

CITY OF BELLEVUE  
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

September 18, 2006  
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

Mayor Degginger called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. and announced that an Executive Session will be held following the Study Session items.

2. Study Session

(a) Update on Sound Transit East Link Public Scoping Process

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman opened discussion regarding Sound Transit's East Link project and the public scoping process.

Don Billen, Sound Transit, provided an update on the project. He emphasized that the agency is not selecting a preferred alignment or station locations at this time.

Dr. Davidson questioned the amount of information that will be available before a ballot measure is presented in the fall of 2007. Mr. Billen said a range of alternatives will be under development but a preferred alternative will not be selected by then.

Continuing, Mr. Billen said a draft EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) will be published in the first quarter of 2008. Following the public comment period, a preferred alternative will initially be identified by the Sound Transit Board during the second quarter of 2008. The final EIS will be prepared over the following year and published. A final decision is anticipated in early 2009 after the environmental documentation is complete. This will be followed by the issuance of a Record of Decision (ROD) by the Federal Transit Administration.

The purpose of scoping is to:

- Determine an appropriate range of alternatives for study in the EIS.
- Eliminate issues that are not significant and those addressed by prior studies from the upcoming detailed EIS.
- Solicit comments on the preliminary Purpose and Need Statement as required by recent federal transportation law.

Mr. Billen said the scoping process runs through October 2 and involves four public meetings (Bellevue, Mercer Island, Redmond, Seattle). The Bellevue meeting was well attended with more than 200 people. Approximately 60 people attended the Redmond meeting. Many expressed support for bringing light rail to the Eastside and provided input regarding alignment and station locations. Residents between I-90 and downtown Bellevue are very interested in the transit alignment, and Sound Transit will continue discussions with these residents.

Mr. Billen explained that light rail is an electric railway powered by an overhead power source, which gives it the flexibility to run on the surface, in tunnels, or elevated. It is quiet, non-polluting, and can be expanded with increasing demand.

The benefits of a street level alignment are lower construction cost, convenient access to stations, an ability to integrate well with urban design features, and increased visibility of the system. Tunnels enable travel through geographic constraints, minimize impacts to existing roadways and property, and offer higher speed and reliability. Elevated systems also provide the ability to operate over uneven terrain, reduce impacts to roadways and property, and provide higher speed and reliability. Elevated is more expensive than street level, and tunnels are the most expensive method. Trade-offs in evaluating alternatives are cost, performance, accessibility to system, urban design, and construction and other impacts.

Mr. Billen described the proposed general layout of the East Link system. Segment A is the I-90 corridor between Seattle and Bellevue, where rail will travel in the center roadway with stations at Rainier Avenue and Mercer Island. This project will be undertaken following completion of the I-90 two-way transit and HOV project to add HOV lanes to the outer roadway.

Several alternatives are under consideration for Segment B between I-90 and downtown Bellevue. These include alignment from I-90 to Bellevue Way, stopping at the South Bellevue Park and Ride and continuing north on either Bellevue Way or 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue. From 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the alignment could turn east at SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and travel along the west side of I-405. Another option is for the guideway to exit I-90 at Bellevue Way and then travel on a new bridge on the north side of I-90 over to either 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue or the Burlington Northern right-of-way to continue north. Under this scenario, a station and new Park and Ride are proposed south of SE 8<sup>th</sup> Street.

Mr. Billen said a neighborhood meeting is planned for 6:00 p.m., September 27, at Bellevue City Hall. Segment C encompasses downtown Bellevue and is more challenging to design an alignment given the rapid growth in the area. Under consideration for this segment are three tunnel, two elevated, and two at-grade alternatives. One option approaches from Bellevue Way, transitions to a tunnel south of Main Street with a station just north of Main Street, and then turns

east under the NE 6<sup>th</sup> Pedestrian corridor with a station at Bellevue Transit Center. The rail would transition to street level between 110<sup>th</sup> and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenues, travel over 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue and I-405, and continue toward the Bel-Red corridor. Two other tunnel alternatives approach downtown along either 112<sup>th</sup> or 114<sup>th</sup>, turn west south of Main Street, and follow either 106<sup>th</sup> turning east under Bellevue Transit Center or 108<sup>th</sup> heading north with a station underneath 108<sup>th</sup>. These would continue up to NE 12<sup>th</sup> and transition to street level on the north side of NE 12<sup>th</sup> and continue across I-405.

One of the at-grade alternatives is a couplet utilizing 108<sup>th</sup> (southbound track) and 110<sup>th</sup> (northbound track). Each track would require approximately 15 feet and therefore a travel lane would be removed. Mr. Billen noted the City's proposal to create a roadway couplet using 106<sup>th</sup> and 108<sup>th</sup> which could work well with the light rail couplet. A second alternative travels on 110<sup>th</sup> from Main Street and turns east between NE 6<sup>th</sup> and NE 8<sup>th</sup>, behind Meydenbauer Convention Center. The third at-grade option extends the second one by traveling across I-405 on an elevated track.

Turning to the two elevated alternatives, Mr. Billen explained that one follows 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue through downtown with a station just south of Meydenbauer Center. That alternative would function best if the City implements the people mover concept being studied for the NE 6<sup>th</sup> corridor.

Referring to alternatives traveling through the block with Meydenbauer Center, Councilmember Marshall said a large construction project is underway at that location. She discouraged spending the resources to study this segment of the alternatives because it does not seem feasible. Mr. Billen said the alignment would have worked with Phase 1 of the development. However, Sound Transit staff are now aware that the project has received financing for Phase 2, which requires modification of the alternative to most likely continue north on 110<sup>th</sup> up to NE 12<sup>th</sup>. The elevated option along Meydenbauer Center must be similarly modified.

Mrs. Marshall questioned whether an alternate alignment for the Meydenbauer Center route could be to serve the Overlake Hospital Medical Center and Group Health campus via NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The hospitals are major employers in Bellevue.

Mr. Billen said this option has been discussed with City staff. However, the right-of-way is too narrow to locate the rail along NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street. In further response to Mrs. Marshall, Mr. Billen said Sound Transit staff have talked with hospital representatives, who are most interested in an alternative that would place a station along NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street with pedestrian connections to the medical campus.

Councilmember Lee asked Sound Transit to remain open to Council's interest in light rail alignment. He suggested routing the East Link through the Eastgate Park and Ride. Mr. Billen said Sound Transit remains open to comments from all affected stakeholders. He noted plans for future high capacity transit to Issaquah, which likely would serve the Eastgate Park and Ride.

Mr. Billen presented a list of other cities with at-grade and tunnel-based light rail systems. He is not aware of any light rail systems that are elevated through a downtown core.

Mr. Billen reviewed three alternatives for the Bel-Red corridor between downtown Bellevue and the Overlake Transit Center along the following routes: 1) Bel-Red corridor, 2) NE 16<sup>th</sup> corridor, and 3) SR 520. On the east end of the corridor, alternatives involve either 151<sup>st</sup> or 152<sup>nd</sup> Avenues. Light rail could travel under 148<sup>th</sup> Avenue to avoid disturbing traffic on this major arterial. Mr. Billen said Sound Transit is interested in the land use alternatives that will be identified from Bellevue's Bel-Red corridor study. Alternatives from Overlake Transit Center in Redmond follow the east or south side of SR 520, with four variations of how to enter and exit downtown Redmond. Stations are anticipated near Redmond Town Center and at a proposed terminal Park and Ride facility.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Billen said final design of the project could be completed as early as 2011 followed by initiation of construction. However, the Sound Transit Board will first have to decide how to sequence projects. Sound Transit will work with RTID (Regional Transportation Investment District) to evaluate regional construction impacts and coordinate projects. Mr. Billen said the north light rail segment from the University of Washington to Northgate will be a Phase 2 project.

Deputy Mayor Chelminiak suggested extending the 30-45 day comment period on the draft EIS to 60 days.

Responding to Councilmember Noble, Mr. Billen said it is preferable to limit the use of tunnels to dense urban areas with limited right-of-way or areas with topographic challenges.

Mayor Degginger feels it is important to have more than one light rail station in downtown Bellevue based on the number of residents and employees and projected growth.

Councilmember Marshall thanked Sound Transit for the recent meeting in Bellevue, which was well attended and reflects the community's interest in light rail planning.

Councilmember Balducci is pleased that a number of alignment options are under consideration. Responding to Ms. Balducci, Mr. Billen said the ridership forecast related to the evaluation of alternatives will be systemwide.

Mr. Noble echoed Mr. Degginger's concern that more stations will be needed in downtown Bellevue, especially with the growth projected by 2020.

Responding to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Billen said the proposed Rainier Avenue South light rail station is part of the East Link project and is anticipated to be funded from the East Subarea.

Dr. Davidson questioned the potential for Sound Transit to provide a circulator for downtown Bellevue if only one light rail station is located here. Mr. Billen said there is not a definitive answer to that at this point. However, a circulator would work best with a station at 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Referring to the third full paragraph on page 2 of the letter, Councilmember Marshall encouraged language to indicate an interest in balancing all of the neighborhood issues when comparing the Bellevue Way and 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE alignment alternative with the 118<sup>th</sup> Avenue SE and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad right-of-way. Turning to page 3, Mrs. Marshall suggested a direct reference to serving the Overlake Hospital Medical Center/Group Health campus. At the end of the second to the last paragraph, she suggested changing “noise and other” impacts to “adverse” impacts.

Responding to Mayor Degginger, Mr. Sparrman asked Councilmembers to submit comments and suggestions regarding the draft letter to staff this week.

(b) Utilities Element Electrical Facilities Comprehensive Plan Amendment (CPA)

Planning Director Dan Stroh recalled that during the Comprehensive Plan update in 2004, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 7107. This provided policy direction to balance the growing demand for energy with protecting neighborhoods from incompatible facilities.

Nicholas Matz, Senior Planner, noted the need for Puget Sound Energy to be able to provide sufficient electrical energy to service the growing demand of downtown Bellevue and other commercial areas, as well as throughout the community. He reviewed Council direction to involve neighborhood associations in electrical facilities planning, which will eventually lead to amending the Utilities Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

Mr. Matz described the Comprehensive Plan figure regarding policy UT-5, representing a schematic of electrical facilities, which essentially meets the Growth Management Act requirement for the consideration of electrical facilities in Comprehensive Plans. The purpose of the Utilities Element of the plan is to have sufficient capacity to serve the Land Use Plan. The policies balance concerns regarding safety and health with a fair and reasonable price paid for utilities products, Bellevue’s natural environment, and aesthetic compatibility with surrounding land uses.

Most, if not all, of Puget Sound Energy’s facilities in Bellevue will need to be expanded. An initial screening to identify facilities potentially incompatible with residential neighborhoods focused primarily on visual impacts. Three categories examined were: 1) existing stations that will expand their capacity within the current fenced boundary, 2) existing stations that will expand beyond their current boundary, and 3) new substations and transmission lines. Puget Sound Energy has identified only one site at this point for a new substation. Mr. Matz described photos of existing substations and transmission lines.

An initial screening of all substations and transmission lines planned for siting or expansion has been completed. Five of the 10 substations and all three transmission lines have visual impacts related to expansion. All 13 facilities are in or near residential zones. Two of the substations and one of the lines provide grid reliability. The other eight substations and two lines respond to new demand. Mr. Matz reviewed photos of the Clyde Hill substation, a screened facility in need of expansion. He described a planned new line through east Bellevue which is through a residential area but could potentially be located along the Lake Hills Greenbelt.

City staff continue to coordinate their efforts with Puget Sound Energy to: 1) Develop residential compatibility siting criteria for future planned facilities, 2) Review and consider alternative site evaluation factors, system-based and context-based, for areas with the potential for incompatibility, and 3) Identify a range of options for on-site mitigation at both existing and planned facilities. System-based factors include the role of a facility within the system plan, reliability criteria, proximity to existing facilities, the need for a certain type of equipment, and the size of the parcels. Context-based factors refer primarily to surrounding land uses.

Mr. Matz said staff will begin outreach activities to neighborhood associations in areas affected by screened facilities. This will include public meetings, open houses, and Planning Commission meetings.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Matz said he will make sure the Environmental Services Commission is invited to participate in this issue.

Mr. Chelminiak encouraged consideration of siting facilities in downtown Bellevue to serve the area.

(c) Refinements to the Development Services Management Model

Mike Brennan, Deputy Director for Development Services, provided a presentation on Development Services and a request to convert LTE (limited term employee) positions to FTE (full-time equivalent) status based on an increased workload. He reviewed a graph showing development levels since 1996. Mr. Brennan described the workload management model encompassing Development Services' functions. Currently the division has 92 FTEs, 19 LTEs, and anticipates approximately \$500,000 for the use of consultants. Mr. Brennan reviewed a graph showing staffing levels since 1990.

Mr. Brennan outlined staff's proposal to reduce the reliance on consultants to less than \$200,000 and to convert the 19 existing LTE positions to FTE status. Of the 19, 12 positions are currently filled and seven are vacant. Mr. Brennan noted the need to retain employees for longer than the three-year term of LTEs in order to keep up with the workload. It can be difficult to recruit and retain LTEs because of competing jobs.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Brennan said salaries and benefits are the same for FTEs and LTEs. The only difference is that LTE positions are limited to three years.

Councilmember Balducci questioned the need to convert all 19 LTE positions to FTEs. Mr. Brennan noted the possibility that the remaining LTEs would leave before their three-year terms end and/or they would compete for the FTE positions, leaving the LTE positions vacant.

Responding to Mr. Lee, Mr. Brennan said the division tries to manage staff positions through attrition.

- ➡ Councilmember Marshall moved to approve the conversion of 19 limited term employee (LTE) positions to full-time equivalent (FTE) status. Mr. Chelminiak seconded the motion.

Responding to Mr. Noble, Mr. Brennan said filling the seven vacant LTE positions will enable the division to reduce its consultant costs.

Responding to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Brennan noted the costs of approximately \$150,000 for a FTE position and \$278,000 for a consultant for the same amount of work.

Mayor Degginger expressed support for the staffing proposal to ensure that services are provided in a timely manner. He requested periodic reports to the Council regarding staffing levels and consultant expenditures.

- ➡ The motion to approve the conversion of 19 limited term employee (LTE) positions to full-time equivalent (FTE) status carried by a vote of 7-0.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Chelminiak, Mr. Sarkozy said the staffing plan will return to Council during the Budget process. However, tonight's decisions allow staff to move forward with converting the positions and recruiting for vacancies.

Mr. Degginger requested an update by the end of the year.

### 3. Council Business [Regular Session Agenda Item 6]

Councilmember Lee attended Bellevue Youth Theatre's production of *A Dragon's Tale*.

Councilmember Balducci attended a meeting of the Bellevue Youth Link Board, which is discussing the establishment of a youth court. She attended several transportation-related meetings including the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Transportation Policy Board.

Councilmember Noble attended the Eastside Transportation Partnership (ETP) meeting.

Deputy Mayor Chelminiak attended meetings of the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board and Bellevue Parks & Community Services Board. A Parks Board retreat is planned for Saturday, September 23.

Mayor Degginger attended the King County Council's discussion of the *Transit Now* proposal and provided input on Bellevue's interests. He met with mayors of the Points Communities, Medina, and Kirkland to discuss SR 520 planning.

Mr. Degginger invited comments regarding the draft letter to PSRC about Vision 2020+20 [provided in desk packet].

Councilmember Lee suggested revising language on the second page of the letter [second full paragraph] to indicate that the Vision should not direct funding to areas accommodating growth.

Councilmember Marshall commented that PSRC's role is to direct funding. Council's consensus was to leave the language as it appears in the desk packet version.

Mr. Chelminiak is comfortable with the sentence regarding the Vision's use as a guide to direct funding. However, he understands Council's position that the City will decide how it will accommodate growth.

Responding to Mr. Degginger, Mr. Lee agreed that the paragraph adequately communicates his position.

Referring to the fourth full paragraph on page 2, Mr. Lee suggested language to emphasize that growth planning should remain the responsibility of local jurisdictions. Council agreed to this revision.

At 8:01 p.m., Mayor Degginger recessed to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich  
City Clerk

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