

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

May 22, 2008
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Vice Chair Northey, Commissioners Glass, Kiel, Larrivee, Tanaka, Van Valkenburgh, Wendle

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: David Cieri, Goran Sparrman, Kevin McDonald, Kristi Oosterveen, Eric Miller, Department of Transportation; Emil King, Department of Planning and Community Development

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:34 p.m. by Commissioner Northey who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Wendle, who arrived at 6:36 p.m., and Commissioner Van Valkenburgh, who arrived at 6:41 p.m.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Department of Transportation Director Goran Sparrman said the number of capital needs in the community exceeds the ability of the system revenue sources to pay for them. The impact of the capital resources shortfall is beginning to make itself felt in significant ways. The Bel-Red corridor project is yielding additional needs, and it is clear that financing the infrastructure plan for the corridor will be a significant challenge for the city.

Staff has been working with the City Council over the past year and a half on how to think about budgetary requirements, both on the capital side and the operating side. Typically, every two years the city goes through the budget process focused on the next two years. For the last year and a half the focus has been on the 20-year horizon in order to set the context for the next budget update. Staff recently briefed the City Council on the transportation impact fee structure and the options for changing it. Staff has also talked to the City Council about the tools theoretically available to address the funding requirements for the Bel-Red corridor

infrastructure program; they include raising impact fees, using impact fees selectively in the corridor in addition to the citywide program, and establishing local improvement districts. Staff expects the Council to have many more intense discussions on the topic over the next three or four months.

The dilemma in terms of the TFP and CIP is tied to assumptions of revenue and where the line will get drawn based on available dollars. The only logical way to proceed is to assume that the only dollars that will be available will be those generated by existing revenue sources. That means there will be very little new money for projects, but that will be the reality unless and until the City Council effects a policy change and increase revenues.

Commissioner Wendle asked if the concurrency reports will begin to flip on red lights to new development as a result of the funding shortfalls. Mr. Sparrman said that will not necessarily be the case. Concurrency looks at existing traffic volumes, adds in the traffic volumes forecasted to be generated by approved development projects, takes into account all funded CIP projects, and yields an operational picture. Things are looking good for the short term and even a few years out. However, at 2020 and beyond there will be some significant concurrency problems. The 2030 analysis shows a significant number of intersection breakdowns.

Commissioner Northey asked about the legislative alternatives to changing the concurrency laws. There are some parts of the current concurrency approach that do not fit well with the principles of growth management, notably the idea of not allowing the dense urban cores to develop because of the traffic congestion that would result; the intent of growth management is to preserve green space and rural areas by focusing development on the urban core areas. Mr. Sparrman said there is already some momentum in that direction. Many of the communities surrounding Bellevue have different ways of looking at concurrency, or are moving in the direction of looking at concurrency from a multimodal perspective. The Bellevue system is exclusively focused on the automobile. Bellevue is rapidly becoming an urban center, and urban centers depend on multimodal transportation systems. That reality will eventually have to be reflected in how the city thinks about transportation. The state legislature two years ago passed a law that compels local agencies to move toward a multimodal concurrency system.

Commissioner Larrivee asked if staff has any projections for potential revenue streams and whether the Commission should craft project recommendations that reflect potential new revenues down the road. Mr. Sparrman said it would be presumptive of him to attempt to speak for the Council in terms of what they might choose to do. He allowed that there is a general consensus that the city is in need some additional resources to address capital needs for transportation, parks, utilities and in other areas.

Mr. Cieri took a moment to thank Commissioner Wendle for his service on the Commission for the past four years, noting that his term would end on May 31.

Commissioner Wendle observed that the city has changed, as has the focus of the Commission, however the last four years. The evolution of the city has been particularly dramatic in the last two years. He said it is amazing how much the city has been able to accomplish and said it has

been exciting to be a part of it.

Refreshments were served.

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

Commissioner Glass reported that he along with Commissioner Northey and Commissioner Larrivee attended the light rail best practices committee meeting on May 20. He said good progress is being made toward finalizing the report. The group will meet again on June 3 and will meet for the last time on June 17.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Jim Antell, 14206 NE 40th Place, read into the record a letter dated April 24, 2008, regarding the proposal to widen 140th Avenue NE by ten feet to accommodate bicycle lanes. He said the Bridle Trails Community Club was surprised by the recommendation of the Commission in that the proposed project is not published in the ped-bike plan which the city presented to citizens for public comment. The Bridle Trails Community Club formed a subcommittee to evaluate the projects in the ped-bike plan within the Bridle Trails subarea, and did not recommend building bicycle lanes on both sides of 140th Avenue NE. In order to construct bike lanes on both sides of the roadway, the city would have to remove the walking path, trees and vegetation along the street, an approach which is not consistent with the development of the neighborhood or the needs of the neighborhood. The proposed facility is not needed as a park, transit, schools or retail services connection. The average speed of the vehicles travelling the roadway is 41 miles per hour. There are over 58 driveways between NE 24th Street and NE 40th Street, presenting potential hazards for bicycle riders and pedestrians. The current six-foot-wide multipurpose separated path has been serving the neighborhood well since it was constructed. The Bridle Trails Community Club should be permitted additional time to gather data and public comment regarding the new proposal; the issue should be left open at least through the end of May. There is already a north-south bike lane along 116th Avenue NE that connects to NE 70th Street and the SR-520 bike path, allowing for north-south travel to connect with east-west travel. The cost to construct the facility will be very expensive, especially given that the local community does not want it. Widening the road will encourage higher speeds.

7. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Commissioner Van Valkenburgh. Second was by Commissioner Larrivee and the motion carried unanimously.

8. STUDY SESSION

A. NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street Project Update

Mr. Sparrman allowed that the future design of NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street and its function is a very complex transportation project. In fact, it is much more than a transportation project, which is one of the reasons the Transportation Commission and the Bel-Red corridor steering committee has taken a lot of interest in the vision for the key roadway project. What is complex is usually also expensive, and the costs for the project are somewhat mindboggling and lie on the wrong side of \$200 million.

Mr. Sparrman noted that the same presentation, with some minor adjustments, will be taken to the City Council on May 27 so they can also be exposed to some of the tradeoff issues everyone has been struggling with.

Senior Planner Kevin McDonald reminded the Commissioners that in February and March a suite of transportation system projects needed to implement the vision of the steering committee were reviewed by the Commission. That review work culminated the Commission's April 10 recommendation to the Planning Commission on the list of projects. A recommendation regarding NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street was not developed pending the outcome of discussions with the Parks and Community Services Board regarding the design concept for the corridor, particularly the park blocks concept that was notably missing from the design that was brought forward. The Park and Community Services Board was given a presentation by staff on May 13. He said the conclusion they reached was outlined in a memo included in the Commission desk packet.

Continuing, Mr. McDonald said much of the cost of the NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street project is related to right-of-way. In the sections where the roadway currently exists, the right-of-way is 60 feet wide, but more will be needed to accommodate the preferred cross section.

The work to design NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street is proceeding under a set of design principles established by staff and the consultant team aimed at the functions envisioned for the roadway. The principles are predicated on the vision of the steering committee that the corridor is to be multimodal; have a strong relationship with adjacent land uses; incorporate a literal green component with trees and landscaping, a functional green component with natural drainage practices for stormwater; include variable urban design and open space treatments along the corridor as it passes through different land use types; and serve as a major non-motorized transportation corridor with north-south linkages to arterials, the system of pathways along the stream corridors, and the BNSF corridor.

Mr. McDonald said the proposed design includes a four-lane roadway with left-turn pockets at major intersections capable of accommodating about 30,000 cars per day in the western segment, tapering down to about 15,000 to 20,000 in the eastern segment. The design includes light rail transit running at-grade in the median with two stations, one at 122nd Avenue NE and one at 130th Avenue NE. Wide and generous pedestrian facilities with landscaping on both sides of the street are part of the design, as is an off-street ped-bike path separate from the sidewalk and the travel lanes.

There has been thinking about planning for a local access or frontage road in the nodes at 122nd Avenue NE and 130th Avenue NE. The additional roadway would permit slower moving vehicles to gain access to the adjacent land uses and provide for some on-street parking in the vicinity of the nodes. Other elements include urban plazas and parks and open spaces along the stream corridors.

Artist concept drawings of various roadway segments were shared with the Commission.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Van Valkenburgh, Strategic Planning Manager Emil King said staff has analyzed an underground tunnel scenario for the light rail transit in the 122nd Avenue NE area because of the topography. Where undergrounding occurs, the amount of total right-of-way needed would be significantly less.

Mr. Sparrman said with less right-of-way required there will be a lower cost associated with the project. However, because for most of the corridor there is no right-of-way at all, acquiring it will entail a number of total takings, so the incremental savings is not as big as one might wish. He added that the notion of undergrounding transit in the Spring District (122nd Avenue area) has been taken to a fairly high design level to better understand how it would work. Stacking the roadway on top of the light rail appears to be the best design solution if undergrounding were to occur.

Mr. McDonald said around the world there are quite a few examples of park block installations, some of which were designed by the city's consultant Crandall Arambula. He showed pictures of some, noting that the research indicates the park blocks tend to be most functional on low-volume streets within neighborhoods as opposed to high-volume corridor streets such as NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street is envisioned to be. They do tend to separate land uses on opposite sides of the street. That is one of the reasons the park block concept for NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street has morphed into having the park component developed more fully on the side in the nodes. While still a green corridor, the NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street is considered a component of the park system.

The Parks and Community Services Board has unanimously endorsed the park and open space components and the conceptual plan for NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street. They had considerable discussion about NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street and their conclusions were that it is a great street which will serve as a good multimodal corridor with all the right green elements. The Parks and Community Services Board emphasized that the corridor itself is not a park and should not be considered a part of the park system for the Bel-Red subarea.

Mr. McDonald shared with the Commission the land use map showing the proposed zoning throughout the corridor. He said the transportation system interface with land use will need to fully accommodate the needs of pedestrians; assure mobility and accessibility; include building fronts with visual interest facing major streets; and reinforce the community investment in transit and improve system usability. The frontage road, especially in the nodes, will create a softer interface between vehicle travel and the sidewalks; there are a number of excellent examples around the country.

The City Council will receive an in-depth presentation on NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street on May 27.

Commissioner Northey asked how the comments of the Commission will be handled. Mr. McDonald said they will be carried forward to the Planning Commission which will begin its formal review of the entire package following the May 28 public hearing. The Commission could elect to attend and testify at the public hearing, draft a memo to be sent to the Planning Commission, or both. There will also be time for comments to be handed to the Planning Commission following the public hearing.

Mr. Sparrman said staff is continuing to refine the design for NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street and suggested the Commission should not be surprised to see changes as things move forward.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Tanaka, Mr. Sparrman reiterated that the right-of-way costs are projected to account for well over half the total project cost. The lion's share of the acquisition costs will be associated with those areas in which the city does not currently have any right-of-way. The anticipation is that the first phase will include the segment between 116th Avenue NE and 124th Avenue NE; the area to the east of 124th Avenue NE would occur in the third phase in the 2020 to 2030 timeframe.

Continuing, Mr. Sparrman explained that if the city had the resources it would prefer to acquire all necessary right-of-way up front. The likelihood is that the acquisition will occur at the time the projects are funded for implementation. However, one of the possible alignments in Sound Transit's East Link project runs along NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street; the draft EIS for East Link includes an alignment along SR-520. If East Link were to proceed to implementation prior to the city doing the associated projects, a mechanism would need to be found to piggyback on the right-of-way acquisition process.

Commissioner Larrivee suggested that to the extent the city implements natural drainage practices fairly aggressively along the corridor, the result will piggyback fairly well with what the park system is doing in other areas. If not done well, the city will run the risk of not achieving the high-quality stormwater management and park systems the plan calls for. Mr. Sparrman said the focus is on finding more and better ways to reduce the amount of runoff. Permeable surfaces are being experimented with in other corridors; reducing runoff volumes means there is less water to be treated, and that translates into lower costs and improved water quality.

Commissioner Glass asked what other streets in Bellevue currently handle between 20,000 and 30,000 cars per day. Mr. Sparrman said Bel-Red Road currently carries close to 30,000 cars per day.

Commissioner Glass said his vision for a cycle track would be a facility that allows riders to ride without having to stop often. The proposal does not appear to be all that bicycle friendly. Mr. McDonald noted that most of the local street segments do not intersect NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street; the cycle track will hit the signalized intersections on the arterials but will not cross multiple driveways and local streets.

Commissioner Glass said he liked the original park block vision better than the proposed slimmed down version. He asked if the steering committee envisioned NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street being such a busy arterial. Mr. Sparrman said there was always an intent to make NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street the spine running through the corridor. Other than Northup Way and Bel-Red Road, there are no through facilities.

Commissioner Glass suggested that it would be far more pleasant to eat at a sidewalk café if separated from the main traffic by the larger park area. The park block concept would certainly be more of an asset to the community of people who will ultimately live and work there.

Commissioner Wendle recognized that the plan has explicit language about how parks might be integrated. He suggested the parks should be accessible by public transit.

Commissioner Wendle expressed the view that the NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street as proposed is overbuilt and far too wide. It will be important for the Council and others to seriously think about what the roadway will be like, and absent real world examples it could be difficult to imagine. There are just too many elements involved. Preserving the right-of-way for Sound Transit will be key, along with persuading them to choose the corridor as the alignment for the East Link project.

Mr. Sparrman said staff has been testing a number of configurations for the corridor, including shrinking the cross section. He said it turns out that because of the way the right-of-way will have to be acquired, the marginal cost of obtaining the land necessary for an extra lane is not as great as one might think. Additionally, narrowing the corridor will have the effect of pushing traffic out onto Bel-Red Road and Northup Way. Given the long-term potential for land use, NE 15th Street/NE 16th Street may in fact be under designed.

Mr. Sparrman added that staff has looked at Bel-Red Road as the place for a through bicycle facility. It was found that the cost of adding such a facility along with better sidewalks would be exorbitant, and the environmental impacts would be significant.

Commissioner Larrivee suggested that as the profile of the roadway expands, the city will need to be very cautious about how much street activation will be obtainable. A really wide cross section will essentially create separate neighborhoods and may not achieve the vision for the nodes.

Mr. Sparrman said staff are asking the very difficult questions as they move forward with envisioning the design for the roadway. One of the questions being asked is what the city will do if ultimately it finds it will not be able to build the roadway. Providing a smaller facility with more of a local access function could be one option, and of course that approach would not require as much right-of-way. At the same time, there is a need to speak to the broader capacity issue.

Commissioner Van Valkenburgh pointed out the need to be bold in looking to and planning for

the future. Given the growth of the area, it will be necessary to accommodate density in the urban centers. It will not be beyond the realm of possibility to think that the roadway as proposed will be necessary to serve the corridor, both the local traffic and the through traffic.

Commissioner Wendle asked if consideration is being given to changing the way the land use is being assumed. He noted that the building heights for some of the areas is substantial. Mr. King said the Planning Commission has had the most discussion on allowable FARs, as well as allowable heights. The Planning Commission has not discussed the notion of potentially modifying the overall development program up or down; their focus has been on delivering a development program to fit the forecast for market growth which most believe is accurate.

****BREAK****

B. Preliminary Score-Ranked TFP & CIP Roadway/Intersection Project List

Capital Programming Coordinator Kristi Oosterveen noted that the ranking criteria are Comprehensive Plan based and utilizes a matrix system predicated on needs versus benefits. The five areas of focus and the relative weighting for roadway/intersection projects are safety, 25 percent; vehicular level of service, 25 percent; transit systems, 15 percent; non-motorized systems, 20 percent; and regional benefit/outside funding, 15 percent.

Ms. Oosterveen said staff hopes to have at least some preliminary figures regarding the TFP and CIP revenue projections by the time the Commission meets again on June 12. The prioritization exercise, combined with financial figures, will lead to combining the roadway/intersection project list with the ped-bike project list into a single document and enable the creation of a preliminary TFP and CIP update recommendations for the City Council, hopefully before the August break.

Commissioner Larrivee pointed out that the scoring mechanisms for the ped-bike projects and roadway/intersection projects are different. Ms. Oosterveen agreed. She explained that once the two lists are combined, the focus will be on prioritizing the projects. The scoring mechanism is only the first step in getting to the prioritization stage.

Ms. Oosterveen said once the preliminary TFP update recommendation is sent to the City Council, staff will begin the EIS development process. The impact fee update process is continuing on a different track and will flow through late 2008 or early 2009 when Council adoption of the TFP is expected to occur. The preliminary CIP for the overall budget process will be presented in the September/October timeframe for Council discussion, with adoption anticipated early in December.

Commissioner Van Valkenburgh suggested that the projects on the list do not indicate much geographic equity in terms of investments. She asked if that will become part of the conversation at some point. Ms. Oosterveen said the inequity is more pronounced in looking at only the roadway/intersection projects. Once the ped-bike projects are folded in there will be a much greater geographic spread across the city. A Title VI equity analysis will be conducted later.

Commissioner Northey felt it would be helpful for the Commissioners to see where the various projects were ranked in the current TFP. Capital Programming Implementation Manager Eric Miller said that information can be provided, along with an indication of which projects are new.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Tanaka, Mr. Miller allowed that it is very difficult to come up with any criteria that will look at an intersection project and score it in the same way a new or widened road is scored. That is a perennial problem and is the reason behind having completely different scoring criteria system for ped-bike projects.

Commissioner Glass referred to the level of service matrix and pointed out that as designed the matrix would give 40 points to an LOS F intersection project that does not improve anything. Commissioner Northey voiced concern that the matrix utilizes criteria other than the V/C ratio given that level of service is a term of art. Some of those 40 points might be from adding operational improvements and reducing delay. Similarly, the matrix gives the most points to projects that create alternative routes and profound network changes, none of which falls under the true definition of level of service. Mr. Miller pointed out that the scoring criteria were discussed and approved by the Commission in the fall of 2007. He allowed that there is no perfect scoring system, and said the final prioritization does not have to fully rely on the scoring. It is rewarding to see projects that have been consistently ranked high end up near the top of the list.

Commissioner Van Valkenburgh agreed and said she would be far more concerned to see CIP projects near the bottom of the list. While there may be concerns about the LOS matrix, in a relative sense the criteria are being applied in the same way to all of the projects.

Commissioner Glass called attention to project FES-6 and asked if it should be pursued given the recent remodel work at Newport High School. Mr. Miller said a question about the project was raised in the fall of 2007 and the Commission asked staff to check with traffic operations to see where they stood on the project. He reported that they are fully behind it. The primary benefit is for the southbound traffic at the intersection with Newport Way and Factoria Boulevard. The demand going into the school may not be as high anymore, but there are other benefits to the project, including the relocation of the driveway to St. Margaret's church site for which the Council has approved Comprehensive Plan amendments to permit an affordable housing development.

Commissioner Wendle commented that the regional benefit criteria seems to penalize the Factoria area projects. No project received 100 points, and some Factoria projects got a zero. Any project with 50 or more moved up on the list. Ms. Oosterveen pointed out that only five of those projects would be eligible for any kind of outside funding. Three of the projects are in other regional plans. Commissioner Wendle observed that because the regional funding criteria is weighted so heavily, in essence it lets regional priorities for funding and grant sources establish priorities for local improvements. Each project should be carefully scrutinized during the prioritization process to see if they merit moving up on the list.

Commissioner Glass asked why FES-4 did not score higher on the regional benefit criteria given that it will improve the on and off ramp. Ms. Oosterveen explained that it is not included in any of the plans so did not receive any regional benefit points at all.

Commissioner Northey suggested that FES-11, a signalization improvement project, should be handled as a part of the signal project in the traffic operations group. Mr. Miller explained that the signal poles are located where they are causing a safety hazard. The project is aimed at moving them.

Commissioner Van Valkenburgh asked why the project would receive a transit score of 100 if the project does not involve transit facilities. Ms. Oosterveen said the transit score is based on the number of buses along the corridor.

Commissioner Northey said at some point she would like to see how all the 150th Avenue SE and I-90 projects fit together.

Ms. Oosterveen said the preliminary staff-prioritized project list will be brought to the Commission on June 12.

C. Commission Chair and Vice-Chair Nominations and Elections

Commissioner Northey opened the floor to nominations for Chair and Vice-Chair.

Motion to nominate Commissioner Northey to serve as Chair was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Commissioner Tanaka and the motion carried unanimously.

Motion to nominate Commissioner Tanaka to serve as Vice-Chair was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Commissioner Van Valkenburgh and the motion carried unanimously.

9. OLD BUSINESS – None

10. NEW BUSINESS

Commissioner Van Valkenburgh reported that owing to a family situation she will be leaving the city of Bellevue and moving to Illinois the end of July.

11. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

12. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. April 3, 2008

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Glass. Second was by Commissioner Tanaka and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioners Kiel and Larrivee abstained from voting.

B. April 10, 2008

Motion to approve the minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Tanaka. Second was by Commissioner Northey and the motion carried without dissent; Commissioner Larrivee abstained from voting.

13. REVIEW CALENDAR

A. Commission Calendar and Agenda

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

B. Public Involvement Calendar

14. ADJOURNMENT

Commissioner Northey adjourned the meeting at 9:12 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date