEC program in a way that is appropriate to its situation. Bellevue determined to focus primarily on peak hour trips because even relatively small changes in the number of vehicles on the highway system can have a marked effect on the actual level of congestion. The program is not, however, focused entirely on the large employers only.

Ms. Johnson said the Bellevue GTEC program is focused on creating lasting programs that can build over time rather than short-term one-off programs. An emphasis has been placed on carpooling and vanpooling because it was determined early on that about half of the 5000 trips that need to be reduced could be accommodated with available transit capacity. A new brand, "Choose Your Way Bellevue," has been developed, and the website has been updated to reflect the new brand. Some employer programs have been started. During the summer months one focus was on reaching out to the residential communities, and a storefront was opened at the Bellevue Transit Center. In late 2008 the telework program was launched. Throughout 2008 a number of smaller efforts were started that will continue, including ride matching efforts, the launching of a newsletter called *Commuter Connection*, and outreach to new residents and employees in the downtown.

The cornerstone program was the I-405 flex pass and employer outreach program. The primary funding source was I-405 construction mitigation dollars, and the specific goal was to remove trips from I-405 by getting employees to use flex passes. Rebates of \$25 per pass were provided to the companies that signed up. Employers were recruited through direct mail to all companies with five or more employees, through workshops conducted over the course of the year, and through recognition advertising. King County Metro and TransManage staff helped to design the program and implement it. A total of 62 employers participated in some way; 51 of them conducted consultations with TransManage staff, and 39 actually initiated some form of commute benefit. Over 1000 new flex passes were put into the hands of downtown employees as a result of the program.

The hospitality program was another program launched. Downtown Bellevue has a lot of retail, restaurant and hotel employers and employees. The program was tied to the I-405 program and allowed for providing education about the construction projects and how to get around during the construction period. "Choices for Your Commute" was the branded program associated with the hospitality program. TransManage conducted a survey and did the direct outreach and all the marketing. They found few employers either interested or able to put a lot of monetary resources towards helping their employees commute. However, there were some who became engaged and which allowed TransManage to promote programs to inform employees and incentivize them to commute by means other than driving alone. Under the "Choices for Your Commute" program, employees filled out a trip log for a month, after which they were eligible for a drawing. At the peak of the program there were 195 individuals participating. The program ended in 2008 but did make some headway in engaging employers and employees.

Ms. Johnson said "Telework Bellevue" was another program focused on employers. Outreach was conducted to all employers in the downtown. Two informational workshops and a webinar were conducted by a telework consultant who was engaged through King County. The program consists of consultations with the consultant on how to develop a telework program, including a focus on technical needs, developing policies, working with management to bring them on board, and assessing the suitability of particular employees to doing telework.

The goal was to have ten employers participating; currently there are nine on board.

The “In Motion” trip reduction program was focused on encouraging residents to try modes other than driving alone. A similar program was conducted in 2006, but it was felt in the summer of 2008 that the downtown was ripe for a repeat. The outcomes were measured by having people log their trips. A total of 346 gift cards were distributed to those who met the threshold of two non drive-alone trips per week for four weeks, resulting in a reduction of 114,000 SOV miles traveled. Additional activities for individuals included rideshare outreach; lunch events were held at which people from the same zip codes could meet each other and form carpools and vanpools. The number of vanpools in the downtown increased over the course of the year, though that success cannot be directly tied to the lunch events.

The Commute Connection storefront that was opened at the Bellevue Transit Center includes 27 indoor bike parking spaces. As the bike riding season approaches, it is hoped that many will sign up and use the service. The help desk is staffed by TransManage from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. weekdays who provide people with commute and bus riding assistance.

Ms. Johnson said Welcome Activity packets are passed out to new residents. They include a free bus pass and an invitation to visit the website to learn about travel options. New residents also receive a pedestrian guide showing all the interblock connections in the downtown, and the locations of restaurants and other amenities. More than a thousand of the welcome packets have been distributed, along with branded water bottles.

Research, particularly with regard to downtown parking, was conducted in late 2007 and early 2008. Information with regard to parking availability, cost and usage was gathered and compiled into a report. A high level of employer subsidy was found; on average, employers pay 75 percent of the cost of the parking. The response rate was admittedly small. Property owners overall reported their parking facilities are operating at 90 percent of capacity. Daily parking is expensive and does not generally have in and out privileges; that means anyone having to use their car during the day faces an initial outlay of \$15 to \$20, and after another outlay of the same when they come back following their workday trip. The cumulative cost of making workday errands three or four times per month approaches the average monthly parking rate. There is a clear need to align parking requirements with modeshare goals.

Commissioner Larrivee said his sense is that outside the downtown core there is in fact an excess of available parking and that many people would choose to ride the bus into the downtown if they could just get their car close enough to be able to easily access it. He suggested that if the transit authorities are not looking to use that excess parking as park and rides, especially along corridors that are well served by transit, the city should look into it.

Ms. Johnson said the webpage is being redesigned to be less text heavy and to encourage more repeat visits. The intent is to provide access to real-time travel information, current conditions and the like. Visitors to the site seeking travel information will also be able to see what other

programs are available to them.

The plan is to continue building on what has been working while honing efforts and making things even better. Quite a lot has been invested in building up the website, the brand, and the commuter connection facility, and they will continue to be used as tools.

There are some uncertainties in the funding sources continuing, especially for the GTEC program. In the meantime, efforts will be put into doing what can be done with the available funding.

Commissioner Glass suggested that finding a way to serve the midday travel needs of downtown workers so that they can avoid using their cars is a big hurdle in need of a solution. He asked if there are any strategies under consideration. Ms. Johnson said there has been some coordination with the zip car program, which is a car sharing service. Currently there are five zip cars operating in the downtown. Employers could help pick up the tab.

Commissioner Larrivee suggested that more attention should be given to taxi services as a means for getting around in the middle of the day. Too often currently the only available options are to take the bus or drive alone for those who will need to run errands during the work day.

Commissioner Tanaka asked how much capacity there is for increasing bike usage in the downtown. He said it appears the number of commuters even willing to consider using bikes seems pretty low and asked what could be done to change that. Mr. Ingram said there are some significant constraints, the biggest of which is the distances people are traveling to work in the downtown; the average commute distance is currently fifteen miles. There may be opportunities to encourage bicycle commuting on the part of those who do not commute so far but the percentage is fairly low.

B. Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Program Update

Traffic Engineering Manager Mark Poch explained that ITS involves transportation projects that apply advanced technology. Bellevue has been utilizing ITS-type projects since the late 70s. In 2004 it was decided to inventory all of the ITS things being done and where the program should go in the future. The result was a plan for a number of new projects, including a new communication system, new signal system, transit signal priority, traffic camera, real-time traffic maps, and a myriad of other possible projects. The high-priority projects are the communications system that feeds information to the traffic management center, the signal system, and transit signal priority, all of which is needed to better address growth in the downtown, to positively impact the modesplit, and to provide for the requirements of the new rapid ride program that will be online by 2011.

The traffic computer system upgrade project is fully funded and is already under way; it will be

completed in 2011. Other ITS projects will follow; they are also fully funded through R-156, the ITS master plan implementation program which is scheduled to start in 2012 and continue through the current CIP horizon of 2015.

Mr. Poch shared with the Commissioners photos taken of the inside of a new signal cabinet having a new broadband connection. He explained that a fiber optic cable feeds from a trunk line in a major street and is patched into an Ethernet switch having ports that allow for plugging in various devices, such as signal controllers and opticon discriminators. The new systems replace the slower copper-based systems and offer much higher reliability. The fiber optic system is not exclusive to the transportation department; it is available to any city department and could be used for things like public safety and wireless communications. The new systems are requisite for the new signal system that is planned.

One major benefit to having a new signal system will be continuity. The main vendor for the current system was recently sold and the new company is focusing on other products, which has resulted in poor service; continued support from the vendor is uncertain. The agencies that are choosing to go to more technology based signal systems are electing not to deal with older system systems like what Bellevue currently has in place. Motorists will see better timing plans that are easier for the city to maintain and update; better left-turn phasing; quicker recoveries following emergency vehicle preemptions; better after-hour coverage; and links to adjacent jurisdictions.

Traffic adaptive technology is a major new possibility for the signal system. It involves continuously calculating and updating timing patterns to adapt to real-time conditions on a cycle-by-cycle basis. The technology is widely used in Europe.

We are looking for a new system that will better serve pedestrians as well. One of the problems with the current system is if a pedestrian does not hit the button at just the right time they are locked out of a whole phase and will not get the walk signal, even if there is plenty of time for them to cross the street. That is very frustrating for the pedestrians. We are also looking for a new system with a pedestrian advance feature that allows for the walk sign to come up before an adjacent through movement. Additionally, pedestrians that need a little extra crossing time could get it by pushing and holding the button for a couple of seconds.

Bus transit will be key to the future mobility of the city, especially in the downtown. That equates to transit signal priority (TSP), which the current system cannot support. The city has committed to providing TSP for the rapid ride route. If the city provides for a communications backbone, Metro will be able to provide the public with real time arrival and departure times, possibly even kiosks to make boarding the system faster. Additionally, there will be light rail running down the middle of a new arterial in the Bel-Red corridor, and the city will need to be able to coordinate signal systems with that train.

Chair Northey asked what the rapid ride alignment will be. Mr. Poch said it will be going out

NE 8th Street from downtown to 156th Avenue NE, will turn north and continue on to NE 24th Street where it will then turn west and on to 152nd Avenue NE and into Redmond.

Mr. Poch said there are additional ITS projects envisioned for the future but no priorities have been set for them yet. The project lists include traffic cameras, of which there are currently 43 located around the city. The current control system is operating at capacity, but with more cameras installed will come an improved ability to track and tune traffic signals and to provide the public with good information. One proposal is to install more rooftop cameras to provide for a better overall view. Cameras installed at park and ride lots or freeway ramps could arm commuters with information they could use for planning their routes. Cameras focused on areas prone to flooding would be useful.

Another ITS project involves the siting of variable message signs. Portable signs are currently used during large events such as the Fourth of July celebration and the holiday season. Permanently mounted signs could continually provide motorists with information they can use. The installation of weather stations to provide information on temperatures, pavement conditions and icing would benefit both the public and the street department. Variable speed limits could become part of the ITS system; they are already in use at a number of school zones but could also be used on arterials to good effect. Flood monitoring stations with sensors monitoring the level of creeks prone to flooding could provide accurate predictions for when certain areas could be expected to flood. Variable signs could be used to re-channel intersections during certain times of the day; they could for instance turn a right-only lane into a through/right-turn to improve traffic flow when needed.

Automated photo enforcement in school speed zones is very close to becoming a reality. The police department has the lead on the project, but transportation is providing close support. Parking management in the downtown; automated traffic counts; improvements to the real-time traffic maps; and streetlight management all are possible ITS projects.

Mr. Poch briefly reviewed the project budget costs associated with the ITS system. He noted that the fiber optics have been installed in the downtown and rapid ride corridors. A contract to install the Ethernet switches was just recently awarded by the Council; once that work is done and the network is operational, 45 percent of the communications work will be completed. The next focus will be on the Overlake and Factorial areas; when completed, 68 percent of the system will be done.

An RFP is out to evaluate signal system features and performance and to evaluate their availability. Specific task-oriented contracts are envisioned covering things such as researching various system requirements, evaluating the performance of finalist systems, then system engineering, procurement, and finally integration. The schedule calls for being in front of the Council with a contract for the first task in June.

Commissioner Glass asked if a decision has been made by the Council to go forward with

speed enforcement and red light cameras. Mr. Poch said the police department has been before the Council a couple of times to talk about the program for up to six intersection approaches and three school speed zones.

- 9. OLD BUSINESS – None
- 10. NEW BUSINESS – None
- 11. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None
- 12. APPROVAL OF MINUTES None
- 13. REVIEW CALENDAR
 - A. Commission Calendar and Agenda

The Commission reviewed the items scheduled for discussion at upcoming meetings. They were reminded that there would be no meeting on April 9.

- B. Public Involvement Calendar

- 14. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Northey adjourned the meeting at 8:16 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date