

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

September 17, 2007  
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room  
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Degginger, Deputy Mayor Chelminiak, and Councilmembers Balducci, Davidson, Lee, Marshall, and Noble

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m., with Mayor Degginger presiding.

2. Study Session

(a) King County Metro Update on Transit Initiatives

Deputy City Manager Brad Miyake explained that King County Metro staff have been invited to provide an update on three transit initiatives: 1) February 2008 service change, 2) Bellevue-Redmond RapidRide planning process, and 3) Transit Now partnership program proposals. Staff is seeking Council direction on the programs.

Bernard van de Kamp, Transportation Regional Projects Manager, introduced Jim Jacobson, King County Metro Deputy General Manager, and David Hull, Supervisor for Surface Planning. He noted a revised letter in Council's desk packet to the Federal Transit Administration regarding the County's grant request for the RapidRide program.

Mr. Hull reviewed the February 2008 service changes which include the implementation of Transit Now services for high ridership routes and better connections at key Eastside activity centers. In 2005, King County Metro went through a public process on the Eastside to find ways to enhance the network's performance without using additional resources. In Spring 2006, King County Executive Ron Sims moved the Transit Now initiative forward, and King County Metro suspended the Eastside service change process. Planning for Eastside service changes resumed late last year with additional resources to support the enhancements.

Mr. Hull said the service changes will be implemented on February 22, and the bus tunnel will reopen on February 24. One of the primary improvements will be Route 221 between Redmond's Education Hill area to the Overlake employment center and continuing south to the Eastgate Park and Ride lot. The other major service change is Route 248, which connects the Avondale Road area through Redmond Towne Center and on to Kirkland. Changes affect a total of 12 routes. The service changes improve the connection between the Bellevue Transit Center and Overlake Hospital as well.

Mr. van de Kamp recalled discussions a few years ago about moving the existing bus layover site from SE 41<sup>st</sup> Street near Factoria Mall to 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE, adjacent to Newport High School. He requested Council direction regarding this issue.

Councilmember Marshall described her involvement in recent years in modifications to 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE related to maintaining the bus layover site on SE 41<sup>st</sup> Street. She wants to ensure that Little League coaches and representatives are informed about and are amenable to changing the bus layover site.

Mr. van de Kamp said the pullout area on 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE is approximately 350 to 400 feet, and Metro does not need the entire length. It would be a 24-hour layover location. He said staff has not spoken with Little League representatives. However, staff did talk to school officials a few years ago during the process of updating the Factoria Area Transportation Study (FATS). Mr. van de Kamp said the City has received an application for the demolition of the former Mervyns store.

Councilmember Balducci requested a copy of the meeting minutes reflecting Council's previous discussions about the layover location.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Hull said Metro prefers to have restroom facilities at layover locations.

Mr. Hull moved on to describe the RapidRide program, which is a bus rapid transit system. This type of system is a series of coordinated improvements in a transit system's infrastructure, equipment, operations, and technology that give preferential treatment to buses on urban roadways. It is intended to reduce travel times and improve service reliability.

A grant has been received for the Pacific Highway South corridor. Additional RapidRide corridors will be Aurora, Ballard/Uptown, Bel-Red Road, and West Seattle. The target frequency is 10 minutes or less with two-way, seven days a week service. The buses will travel faster than traditional service and bus stops will be located farther apart.

King County Metro is working with Bellevue staff to develop an advisory panel to guide public outreach activities. Major issues are locations of stations and stops and optional alignments. Public open houses will be held in 2008. City Councils will be briefed again about the project later this year, and Metro will seek City Council endorsement of route design in Spring 2008. Design and construction will begin in 2008 and implementation is targeted for 2011.

Mr. van de Kamp said King County Metro is asking the City of Bellevue to support the program by sending a letter to the Federal Transit Administration, as provided in Council's desk packet. The grant is seeking funding assistance for the Bel-Red RapidRide project.

Staff responded to additional questions of clarification regarding signal priority, bus stops, and fares. Mr. Hull said the RapidRide service will utilize smart card readers for the payment of fares.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Hull said Metro wants to implement RapidRide at a higher level than what is funded through Transit Now, which will be possible with the Small Starts grant. Ms. Balducci wants to ensure that cities will not be asked to provide funding. Mr. Hull said funding will not be requested for major corridor implementation. However, cities might be asked to fund related signal priority or other measures.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Metro staff said they will provide information about the costs associated with RapidRide implementation on the Eastside.

Councilmember Lee noted his involvement with the Regional Transit Committee and his support for the RapidRide program. Referring to the draft letter to the Federal Transit Administration, Mr. Lee suggested removing the reference to light rail in the third paragraph. Mr. van de Kamp explained that the BRT system will help build a market for future light rail usage. However, he concurred that the reference in the letter is not necessary.

Councilmember Noble encouraged bus pull-out lanes to avoid interfering with traffic flow. He would like a system that provides a maximum benefit to both the transit and roadway networks.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Chelminiak, Mr. Hull said BRT stops will be shelters with a unified design and more amenities than traditional bus stops, including real-time travel information.

Moving on to Transit Now service partnerships, Mr. Hull described direct financial partnerships. Metro will cover two-thirds of the costs and cities will pay one-third of the costs associated with financial partnerships. Criteria for the identification of partnership projects have been adopted by the King County Council and include service to urban and manufacturing centers, improvements to core service connections, and partner commitments for five or more years of service.

Mr. Hull noted Bellevue's Transit Now project to create a downtown circulator. He described the service problems associated with a one-way loop and the benefits of a two-way loop. The two-way loop would be operated with three vehicles instead of four. The estimated cost of the two-way loop service is approximately \$1.3 million annually for service seven days a week. Options include Monday through Friday or Monday through Saturday service levels.

Mr. Hull responded to additional questions of clarification regarding the operation of the downtown circulator.

Councilmember Marshall expressed an interest in a distinctive and artistic look for the circulator buses. Mr. Hull noted that Issaquah has a different name for its circulator shuttles. However, painting the buses creates complications in terms of using the buses for other routes at times and other operational issues. He said there are ways to distinguish the look of the buses.

Mayor Degginger likes the idea of the circulator serving both downtown businesses and workers as well as the neighborhoods adjacent to the downtown. Responding to Mr. Degginger, Mr. Hull said the proposal envisions 21-passenger shuttle vans.

Mr. van de Kamp said staff is seeking Council direction regarding the desired level of service.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Hull said some local circulators in regional cities started as grant-funded programs and later were merged into Metro's system.

Deputy Mayor Chelminiak stated a preference for Monday through Saturday service with increased service during the winter holidays. Mrs. Marshall concurred.

Mr. Hull said the submission of a proposal is requested by October 1.

Mayor Degginger noted Council consensus in support of the Monday through Saturday schedule.

Mr. Hull described a proposed Transit Now partnership for Route 245 with partners to include Bellevue, Redmond, Kirkland, T-Mobile, and Microsoft. He reviewed cost and ridership alternatives based on service levels.

Councilmember Marshall supports the partnership if T-Mobile and Microsoft are willing to participate. If not, Mrs. Marshall would support peak period-only service funded by the City of Bellevue.

Councilmember Lee feels that financial support for Route 245 should be provided by Metro. Ms. Balducci concurred.

Mr. van de Kamp said T-Mobile and Microsoft, as well as Redmond and Kirkland, are interested in further discussion about a partnership.

Councilmember Balducci questioned the source of funding to be used by Bellevue if it enters into the partnership.

Mayor Degginger spoke in support of the proposed partnership, although he concurs with other Councilmembers that the route should be fully funded by Metro.

Mrs. Marshall feels it is fair for private companies to provide financial support because their employees are primary users of the travel corridor.

Councilmember Noble concurred with supporting the partnership, although he agrees with others that Metro should be funding the route.

Dr. Davidson is disappointed that Bellevue and other parties are being asked to provide funding when transit already receives a fair amount of the City's tax dollars.

Mayor Degginger requested information about the financial commitment of other entities and the source of Bellevue funds for the project.

(b) Utilities Asset Management and Failures/Claims Reduction Efforts

Utilities Director Denny Vidmar opened discussion regarding the Utilities Department's asset management and long-range planning programs. He noted that aging infrastructure is a critical national issue. Bellevue's replacement cost for its water, wastewater, and stormwater systems is approximately \$3 billion.

The Utilities Department's long-range planning horizon is 75 years. Bellevue is one of a few jurisdictions that are linking replacement funding with system-specific capital planning. The three major elements for maintaining the City's system are capital planning, renewal and replacement funding, and maintenance.

Wes Jorgensen, Engineering Assistant Director, explained that one-third of Bellevue's system is 41 to 50 years old. Aging infrastructure requires increased maintenance and capital expenditures. Mr. Jorgensen reviewed the types of Utilities assets. The current capital program includes a strategic asset replacement program, funding for future renewal and replacement, and asset inspection and prioritization. At the current spending level, it would take 400 years to replace Utilities assets.

Anne Weigle, Resource Management Assistant Director, recalled that the Council provides direction to establish the financial policies governing rate setting as well as renewal and replacement. Utilities conducted a comprehensive reserve analysis and cost containment study in 1994. Renewal and replacement fund policies were subsequently adopted by Council in 1995, and a restricted R&R fund was established at that time. These policies were last updated during the 2007-2008 budget cycle.

Fund policies include smoothing rate increases and structuring rates to ensure equity for current and future ratepayers. R&R funds are used to help provide rate stability but they are not used to provide rate relief. Debt capacity is reserved for catastrophic events and significant changes in the expected life of an asset. Short-range planning is based on the seven-year Capital Investment Program (CIP) Plan. Long-range planning is based on the replacement of pipes and non-pipe assets. Ms. Weigle reviewed forecasted rate increases for each utility category. The Utilities Department anticipates the need for additional resources to support increased capital needs.

Alan King, Operations and Maintenance Assistant Director, explained that aging infrastructure results in increased system failures and a reactive maintenance approach. Increased maintenance is required to continue to meet service levels for customers. Mr. King reviewed graphs demonstrating the increase in main breaks as well as related claims. Staff is currently working to identify how systems fail and those portions of the system with a high incidence of failures, adjust inspection and maintenance practices, and develop failure mitigation programs. Preventative maintenance is decreasing as attention to reactive maintenance increases.

Staff responded to additional questions of clarification.

Responding to Mr. Noble, Mr. King said the current funding approach reacts to budget cycle maintenance levels. However, the sharp increase in claims and system failures highlights the need for longer range planning.

(c) Red Light and School Zone Photo Enforcement Program

Interim Police Chief Linda Pillo explained that red light photo enforcement has become a well-established traffic safety tool that provides effective continuous enforcement. Cameras have resulted in decreases in intersection violations and collisions.

Captain Mike Johnson provided the staff presentation regarding the proposed red light and school zone photo enforcement program. Staff is seeking Council direction regarding the implementation of a pilot program.

Captain Johnson explained that 40 percent of all crashes occur at intersections, due primarily to drivers running red lights. Photo enforcement is currently in use in more than 250 U.S. cities. Cameras have resulted in an average decrease of 16 percent for serious injury collisions and a 24 percent decrease in fatal "T-bone" crashes. Approximately 10 cities in Washington state are using photo enforcement technology, and several more are ready to implement the approach. Captain Johnson briefly reviewed intersections in Bellevue with the highest number of drivers running red lights.

Mayor Degginger noted the time and requested that this item be continued under Agenda Item 5, City Manager's Report, during the Regular Session.

At 8:00 p.m., Mayor Degginger declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich  
City Clerk

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