

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION  
MINUTES

July 26, 2011  
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall  
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

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

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: None

STAFF PRESENT: Paul Krawczyk, Goran Sparrman, Kevin O'Neill, Kevin McDonald, Steve Costa, David Berg, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: Councilmember Lee

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

Deputy Mayor Conrad Lee opened the retreat with a brief introduction thanking the Commissioners for their service and explaining his desire to work with the Commission to address their questions and issues.

2. NORTHUP WAY CORRIDOR PROJECT

Project Manager Steve Costa reviewed with the Commission the Northup Way corridor project and asked for input. Commissioner Larrivee suggested that all things being equal, it is always best to separate cars from pedestrians and bicycles. The other Commissioners concurred.

With regard to the project segment to the west of I-405, the Commissioners concurred with the recommendation of staff to establish the ultimate improvements in terms of curb, gutter, sidewalk and bike lanes on one side of the road, and expanding the other side of the road to provide for temporary pedestrian and bicycle improvements but without a curb.

For the segment of the project that passes under the I-405 bridge deck, the Commissioners recommended shifting the ultimate cross-section to allow for locating the pedestrian facilities behind the columns on both sides, and locating the bicycle lanes next to the vehicle lanes.

After reviewing the segment to the east of I-405, the Commissioners expressed support for the option with the third bike lane providing left turns northbound onto 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and NE

24<sup>th</sup> Street. Mr. Sparrman suggested the third lane should be given a treatment to make it stand out, possibly by coloring it.

Commissioner Northey suggested traffic operations staff should take a closer look at the setup to make sure all safety concerns are addressed.

The Commissioners voiced their support for the design option that creates a separate ped-bike bridge for the Burlington Northern segment over the option that would expand the width of the existing bridge.

Commissioner Glass said he could see people wanting to get onto the Burlington Northern trail and head down to the Kirkland waterfront or cross the SR-520 bridge without having to mix it up with cars. Accordingly, the separated option would be the better choice.

The Commission concurred with the proposal for the NE 24<sup>th</sup> Street segment of the project that was developed in conjunction with the Bridle Trails community, which consists of a separated multi-purpose path south of NE 24<sup>th</sup> Street.

Mr. Costa said the next step will be to bring the design work to the 30 percent mark and to develop cost estimates. Once that work is done there will be a discussion between the city and the state as to whether or not to proceed to final design and construction; that conversation will occur in September.

Mr. Sparrman said the idea is to have the state pay for the project. The city has no money to put into it. The state has been lobbied very hard even to get them to where they are.

### 3. STATE OF THE DEPARTMENT REPORT

Mr. Sparrman said it is remarkable how much has been accomplished in the last year even though the environment has been challenging. On the capital side, a large number of very small projects were completed, everything from fixing crosswalks to adding missing pieces of sidewalks and fixing intersections. Those projects do not seem to get much attention.

The city's centralized computer traffic control system is dated and in places was literally held together with bailing wire. Two servers acted as the heart of the system; one of them stopped working all together, and the second was only working tenuously with parts supplied by a vendor who was no longer willing to support the system. With Council support, the system upgrade was launched, the first phase of which has been completed. Before the end of the year, the last of the signals operating under the old system will be switched over.

In 2010 the city worked through the first iteration of the Budget One process. The Commission voiced a number of concerns about the capital side of things, but overall the effort proved to be successful. The process helped everyone gain understanding of what goes into

the complex organization that is the city.

Mr. Sparrman said two major projects are currently underway: 145<sup>th</sup> Place SE, and 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE. More projects are in the pipeline, which is evidence that things are continuing to get done on the capital side. However, some projects are facing funding challenges. The current plan is for the Council in the September/October timeframe to thoroughly discuss the status of all the mobility initiative projects, the cash flow requirements, and how to respond. The reality is that the NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street project and the first two phases of the 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE project will require some \$20 million in new cash in order to stay on schedule. The Council will have to talk about how the mobility initiative will play out in the context of the current capital situation.

The CIP will be updated again in 2012. The process will involve wading through a lot of projects and determining priorities. The Commission will be involved in the process.

Mr. Sparrman said the work to update the downtown transportation plan will kick off soon. In the seven years since the Downtown Implementation Plan was adopted a number of things have changed: there have been changes to the regional system and to transit services, and there have been significant changes on the land use side. The Bel-Red plan, a very large land use change driven by the coming of light rail, needs to be taken into consideration in updating the downtown transportation plan. The update will push the horizon year from 2020 to 2030.

Councilmember Lee stressed the importance of updating the downtown transportation plan. He noted that the indications are that without revisions the downtown area will face gridlock by 2030.

Mr. Sparrman said when the Downtown Implementation Plan was adopted, the city barely managed to show that it would have the transportation infrastructure to accommodate the planned land use growth. Absent new infrastructure capacity, by 2030 the downtown will not be able to maintain LOS E, which is the adopted standard for downtown. The update work will ferret out the transportation demand that can be expected by 2030, and how to respond to the demand with transportation infrastructure accommodating all modes of travel. The trends toward costlier fuel and more people choosing to live in the downtown could mean the old trip generation rates may not be a constant.

Commissioner Northey noted that the city had made some changes to the level of service calculations in terms of the mobility management areas then wondered if there should be a different kind of definition applicable in the downtown, one that measures more than just getting cars through an intersection in a given time period. Most big cities with large downtown areas do not work to accommodate cars. Mr. Sparrman said there are two parts to the argument, both of which are policy issues. First is how to define mobility, whether it should be focused on cars or on the bigger picture of getting people from one place to another easily and pleasantly. Second is whether or not concurrency should be looked at from the point

of view of squeezing a certain number of cars through an intersection, which for years has been viewed as an outdated model. The work to update the downtown transportation plan does not contemplate changing the Bellevue's concurrency methodology; that will be addressed through a different process at some point in the future.

Commissioner Glass asked what income streams feed the capital program. Mr. Sparrman said historically sales tax revenues were the primary funding source. The real estate excise tax has in the past been a significant revenue source. Impact fees have always played an important role. Following the Council's action to increase the impact fees, the recession hit and the city has received almost no impact fees for the past few years. The assumption for the next seven years is that \$30 million will come in from impact fees, but only if the economy strengthens. All of the revenue sources feeding into the CIP have taken a hit. The current two-year budget was approved one year ago and already the revenues are coming in below the estimates. Normal retail sales are generating revenues slightly above the projections, but sales tax revenues resulting from construction projects are down by ten or fifteen percent.

Commissioner Lampe asked how good the tools are that the city has to use for traffic modeling. Mr. Sparrman said the BKR model is more detailed than the regional model and is more accurate than the model used by Sound Transit. He stressed, however, that a model is only a model; it is absolutely necessary to feed into it only the best information, and to know how to understand what comes out of a model. While the staff are comfortable with the model, they must be careful with regard to the trip generation rates used.

Transportation Planning Manager Kevin O'Neill explained that a few years ago the city hired a national firm to do a full audit of the model; the intent was to know if the model is state of the art. The model was given a passing grade, though several tweaks were suggested, most of which have been incorporated into the model.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Jokinen about how to address the revenue shortfall for CIP projects, Mr. Sparrman said the options are to generate more money, delay or cancel some projects, or borrow money. Those decisions are made by the Council.

Commissioner Northey noted that there is fresh graffiti in the I-90 tunnel at SE 38<sup>th</sup> Street and asked which department is responsible for removing it. Mr. Sparrman said the Washington State Department of Transportation is responsible for the tunnel. Deputy Director Dave Berg said he would contact them to let them know.

Commissioner Northey commented that the Washington State Department of Transportation project to expand I-90 by adding a lane from Eastgate to Lakemont Boulevard brings with it the opportunity to include sound walls, which the local residents would like to see. Mr. Sparrman said it was his understanding that the expansion, especially westbound, is a long way out in years. The eastbound auxiliary lane appears to be higher on their list.

#### 4. DOWNTOWN TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE

Mr. O'Neill stressed that point that with the recent surge in the residential population in the downtown, the downtown has become a place people are going into, not just out of, at the end of the day. It is a very important employment center, but it is also the city's fastest growing residential neighborhood. As of the 2010 census, the residential population stood at about 7200, but there is enough building space there to accommodate 10,000 residents given the current vacancy rate. There are an estimated 44,000 jobs in the downtown, a figure which has fluctuated considerably over the last decade.

The levels of change that have occurred since adoption of the Downtown Implementation Plan have been remarkable from both a regional and local policy standpoint. That is why the Council believes the time has come to update the downtown transportation plan. The Council agreed with the staff that the Commission should provide oversight to the project similar to the oversight provided for the ped-bike plan.

Senior Planner Kevin McDonald said the task will be to update the transportation section of the downtown subarea plan. The subarea plan is the document that houses the projects and policies developed in the Downtown Implementation. The work will include reviewing each of the projects, removing projects that have been completed, deciding whether the rest of the projects on the list are still valid and needed to meet the mobility challenges of the downtown through 2030. The focus will be on all modes of mobility. The Commission will be asked to create an implementation strategy that includes identified priorities, logical paring of projects, funding strategies, and other elements.

Mr. McDonald said the challenge relative to mobility in the downtown will be defined by the travel demand model, which shows that by 2030 there will be as many as 650,000 daily person trips in vehicles in the downtown, almost double the current vehicle trips.

The levels of service adopted for the downtown are based on the volume-to-capacity (V/C) ratio of the system intersections. The V/C ratio for the downtown is 0.95, or LOS E+. At the very least, it will be necessary to show that the capacity is consistent with the adopted level of service standard.

Roadways, of course, serve to move more than just cars. For some streets in the downtown it would be good to have more on-street parking. Also needed are loading zones for everything from moving vans to delivery vans, as well as for residential and business users. Many of the downtown streets are used in their entirety for moving traffic, which includes the areas in front of businesses that need to have packages and goods delivered. More curb space is needed for all kinds of reasons, and the traffic management staff will be looking to the planning effort for policy direction.

Commissioner Simas asked if the need for loading zones taken into account during the

development process. Mr. McDonald said in many cases it is. In most cases the larger developments have off-street, side-street or alley options for loading and unloading functions. However, it is not always practical to use those facilities; often people will simply pull up in front of a building, park with their flashers on, and occupy the travel lane as a loading zone for a few minutes.

Mr. Sparrman added that the discussions by the CAC working on the Downtown Implementation Plan included an extensive conversation about using the roadway lanes for traffic during peak periods and for on-street parking during the off-peak periods. The issue was never followed up on due to a lack of resources, so the long-standing issue is becoming more acute.

With regard to transit in the downtown, Mr. McDonald pointed out that while the city does not control the buses, it does control the roadways. Third Avenue in downtown Seattle is a classic example of how a roadway can be used for cars while prioritizing transit at certain times of the day; Bellevue does not currently take that approach, but it is one strategy that could be pursued. The study may highlight changes needed to better connect downtown residents and workers to the regional transit market. The adopted ped-bike plan will be used as the place to start relative to the non-motorized system in the downtown, but the adopted projects will be reviewed to determine if they are the best fit going forward to 2030.

Commissioner Larrivee asked if the city lumps the Microsoft connector service in as a pseudo-transit service and include them in the overall transit discussion. Mr. O'Neill said the service has not been given the consideration it probably deserves. He allowed that they are looking for curb space for their vehicles and have had conversations with King County Metro about using their stops to pick up riders. They would love to be able to use the downtown transit center. Microsoft is not legally allowed to use transit stops, but when the city creates curb space for buses it can decide who can use it; the city already allows the Microsoft connector buses to use the curb space to the north of the transit center. Microsoft has been very strategic about assigning their routes where there are gaps in the Metro or Sound Transit routing system and as such they are an important component of the transit picture.

Mr. McDonald said it will take a package of projects that collectively make sense to accomplish the overall mobility goal. A set of evaluation criteria to be called measures of effectiveness will be established; they will include both qualitative and quantitative metrics.

Commissioner Larrivee suggested one such measure would be the diversity of land uses able to be sustained in the downtown. Transportation is a necessary evil needed to bolster the success of businesses, employment and housing. Where transportation is not done right, those uses are restricted. Mr. O'Neill allowed that there will be a robust discussion during the study. The V/C ratio is one measure of effectiveness, but others should be considered as well.

Mr. Sparrman agreed that land use should drive the transportation infrastructure, not the other

way around. It is a good thing that Bellevue has an explicit land use vision for the downtown; that will not be revisited as part of the study, though it could be a separate study in a future year.

Mr. McDonald said there are a lot of clients to be served in doing the downtown transportation plan update. The City Council is a client, of course, but their clients are those who live, work, shop and recreate in the downtown. All of them will need to be considered in doing the update.

Mr. McDonald said the Council in June gave a head nod to notion of having the Commission serve as the advisory body for the project. The Commission has a lot of expertise in the area of transportation and as such is a natural fit for the role of advisory body. The product of the study will be policy guidance and project recommendations to be forwarded to the Council for consideration.

Mr. O'Neill offered two scheduling options: making the update work part of the Commission's regular agenda for its monthly meetings, or adding a meeting per month focused only on the topic. Chair Tanaka said his preference would be to fold the study into the Commission's regular monthly meeting, keeping open the notion of having to meet a second time during the month when necessary. Commissioner Lampe expressed his support for holding a separate monthly meeting focused entirely on the update study; if made part of a regular meeting, the study may not get the focus and attention it will need. Commissioner Larrivee agreed and commented that the study could tend to push regular agenda items to the side. Mr. McDonald noted that the first three meetings or so will be primarily informational and could be made to fit with a regular agenda.

Mr. McDonald said the Council made the suggestion that the expertise and interests of the city's other boards and commissions should be considered during the study, in particular the Planning Commission which serves as the steward of the Comprehensive Plan. To that end staff will provide periodic briefings, and an occasional joint meeting with the Planning Commission might be in order. The Council will be kept updated as well.

Commissioner Larrivee suggested it would be helpful to have a Planning Commission representative serve as liaison to the study.

Mr. McDonald allowed that interfacing with the public will be a critical component of the study. He said there will be opportunities for direct contact with the public during regular Commission meetings but also at special events such as scoping meetings, workshops and focus groups.

Staff will provide support throughout the process. Having the Commission chair and vice-chair work with staff to plan agendas materials prior to meetings would be helpful.

Mr. McDonald provided the Commissioners with a draft list of guiding principles. There was agreement for the Commissioners to take them home, read them over, and come prepared to discuss them at the next regular Commission meeting.

The Commissioners reviewed the proposed project schedule. Mr. McDonald noted that the intent is to kick off the project in September. Existing conditions and other background information will be discussed in the first few meetings. During the fall there will be a kickoff meeting aimed at hearing from the public comments about scoping, issues and ideas. Project ideas will be developed during the late fall/early winter timeframe. The preliminary recommendations will be subjected to the evaluation criteria and then carried forward to the Council and the public for comment. The recommendations will then be refined and included in a final report to be submitted to the Council. If all goes smoothly, the project will take about 18 months.

Councilmember Lee commented that the downtown is very important to the entire city in that everyone uses the area. He said he would hope that the list of stakeholders should be drawn as widely as possible. Commissioner Larrivee concurred. Mr. Sparrman said that was always the intent.

#### 5. DISCUSS COMMISSION OBJECTIVES FOR COMING YEAR

Chair Tanaka observed that in past meetings the Commission has expressed a desire to reach out to the transportation commissions in neighboring jurisdictions, and has talked about the issue of bicycle safety. He suggested the two topics could be merged. An initial contact has been made with Kirkland, but Redmond should be contacted as well. The focus should be on topics of common interest, particularly ped-bike planning. The Commissioners agreed and Commissioner Glass agreed to serve in a lead capacity.

Commissioner Glass asked if the Commission could put a discussion of impact fees on its agenda. Mr. Sparrman said to do so would need Council direction. To date the Council has not raised the issue. The Council has signaled that it wants to discuss the issues associated with revenues, which could happen as part of the CIP update process. Councilmember Lee concurred that the Council will discuss the issue, perhaps during the budget deliberations.

Commissioner Glass noted that the city currently operates under a single fee area instead of the original twelve. He suggested there might be some middle ground that would be more practical. Mr. Sparrman said the choice to move away from multiple mobility management areas to a citywide approach was made deliberately by the Council. Subsequently, some Councilmembers have questioned whether or not that was the right decision. It will be up to the Council to determine if the issue should be revisited, and whether or not to involve the Commission. Commission Lee agreed to raise the question with the Council to see where things stand. Commissioner Glass said his concern is that the impact fees may be serving as another hurdle developers must overcome to get projects off the ground.

Commissioner Simas suggested that absent an economic analysis to provide some focus, the Commission could not reach any conclusion. The Commission could argue that the impact fee should be \$3000 rather than \$5000, but there would be nothing on which to base the argument, and nothing to say that making the change would increase development activity in the city and as a result revenues for the city. The Council certainly is in no mood to do anything that will reduce revenues.

Commissioner Larrivee said he would like the Commission to have a presentation on ped-bike safety in construction zones and what can be done to mitigate the impacts. Mr. Krawczyk said he would schedule the appropriate staff to give the Commission a good breakdown of the current practices.

Commissioner Glass asked if there will be a role for the Commission relative to locating and designing the light rail stations in the city, how they will connect with the current bus system, and relevant ped-bike access issues. Mr. Sparrman said the East Link project will move into its final design phase during 2012. During that process the city will rely on the findings from the best practices committee and the report they compiled. Exactly how that will be done, and what role the Commission will play, is yet to be decided.

Commissioner Simas said he would like to receive an update with regard to how the red light cameras in the city are impacting traffic flow at the intersections. Mr. Sparrman said he would ask the traffic operations staff to provide information.

6. WRAP-UP

Chair Tanaka thanked the Commissioners for their comments and the staff for their input.

7. ADJOURN

Chair Tanaka adjourned the meeting at 8:23 p.m.

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Secretary to the Transportation Commission

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Date

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Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

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Date