

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

September 21, 2015  
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room  
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Balducci<sup>1</sup>, Deputy Mayor Wallace and Councilmembers Chelminiak, Lee<sup>2</sup>, Robertson, Robinson, and Stokes

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

At 6:00 p.m., Deputy Mayor Wallace called the meeting to order and announced recess to Executive Session for approximately 20 minutes to discuss one item of potential litigation.

The meeting resumed at 6:33 p.m., with Deputy Mayor Wallace presiding.

2. Study Session

(a) I-405 Electronic Toll Lanes Opening

City Manager Brad Miyake introduced staff's update on the opening of the I-405 electronic toll lanes.

Transportation Director Dave Berg said the opening of the electronic toll lanes is a significant milestone and presents a good opportunity to provide a history and an update on the tolling project.

Kim Henry, I-405 Program Director, said the I-405 electronic toll lanes from Bellevue to Lynnwood will open Sunday, September 27. He noted that WSDOT recently received funding from the state legislature for additional I-405 projects. He recalled environmental work on the corridor in 1999 followed by the Record of Decision in 2002 that called for a mixed-mode I-405 Master Plan of improvements. Mr. Henry said significant progress has been made throughout the corridor. However, while 80 percent of the Park and Ride capacity in the plan has been completed, WSDOT regularly hears that the capacity is not sufficient.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mayor Balducci participated remotely via speakerphone.

<sup>2</sup> Councilmember Lee left the meeting at 7:27 p.m.

Mr. Henry said the state legislature recently funded the Renton to Bellevue segment of I-405, which includes widening the roadway and adding express toll lanes. He described the express toll lane access points on I-405. Additional projects that have received new money from the state legislature are the I-405/SR 167 direct connector, SR 167 HOT Lanes Stage 4, I-405/NE 132<sup>nd</sup> interchange (Totem Lake/Kirkland), and SR 520/124<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE (Bellevue) interchange. Next steps are to continue developing the next round of projects and working with the executive advisory group to set priorities.

Mr. Henry said express toll lanes are needed in urban areas to address congestion and improve mobility. He displayed a map of the United States depicting the limited areas in which half of the country's population resides. Many of these areas use express toll lanes. He described the improved performance in all lanes after tolling was introduced in Miami on I-95.

Mr. Henry played a video depicting how express toll lanes work. The lanes will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week and the toll rates will vary from 75 cents to \$10, with an average toll rate of \$1 to \$4. He described the types of passes available and carpool policies. WSDOT will collect traffic data before and after the express toll lanes open and will monitor traffic performance on local arterials, transit impacts, enforcement, and safety.

Mr. Henry referred the Council and the public to the project web page: [www.wsdot.wa.gov/tolling/405](http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/tolling/405). Citizens may sign up for regular email updates at [www.wsdot.gov/emailupdates](http://www.wsdot.gov/emailupdates).

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Henry said a Flex Pass will work on all tolled highways. WSDOT will send a free pass to regular commuter carpoolers ([www.rideshareonline.com](http://www.rideshareonline.com)). In further response, Mr. Henry said WSDOT already uncovered the signs at express lane access points to help educate the public in advance.

Responding to Councilmember Robinson, Mr. Henry said pricing is based on destination. He said the messages on the new signs should be fairly straightforward once the lanes are open. A driver will choose a destination and be able to see the tolling rate at that time.

Ms. Robinson questioned whether toll revenues will finance noise mitigation related to the widening of I-405. Mr. Henry said the state legislature established a special account for I-405 toll revenue which can only be spent on I-405 projects. Future decisions will determine how the money is spent.

Responding to Ms. Robinson, Mr. Henry said carpool use will trigger a beacon to the Washington State Patrol that a carpool vehicle has entered the roadway. They will monitor whether vehicles have the appropriate number of people in the vehicle.

Councilmember Stokes said it is good to know that other cities are using express toll lanes and they seem to be working. He questioned the anticipated impact between NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street to SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Mr. Henry said electronic express toll lanes will revert to HOV lanes at that point for

southbound traffic. He acknowledged that the area is a challenge. However, it was not possible to build the section to Renton at the same time as the section to Lynnwood.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. Henry said current Good to Go passes should be traded for a Flex Pass in order to also use I-405 express toll lanes. SR 520 cameras will read the Flex Pass as it does now, regardless of whether it is used for HOV access on I-405. Ms. Robertson stated her understanding from an article in *The Seattle Times* that, if HOV enforcement is not effective, all of the lanes on I-405 will be tolled. Mr. Henry said that is not accurate. If there are problems with enforcement, WSDOT will work with the Washington State Patrol to increase the emphasis on enforcement. He said there are high rates of compliance in this area. However, there is a national interest in how to improve enforcement at a lower cost.

Ms. Robertson said the article also stated that there are no plans to change the HOV requirement from two to three individuals on I-5 or to add HOT lanes to I-5. She said she would like to see some equity between the use of express toll lanes in Seattle and on the Eastside. Mr. Henry said it is hard to predict what will happen on I-5 since there is not currently a specific plan. He said users of HOT lanes on highway 167 appreciate the trip reliability and look forward to similar lanes on I-405. He said it is likely there will be increasing pressure to toll more of the freeway system in the future.

Councilmember Robertson noted the high collection costs related to highway 167 tolling. She questioned the percentage of revenues that will go toward I-405 projects versus collection expenses. Mr. Henry said highway 167 was an early toll corridor and there is an initial fixed cost of developing a tolling system. As toll systems are added, the cost of collection per toll decreases.

Councilmember Robertson said she would like information on the actual collection costs. She said the gas tax per mile is inexpensive to collect, while tolls are much more expensive to collect. She would like to see the percentage of revenue that is invested in projects.

Deputy Mayor Wallace concurred that the financial performance is not particularly compelling. He observed that tolling is more effective in addressing congestion versus generating revenue.

Mayor Balducci confirmed that HOT lanes are primarily used for congestion management, while the toll revenues generate a good revenue stream for maintenance costs. In other situations, tolls are often used to finance a bridge or other capital investment. She said it is difficult to both maximize revenues and reduce congestion on the same roadway. Mr. Henry agreed. He said the express toll lanes will bring more traffic management and mobility benefits, while also providing the benefit of the revenue stream.

Mayor Balducci recalled that, when the SR 520 tolls began, there was an understanding that there would be changes in traffic patterns and traffic diversion, at least for some time period. Mr. Henry acknowledged that the first couple of weeks after the I-405 lanes open will be challenging. Part of this will be due to the system of specific access points for the lanes. He said it could be up to a year before drivers have fully established regular travel patterns. However, drivers' experience with lanes on highway 167 will help the situation.

Mr. Henry said there are legislative performance measures to monitor the system (e.g., average traffic speeds) and to require that the program cover all operating costs by the end of the second year.

Responding to Mayor Balducci, Mr. Henry said residents can obtain help from WSDOT in a number of ways including customer service centers in Bellevue and Seattle (University District). The public can access the web site [www.goodtogo405.org](http://www.goodtogo405.org), and the phone number is available on the web site.

Deputy Mayor Wallace referred to the new funding for I-405 from the state legislature and questioned the timing of the NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street road project. If that is not in the current funding cycle, he believes there should be discussion about how to move that project to a higher priority because it is part of the light rail implementation project as well.

Mr. Henry said WSDOT and City staff have been talking about how to move that project forward. He observed that the first step should be to determine how to achieve environmental clearance for the project. He said WSDOT is updating its environmental information on the project. However, the agencies do not want to complete too much work that could become outdated by the time there is funding for the project to move forward.

Mr. Wallace said he is pleased to see that WSDOT is interested in working through the design and ROW acquisition phases for the 124<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE interchange as soon as possible in order to put the project in the best position for future funding. He hopes the same strategy would apply to NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street. Mr. Henry confirmed that staff is working to determine how to sequence the funding and projects.

Councilmember Lee questioned whether the toll revenues will be significant enough in providing capital improvements. Mr. Henry said it will become more significant down the road. For the Bellevue to Lynnwood segment, WSDOT does not anticipate high revenues but they will cover operating costs. Once Bellevue to Renton is implemented (approximately 2023), travel times and revenues will increase significantly.

(b) Eastside Rail Corridor Update

City Manager Miyake opened staff's update on the Eastside Rail Corridor. He said the Mayor has been involved with the Eastside Rail Corridor Regional Advisory Council (RAC) to plan the future of the corridor.

Transportation Director Berg introduced Mike Ingram, Transportation Senior Planner, and Camron Parker, Parks and Community Services Senior Planner, the lead staff for ERC work.

Mr. Berg recalled that the Council set aside \$1 million in the budget for the rail corridor. He said the purpose of the discussion was to present information and receive feedback on how the Council might want to spend the money. Coordination on the Bellevue segment of the ERC focuses on: 1) early implementation of an interim trail in the north section of Bellevue, 2) NE 8<sup>th</sup>

Street over-crossing, and 3) coordination with WSDOT regarding the gap over I-405 and the future widening of I-405 for the Bellevue to Renton project.

Mr. Parker provided an overview of the ERC, which extends from the City of Snohomish to Renton. Part of the rail line into Woodinville is still actively used for freight. Sections of the corridor in Kirkland and Redmond are owned by the cities. He said the Cross Kirkland Corridor opened as a five-mile interim gravel trail, and Redmond is working on its central connector project. The corridor continues through approximately seven miles in Bellevue and south to Renton. A portion of the Bellevue corridor is owned by Sound Transit but the rest of the line within Bellevue and Renton is owned by King County.

Mr. Parker said the ERC contains trail easements, multiple utilities easements, and a high-capacity transit easement. All of this will be addressed through the King County Trail Master Plan process which started in the spring of 2014 and will extend through 2016. The next opportunity for public involvement is October 12. The trail through Bellevue has some of the most significant challenges of the corridor as well as some of the most exciting opportunities in terms of how it can connect to the BelRed corridor and Downtown and, in the future, over the historic rail trestle.

Mr. Parker said the ERC Regional Advisory Council consists of the owners along the corridor: King County, Sound Transit, City of Redmond, City of Kirkland, and Puget Sound Energy. The City of Bellevue is an associate of the ERC Council, which is charged with creating a trail, transit and utility asset for the region while maintaining the opportunity for future freight rail activation. The current focus is on building a regional coalition, and a stakeholder summit is planned for early January.

Mr. Ingram said the City is looking at ways for early trail implementation, similar to what has been done in Kirkland. The best opportunity for this is the north section of Bellevue, owned by King County, that could connect to the Kirkland trail. This could potentially be done in conjunction with improvements to Northup Way planned for 2017. The East Link memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Bellevue and Sound Transit obligates Sound Transit to provide interim trail improvements on its segment of the rail corridor from SR 520 to the Wilburton light rail station. Sound Transit will also be constructing trail connections to the ERC from 120<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and from 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.

Mr. Ingram said the City is working with King County to determine the project elements and costs for completing the north section of the ERC in Bellevue. The City is also discussing with Sound Transit the timing of public access for its segment of the trail. The City would like to open the trail without having to wait until the completion of the light rail project.

Mr. Ingram described staff's work on the NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street overcrossing, which is a challenging location due to property constraints. The City, King County, and Sound Transit are working to determine technical needs, develop a conceptual design, identify property needs, and seek funding opportunities. The overcrossing would be adjacent to the future light rail station. Mr. Ingram said the project is an opportunity to pursue a vision for a visually significant structure and facility.

Mr. Ingram said staff is also working on how to address the gap created along southbound I-405 when the Wilburton Tunnel was removed and the highway was widened in 2008. A certain amount of funding has been allocated in the I-405 program to restore the connection. The next step is to determine the form of reconnecting that segment.

The City will meet with King County and Sound Transit on October 1 to discuss the extension of the ERC interim trail from Kirkland to Bellevue's Hospital/Wilburton station location as well as plans for the NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street overcrossing. Bellevue officials have been invited to meet with King County Councilmembers and State Legislators in October to discuss a strategy to reconnect the I-405 Wilburton gap. The Eastside Rail Corridor Summit is tentatively scheduled for January 8 to focus on building a regional coalition for implementing the trail across the entire corridor.

Mayor Balducci said the objective is to develop a long-term vision for the corridor to serve a number of purposes. She said the Cross Kirkland Corridor was completed at a relatively low cost and is attracting development and activity along the corridor. She is eager to move forward with an interim trail in Bellevue. While the NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street overcrossing will be challenging in terms of design and construction, Ms. Balducci said it needs to happen relatively quickly for trail purposes and for people to access the light rail station and development on both sides of NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

Councilmember Robinson concurred with the Mayor and said she feels the same sense of urgency to start moving forward, especially with the early implementation of a north Bellevue interim trail.

Councilmember Stokes expressed support to move forward and said the City recognizes the importance of the corridor for the community. He encouraged strong leadership to determine how the City can have the most effective influence with the current owners of the corridor.

Mayor Balducci said there has been some discussion about the future decision-making structure, which will likely be a topic of the regional summit. She observed that the current advisory group of owners is actually more of an executive committee. She suggested that the owners will make the final decisions and could perhaps benefit by establishing a true advisory committee of stakeholders, including the City. Ms. Balducci encouraged ongoing discussion with the County about how it will structure its decision-making process.

Councilmember Chelminiak observed that completing portions of the trail in a timely manner will help the public to understand the long-term vision for the overall corridor. He is excited by the potential opportunities for the rail corridor, including its proximity and relationship to the Grand Connection.

Councilmember Robertson noted discussions about placing the trail in the footprint of the existing railroad tracks. However, the corridor is wide. If there is interest in developing a future multi-modal corridor, the center of the corridor is not the best choice for the pedestrian and bike trail, which should be placed along either side of the corridor. She questioned whether the trail costs would be higher off to the side of the existing tracks instead of on the path of the tracks.

Mr. Ingram said there are permitting and other issues which could be discussed in greater detail in the future. Councilmember Robertson suggested that this should be a regional discussion.

Deputy Mayor Wallace expressed concern about spending City funds to develop a trail on property owned by King County. He noted that Sound Transit plans to build the trail on its segment. Mr. Wallace said this is an opportunity for the County to make an investment in the City. He is interested in the County's plans for developing its land, especially north of NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street. He said King County owns the East Lake Sammamish trail, and he believes the County funded the development of that trail. He observed that the County should build the trail and the City should be involved in the planning process.

Mr. Wallace suggested that the City determine how the corridor should function within Bellevue including connections at NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street and pedestrian crossings over I-405 and NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street. This could form the basis for discussions with the owners of the rail corridor.

Mr. Wallace said that, if City funding is considered for the trail, there should be a benefit to Bellevue taxpayers beyond simply having a trail on another jurisdiction's property.

Mayor Balducci said the City of Redmond purchased its segment of the rail line because it saw a significant benefit for their citizens. She noted that she was currently in New York City where she walked the Highline, a park and trail located on an aerial abandoned rail line that was developed through a partnership of nonprofit agencies, the City, and private organizations. The facility has attracted other development along the line. Her perspective is that Bellevue has the advantage of being able to develop an inexpensive gravel trail without having to purchase the land. She supports using City funds to move forward with an interim trail.

At 8:02 p.m., Deputy Mayor Wallace declared recess to the Regular Session.

Kyle Stannert  
Acting City Clerk

/kaw