

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

May 12, 2011
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Tanaka, Commissioners Glass, Lampe, Larrivee, Simas

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Jokinen and Northey

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Krawczyk, Franz Loewenherz, Patrick McGrath, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: Denise Cieri, Wendy Taylor, Washington State Department of Transportation

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m. by Chair Tanaka who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Larrivee, who arrived at 6:45 p.m., and Commissioners Jokinen and Northey, both of whom were excused.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Project Manager Paul Krawczyk informed the Commissioners that on May 16 the City Council would be discussing the B-7 revised interim analysis report.

Mr. Krawczyk also told the Commissioners that on May 9 the Council discussed the mobility initiative projects and reiterated their high-priority status. A group of department directors is currently working to develop ideas for how to put together a new funding proposal to bridge the gap.

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

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS – None

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

7. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. I-405 Congestion Pricing

Wendy Taylor, general engineering consultant for the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), said a record of decision was handed down in 2002 for the freeway improvements which include highway, transit and the potential for a managed lane system. At the time, hot lanes or express toll lanes was a relatively new concept nationally. It was seen, however, as one answer to the issues facing I-405.

WSDOT planner Denise Cieri said in 2003 a study was done regarding managed lanes in the corridor. In 2005 when funding from the legislature was received, language was included in the bill that indicated the legislature expected WSDOT to look at the possibility of setting tolls to offset the cost of the project. Another study was done in 2006 regarding express toll lanes in the corridor. In 2007 the legislature again revealed its intent to have a managed lane system of some sort, and in 2009 WSDOT began in earnest looking at tolling in the corridor.

Ms. Cieri the Eastside Corridor Projects program funded by the legislature is largely complete. The Bellevue braids project began construction in 2009 and is expected to be completed by the end of 2012. The largest project remaining is the Bellevue-Lynnwood segment; construction is expected to begin in 2012 and wrap up by 2015.

Ms. Taylor said all of the funding provided by the legislator has been put to good use, but there remain major gaps in the corridor, most notably the Bellevue-Renton section and the SR-167 direct connector which together will cost about \$1.5 billion. The revenue stream from the nickel and Transportation Partnership Account (TPA) gas taxes are insufficient to pay for the projects; if a new gas tax was implemented, it would need to be on the order of 15 cents per gallon, and the Eastside would need to get between 10 and 15 percent of the total statewide revenues.

Express toll lanes are essentially an expressway within the freeway. They serve to improve efficiencies and assure drivers a consistent and reliable trip at high speeds. The toll rates adjust electronically based on congestion, so as congestion drops the rate drops, thus drivers are lured into the lane. The focus is on keeping the hot lane as full as possible, but not overly full, and a free flow of traffic in all other lanes.

Ms. Taylor said revenue is a primary factor for having toll lanes. The revenues can be used to pay for operation and maintenance, and if there is enough congestion they can contribute to additional improvements. Only those who use the hot lanes pay for them. The HOV system has been so successful that it is beginning to break down, leading to a loss of speed and reliability for transit; toll lanes offer an additional tool for managing the system.

Ms. Taylor explained that in 2009 the legislature asked WSDOT to do a study of express toll lanes. Five different options were reviewed, starting with funded projects for about \$500 million all the way up to solutions costing \$4 billion. The stakeholders opted for a 40-mile system that will cost about \$2 billion, \$500 million of which is already funded through the nickel and TPA gas taxes. The modeling done on the tolled option versus the non-tolled option, the data showed the system will move 31 percent more vehicles with the same number of lanes.

Ms. Cieri said the 2009 study included a large public involvement process. Included was a phone survey; four focus groups, one in the SR-167 corridor and two in the northern portion of the I-405 corridor; a web-based survey; and public meetings. About a third of the responses were favorable to the notion of toll lanes, about a third indicated they were not interested in tolls of any sort, and about a third indicated they needed more information before coming to a conclusion. The study looked at other areas where express toll lanes have been implemented. It was learned that prior to implementing their toll lanes, San Diego conducted an extensive survey; they followed that up with a second survey after the first phase of the project was completed, and conducted a third survey after the second project phase was completed. Their initial survey results closely mirrored those from the WSDOT survey. However, following completion of the first phase of the project, the vast majority of those who initially had been undecided indicated approval; after the second phase was open, some in the opposition camp became converts.

Commissioner Lampe asked what the projected per-mile tolls are projected to be. Ms. Cieri said for the section between Bellevue and Lynnwood, the projection is for a toll of about twenty-three cents per mile for trips averaging eleven miles. Ms. Taylor pointed out that express toll lane systems are typically in the 10- to 12-mile range; the 40-mile system will attract more regional and thus longer trips, so a straight comparison to other systems cannot be easily made. She pointed out that nationally the data show that toll lanes do not trigger diversion to non-tolled systems; they actually improve the general purpose lanes and thus encourage drivers to get off of city streets and onto the freeways.

Commissioner Larrivee asked if the survey results are in any way tied to demographics. He said he was particularly interested to know if those with lower incomes tend to be opposed. Ms. Taylor said she was not aware of any attempt to classify the survey responses in that way. Ms. Cieri concurred but indicated that the outreach effort included lower-income groups as well as organizations that serve low-income residents. The indications from those efforts were that low-income people tend to be required to punch a time clock, which means they have less flexibility with their time and more incentive to arrive at their worksites on time, even if that means having to pay a toll. Commissioner Larrivee asked if there is any hard data showing that such anecdotal information is actually true. Ms. Taylor said she was not aware of any.

Ms. Cieri said the executive advisory group, which was an extension of the corridor steering committee for the 2009 study, looked at five different options. Their choice was Option 4 which in its first phase involves the Bellevue-Lynnwood segment and will within a window of about two years see toll collections begin. The second phase will likely involve borrowing on the bond market, and in order to get the best rate possible it will be necessary for the first phase of the project to prove that it will generate the projected revenues. Absent additional funding sources, the third phase of the project will not be completed for ten years.

Ms. Taylor noted that because there were some questions during the 2009 study, Department of Transportation Secretary Hammond brought in an expert review panel in 2010 made up of national experts in the express toll lane arena to answer questions regarding policy, traffic methodology, phasing and finance. The panel confirmed what was in the 2009 report, concluded that the plan is reasonable, is based on sound analysis, and is consistent with industry standards.

Ms. Cieri said the expert panel did find that the measures of effectiveness included in the 2009

report were not as easy to grasp as others that could have been used instead. While they did not recommend changing the data, they did recommend showing it in different ways, including vehicle throughput. The data shows that by building the same amount of capacity improvement and then operating it as an express toll lane instead of a general purpose lane, throughput could be increased by 14 percent, overall speed could be increased by 36 percent, travel time could be reduced by 14 percent, and the average delay reduced by 44 percent.

The expert panel liked the bar chart graphics, but they felt more of the story could be shown. They suggested including the average speeds for the general purpose lanes, not just for the highly served individuals. In the non-tolled option, general speeds in 2020 are projected to be about 40 miles per hour, and three or more would be required for use of the HOV lanes in order to keep those lanes from failing. Under the tolling option, speeds in the general purpose lanes would improve due to fewer cars in those lanes. By 2035 the situation would somewhat mirror current conditions, with too many cars and not enough capacity to deal with them.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Lampe, Ms. Cieri said the baseline data used for all projects is from the Puget Sound Regional Council.

Chair Tanaka asked how often the tolls are adjusted. Ms. Cieri said the tolls are set by the Washington State Transportation Commission. Any change in the tolls will depend on congestion levels, the projected growth in traffic, and the willingness of commuters to pay. The goal is to improve congestion, not to generate revenues, though the revenues collected make it possible to continue making improvements in the corridor.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Lampe, Ms. Cieri said under current conditions there is insufficient capacity and congestion is high, both in the general purpose and the HOV lanes. The HOV lane is breaking down only during the peaks of the peak hours, but the requirement for 45 miles per hour or better 95 percent of the time is not being achieved for all parts of the I-405 corridor. Capacity will be added, and with that capacity will come an improvement in speeds.

Commissioner Larrivee suggested that while in the long run the projects will bring about some relief, in the short run there will be definite impacts. Ms. Cieri agreed that there will be some congestion impacts triggered by construction. The Bellevue braids project is being built as much as possible during off hours, and the same approach will be taken as new lanes are added.

Ms. Taylor said the recommendation of the expert review panel was to move forward with the north end projects and to continue developing the second stage phasing, financing and project management plans. The executive advisory group was reconvened to sign a letter of support for moving forward with the option recommended by the expert review panel.

Ms. Cieri said in approving EHB-1382, the legislature provided the authority to move ahead with the Bellevue-Lynnwood project, though tolling equipment cannot take effect until appropriation authority is given in 2012. The bill establishes performance standards for travel times and so forth. The operation is noted to have a termination clause if the tolling is not able to pay for all operating costs. The state Transportation Commission was authorized by the legislation to find independent experts to conduct a traffic and revenue analysis for the 40-mile system. WSDOT will at the same time develop a corridor-wide management plan for phasing and a finance plan to fund future improvements, namely the Bellevue-Renton portion and the

director connector for SR-167.

Ms. Cieri noted that WSDOT has an interest in improving conditions over the long term in the corridor. The studies all show that express toll lanes can achieve that goal. In addition, WSDOT has found that the express toll lanes will in fact produce revenues above and beyond operating costs that can be reinvested in the corridor. Operating costs are understood to include more than just the cost of operating the toll lanes.

The Bellevue-Lynnwood project will be advertised on July 25 and the award is expected to be made around the end of November. The project work will begin after January and will be completed by the end of 2014 at the latest. The project will add capacity between Bellevue and Bothell. A new lane in each direction will be constructed between NE 6th Street and the SR-522 interchange area. The existing HOV system in the Bothell-Lynnwood segment will reflect what exists on SR-167. All subcommittee with representatives from all of the transit agencies has been working to make sure all the routes in the I-405 corridor will experience minimal impacts.

Commissioner Glass asked if WSDOT has deemed the hot lanes on SR-167 successful in terms of revenue generation. Ms. Cieri answered that when the project was brought before the legislature, WSDOT said it would like to try hot lanes on SR-167; it was deemed a good test area because of the excess capacity in the HOV lanes on that roadway. WSDOT expected the revenues to meet operations and maintenance within less than five years; the system is in fact expected to turn a profit. Usage of the hot lanes increases as congestion increases and drops off as congestion falls. A big jump in the use of the lanes has been seen now that the Good To Go passes are being pushed for the SR-520 bridge.

Commissioner Glass asked if revenues generated in the I-405 corridor will by law be kept in the corridor and not shuttled off to projects in other corridors. Ms. Cieri said the executive committee pushed very hard to make sure the revenues generated in the corridor will be kept in the corridor, which the legislation requires.

Commissioner Glass asked why WSDOT has not attempted to create express toll lanes on I-5 in the Seattle area. Ms. Taylor said WSDOT is conducting regional planning that includes the I-5, SR-509, SR-167 and I-405 corridors. The planning work is encompassing the Puget Sound Regional Council's 2040 vision in which all roads having a hot lane system.

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

Senior transportation planner Franz Loewenherz informed the Commission that Eastgate/I-90 land use and transportation project is being guided by a Council-appointed Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) which is co-chaired by Commissioner Larrivee and Commissioner Hamlin of the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Larrivee said the work of the CAC to date has primarily been focused on background work done by staff and consultants. At its last meeting on May 5, the CAC began to use that information in developing preliminary draft alternatives that will be presented to the public for input. The discussions have been lively and engaging. The CAC has received input from property and business owners as well as citizens who live in or adjoining the study area.

Mr. Loewenherz said the project is roughly at the mid-point. Much of the early effort has been

focused on bringing the CAC up to speed and discussing the opportunities and constraints facing the corridor. The process of drafting alternatives is well under way; those alternatives will be shared with the public in a series of open house events in June. The CAC will then fine-tune the alternatives and submit them for travel demand modeling and environmental assessment work that will take up much of the summer. The intent is to arrive at a preferred alternative by late fall and finalize the alternative by year's end and make a recommendation to the Council. The Council will then direct the appropriate boards and commissions to begin the work of amending the Comprehensive Plan and development codes.

The Council provided ten principles to guide the study; the principles signify their desire to see land use and transportation elements integrated in an effort that is sensitive to the environment and focused on improving the economic vitality of the corridor.

The background work included a preliminary screening analysis that was intended to assess what the transportation network could bear. A series of hypothetical 2030 land use scenarios were used. The report was produced in part to make sure that whatever alternative comes out of the effort will be based on market realities. A fair amount of community engagement sought from the public comments regarding what they liked, what they did not like, and where they would like to see improvements made; the input included online surveys, an economic development forum, and targeted interviews with agencies and institutions, including the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway.

Mr. Loewenherz said the CAC worked in February to develop criteria that will help inform and evaluate land use and transportation alternatives as they evolve through the process. In March the group held a workshop session to develop building blocks to be used in structuring the land use alternatives.

The CAC in April received a briefing on the transportation issues facing the corridor, including levels of service and delay indicators and what they mean in terms of traffic operations. The preliminary assessment done in 2009 reflected the current corridor conditions. The 2030 Puget Sound Regional Council forecast showing an additional one million square feet of office was also modeled, then as a sort of stress test modeling was done with 1.8 million square feet of office added to the Puget Sound Regional Council forecast. It was encouraging to find in the stress test that most of the prominent intersections in the corridor operated at acceptable levels, with the exception of the intersection of Factoria Boulevard and SE 36th Street; in the enhanced scenario, the 150th Avenue SE corridor emerged as having issues as well.

The addition of auxiliary lane improvements to I-90 that are being contemplated by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) would relieve the severity and duration of congestion, as well as the distance over which the congestion occurs on the mainline. The improvements are not, however included in the city's baseline 2030 model because the concepts have not yet been adopted. Were they implemented, these WSDOT improvements are anticipated to have a positive benefit on local arterials.

Consistent with the Council principles, the transportation strategies will represent a balanced approach. Strategically adding capacity, enhancing operational efficiencies of the existing roadway system, managing demand, and providing people with choices will all be considered. An adaptive signal system has already been added to Factoria Boulevard, and by 2012 the projection is that adaptive systems will be installed throughout the corridor. The early

modeling runs have not included those benefits. Work is also underway with our transit partners to assess how to modify bus service to better connect the area's businesses and residents..

A number of intersection options will be considered. The current TFP identifies three projects in the corridor, including the intersection of Eastgate Way and 156th Avenue SE that identifies an additional left-turn lane. Much has been heard from the community with regard to improving movement in the westbound direction from I-90 to the northbound 148th Avenue SE. The concept of constructing roundabouts will be explored for several intersections in the corridor.

Mr. Loewenherz informed the Commissioners that with respect to the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, the outreach effort included a visual preference survey. It was clear from the results that what people find very desirable is an enhanced environment with non-motorized facilities separated from vehicles by a landscaping strip.

Street connectivity in the corridor is a real problem. A lot of out-of-direction travel occurs as a result of one-way-in/one-way-out designs. The study will look at what that represents relative to access to transit.

The CAC at its May 5 meeting began developing land use and transportation alternatives that utilize the building blocks identified in its March meeting. The No Action alternative reflects the fact that under the current zoning there is only limited opportunity for additional development in the study area, something on the order of 250,000 square feet of office. The market report, however, suggested that in terms of the regional economy the corridor could take on an additional 1.5 million square feet of office. The most robust alternative discussed by the CAC centralized mixed use development around the park and ride to create a transit-oriented smart growth vision that includes walking and biking enhancements. The moderate development scenario focused primarily on office development along with some greening of the corridor, and the least intensive option focused on localized improvements.

C. Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan Progress Report 2010

Mr. Loewenherz said a great deal of work went into updating the ped-bike plan and attempting to fill the gaps in the network. The work then informed the Comprehensive Plan in the form of policy amendments and an entirely new project list. The adopted policy framework included direction to assess how well the city is doing in realizing the priority bike corridor network and adding to the sidewalk network, as well as tracking how well the public is using the facilities and how safe the facilities are.

Transportation intern Patrick McGrath informed the Commission that during 2009 just over a mile was added to the pedestrian network. An additional mile and a half of sidewalk and walking trail facilities were added during 2010. To date, about 2.3 percent of the pedestrian projects in the ped-bike plan have been completed. Policy PB-2 calls for the construction of 25 miles of sidewalk along arterials. In order to be on pace, 2.5 miles of sidewalks must be constructed every year, and currently the city is about one mile behind that pace.

Mr. Loewenherz pointed out that when the policy was formulated the city was operating under a very different financial framework. Even then, the target was envisioned as being very bold. The target was determined by adding some visionary numbers to historical completion rates.

Mr. McGrath informed the Commission that in 2009 the city constructed just less than a mile of bicycle facilities, and in 2010 constructed five miles of bicycle facilities. As of the end of 2010, about 3.4 percent of the bicycle portion of the ped-bike plan had been completed.

Mr. Loewenherz noted that the ped-bike plan shows the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway trail on the south side of the freeway, though the Eastgate/I-90 CAC is looking at the option of constructing it on the north side of the freeway. Commissioner Larrivee asked how the ped-bike plan would ultimately be changed to show the change if in fact the CAC recommends a different configuration and the Council goes along with it. Mr. Loewenherz said a Comprehensive Plan amendment would be required to change the plan.

Mr. McGrath highlighted a few projects for the Commission, starting with 150th Avenue SE adjacent to the Eastgate elementary school. He said the project was identified as a priority through the Neighborhood Enhancement Program in 2004. After studying the route, the decision was made to realign the roadway to the east to avoid building retaining walls. The project included 2500 feet of bicycle lane on the west side and 1600 feet of sidewalk. The project was nominated for American Public Works Association project of the year.

The overlay program resulted in quite a number of new bicycle improvements in 2010. The 3.2 miles of bicycle lanes were accomplished at minimal cost to the city because the work was being done already given that new striping is needed after new pavement is put down.

The NE 8th Street project was a marquee project in 2010. It resulted in 2600 feet of sidewalk identified as a high priority through both the Neighborhood Enhancement Program and the ped-bike plan. The first segment was constructed in 2004 and the remainder was postponed for CIP funding. The project did receive \$200,000 from the Transportation Improvement Board's urban sidewalk program, so the city accelerated the project to comply with the grant, all in coordination with Utilities who needed to replace about 1200 feet of water main under the roadway.

Mr. Loewenherz said the ped-bike program often highlights the five E's: engineering, enforcement, education, evaluation and encouragement. The latter three are implemented to the fullest extent of the city's limited resources. Staff is getting the word out by participating in Bike to Work Day, by participating in safety fairs, through working with transit partners, and by participating in other community events. Additionally, at the direction of the Council the staff for the last couple of years has been actively monitoring the number of people using the ped-bike facilities along the priority corridors.

Mr. McGrath said all of the school crossing signs in the city were changed to conform to the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices, and also updated all the signs for raised crosswalks. During 2011, all the rest of the crossing signs in the city will be replaced.

A program to mark where bicyclists should position themselves above loop detectors was started in 2010. To date, 39 of the marks have been put down and in the future they will be included at all locations where there are stop bars.

Two downtown midblock crossings were constructed in 2010, one on 108th Avenue NE to the north of NE 2nd Place, and one on NE 10th Street to the west of 110th Avenue NE. Another will be created in 2012 on 102nd Street between NE 8th Street and NE 10th Street.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Larrivee, Mr. Loewenherz said often when improvements are made the surrounding businesses are given notice. He said there has been enough national research on the kinds of ped-bike treatments being implemented in Bellevue and even bolder initiatives, and the research clearly shows that pedestrians and cyclists gravitate toward them and roadway users become more attuned to their presence, all of which results in a safer environment.

Commissioner Glass said he would like to see the city move ahead a bit more in educating motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians with regard to how to use the different systems. He said he would like to find a pot of money somewhere to use to further the cause through including spots on BTV and possibly on radio and television in conjunction with neighboring cities. Mr. Loewenherz said the city does partner with Cascade Bicycle Club to make available urban cycling techniques classes through the parks department. There are also other initiatives the city is involved in, all with as little funding as possible, including biking in Bellevue videos that are aired on BTV as well as on YouTube. Every attempt is made to stay abreast of best practices and as initiatives that can be done in a cost-effective manner are identified, they are jumped on. The fact that the number of accidents involving pedestrians and bicyclists is dropping would seem to argue in favor of building facilities over spending more on safety education.

Deputy Director Dave Berg said staff is well aware that the Commission has had safety education high on its want list ever since the ped-bike plan was adopted. Unfortunately, during the last budget cycle many programs were contracted rather than expanded and to date there has not been a proactive non-motorized safety education program.

Commissioner Glass suggested that at some future meeting the Commission should take the time to review the goals set in 2009 to see if they are still realistic and attainable.

D. NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street Multimodal Corridor Recommendations to Council

Mr. Krawczyk asked the Commissioners to review and comment on the letter to Council outlining the Commission's recommendations regarding the NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street project.

Commissioner Simas suggested the memo should include the comments of the Commission regarding the intersection at 130th Avenue NE and the preference for bicyclists to turn left and then right instead of going straight across.

Commissioner Simas agreed to present the memo to the Council.

9. OLD BUSINESS

Chair Tanaka said the staff is gearing up to make a proposal to the Council which, if it goes through, will result in a great deal of work for the Commission. If that happens, the retreat may need to be structured around the project. It would also be appropriate to review the Commission's goals to see if they need to be tweaked.

10. NEW BUSINESS – None

11. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

12. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 24, 2011

B. April 14, 2011

Motion to approve both sets of minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Simas. Second was by Commissioner Glass and the motion carried unanimously.

13. REVIEW COMMISSION CALENDAR AND AGENDA

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

14. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Tanaka adjourned the meeting at 9:04 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date