

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

January 12, 2006
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Bell, Vice Chair Young, Commissioners Wendle, Yuen

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Commissioners Glass, Holler, Northey

STAFF PRESENT: Franz Loewenherz, Francine Johnson, Karen Gonzalez, Department of Transportation

GUEST SPEAKERS: None

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:31 p.m. by Chair Bell who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioners Glass, Holler and Northey, all of whom were excused.

3. STAFF REPORTS

Senior Planner Franz Loewenherz reminded the Commissioners that all emails to and from staff on city-related issues are subject to the public disclosure laws. He urged each Commissioner to create a separate email folder in which to archive all emails to and from staff.

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

5. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Chair Bell reported that he attended the December 13, 2005 joint meeting of the Chamber of Commerce/Bellevue Downtown Association where Capital Programming Manager Eric Miller made a presentation on the Transportation Facilities Plan (TFP). At the meeting there was also an update with regard to Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) projects. The group voiced concerns regarding south Bellevue Way, holding that it should be part of the

TFP; it was concluded that the group will forward a request to the City Council.

Chair Bell said he asked the Chamber of Commerce and Bellevue Downtown Association to add his name to the mailing list in order to keep informed about their meetings and interests.

With regard to the TFP, Chair Bell noted that staff is in the process of developing an Environmental Impact Statement for the plan. When that is completed, a final recommendation will be forwarded to the Council.

6. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

7. STUDY SESSION

A. School-Based TDM Program

Transportation Outreach Coordinator Francine Johnson explained that the goal of the school-based transportation demand management pilot program is to reduce traffic congestion at elementary schools by encouraging students to walk, bike, carpool or ride the bus to school. The two-year program is jointly funded by the Transportation Planning and Traffic Management Divisions of the Transportation Department. All schools experience traffic congestion to some degree, but each school's situation is slightly different. The pilot program is geared toward tailoring an individual approach for each of the participating schools to meet their specific needs.

Ms. Johnson said there are five schools participating in the program, which is in its first year: Clyde Hill, Enatai, Newport Heights, Phantom Lake and Sherwood Forest. Next year, all Bellevue School District elementary schools located within the city limits will be eligible to participate in the program.

In the spring of 2005 staff visited each of the participating schools and conducted manual counts of the number of students arriving at the school by car. Those figures were used in developing the baseline. Bus ridership count information from the Bellevue School District was also received and used to calculate the number of students who either walk or bike to school.

During the summer of 2005 staff met with the principals and PTA representatives of the participating schools to try and gain a better understanding of the issues at each school and what modes are likely to work best at each school. The participating principals each had opinions regarding what should be encouraged at their school.

Ms. Johnson said a package of tools was developed and offered to each school for building a customized program. The first tool in the package is an information campaign that is kicked off at the beginning of the school year using school newsletters and flyers. Information was also sent out in the kindergarten orientation packet; for one school the information included a

school-site map aimed at keeping people from parking in the crosswalks.

The carpool coordination tool raised an issue, namely that many kindergarten, first and second grade students are required to use car seats. Coordination of car seats among parents works best where the students live close to each other. The bike rodeo is a tool used to teach children about bicycle safety, how to access the schools and where to park their bikes; the tool is somewhat limited in that some of the schools only allow fourth and fifth graders to ride their bikes to school. Special assembly presentations is one tool that can be used effectively. Another important tool is identifying potential grant opportunities to help construct sidewalks where needed and to purchase or replace safety equipment and improve crosswalks.

The walking school bus concept involves having a few parents leading children to school on foot, following the same route every day and stopping at the same time very much like a school bus does. The concept is easy to implement, and participating parents share the responsibility which means they only have to walk their children to school once or twice each week. A walking school bus route map has been developed for each of the participating schools. The International Walk To School event that occurs each October is used to kick off the program. In order to keep attention focused on the program, events could be offered once a week or once a month. The program works best when operated in the fall and spring months.

Ms. Johnson said the Pedbee Pathfinder Club is an incentive-based program. Each child receives a passport booklet and must fill out a permission slip that provides both a name and information about how the child arrived at school before starting the program. When the permission slip is turned in, the student receives a small carabineer they can attach to their backpack. Students start at the pioneer level, and each time they walk, ride their bike or ride the bus they get to fill in a star in their passports. As they work through the passport they attain higher levels, and as they do so they are awarded a brightly colored ribbon. The highest level is master pathfinder and on attaining that goal the student is awarded a colored rubber bracelet to wear. To keep the program interesting for the children, the tickets are used for surprise drawings throughout the year for gift certificates. The tickets are also used to track travel choices.

Ms. Johnson said the importance of having the school principals and the PTA fully supporting the programs cannot be overemphasized. In addition, the programs will only succeed when there are dedicated people at each school participating in program implementation. The early school start times can be a challenge, because some parents drop their children off on the way to work. Some parents have gotten the idea that the program must be accepted all or nothing, so staff is trying to get the message out that the program encourages students to walk, bike, carpool or ride the bus as frequently as possible whether that is daily, a few times a week or a few times a month..

Commissioner Wendle noted that many of the schools have concerns about the number of parents who drive their children to school. While there has not been a large safety issue, there certainly has been a lot of congestion in the neighborhoods. Ms. Johnson agreed, pointing out

that some schools will not let children access the school from certain points and the reason is the parents are driving halfway down the road, dropping their kids off and then making a U-turn in the street, which makes it awkward for kids who are walking and for the traffic driving past. The schools have notified the city with respect to issues involving crosswalks and the like, and where necessary police officers have been sent out to increase enforcement.

Commissioner Wendle asked if the city will fund expanding the program to all of the elementary schools. Ms. Johnson said the program budget was set at a level that will accommodate expanding the program to all elementary schools in Phase II.

Commissioner Wendle noted that the school district has a policy in place that kids living closer than a half mile from a school are not permitted to ride the bus; they also have other policies that limit ridership to some extent. Ms. Johnson said staff has been working with the school district. The district does allow for ridership where children walking would encounter very busy arterials such as Bellevue Way because they do not want the children crossing major intersections. The school district is on board with encouraging students within the ridership zones to ride the bus.

Commissioner Young asked if there is a national program or other model that was followed to develop the Bellevue program. He allowed that the program is very creative. Ms. Johnson said staff did research programs that have been implemented in other areas and added their own ideas to the mix. Commissioner Young commented that he lives near the Woodridge elementary school and said it is impossible to drive by the school as school lets out in the afternoon; the traffic sprawls for a block or more out from the school into the residential streets, and many of them are just idling while they wait. In the morning the problems are not much better.

B. Radar Sign Evaluation Report

Neighborhood Programs Manager Karen Gonzalez said stationary radar signs have been in use in Bellevue for about five years. In 2005 staff made the decision to take a more comprehensive look at how well the signs work both in the short term and for the long term. She provided each Commissioner with a copy of the final study report.

Stationary radar signs are typically placed in locations where the standard traffic calming measures are not feasible because of traffic volumes or roadway geometrics but where speeding problems exist. There are currently 20 stationary radar signs installed in Bellevue throughout the city on streets with volumes of 3000 vehicles per day or more and where vehicle speeds are at least 15 percent over the posted speed limit.

Ms. Gonzalez said each sign contains an internal radar unit. As cars go by the radar determines the speed and posts the number to its reader board. The city has purchased and installed signs from three different manufacturers: 3M, MPH and VCalm. The first permanent radar sign was installed in 2000 on Lakemont Boulevard and the data shows that it has been

effective along with all of the signs that have good visibility. On average, speed reductions of between one and five miles per hour have been seen. The 3M LED-based signs are not as bright and the signs are smaller, and they have proved to be less effective. The brighter, larger MPH and VCalm signs have been far more successful in reducing speeds.

The radar signs cost between \$5000 and \$6000 on average. Installation costs range between \$5000 and \$10,000 based on how close the site is to electricity. Staff makes sure the adjacent property owners are supportive of the signs before they are installed, and sometimes that means locating them further away from where electricity is readily available. The city budgets for the installation of three to four signs annually, primarily through the Traffic Safety Technology Fund. Grant opportunities are also sought.

The signs require minimal maintenance. There has been some moderate vandalism experienced, some of which has been severe enough to destroy the signs. A threshold speed can be set for each sign, and in most cases speeds of no more than ten or fifteen miles per hour over the posted speed are shown on the reader. Some flash when the threshold speed has been exceeded; others read "slow down." The VCalm signs have strobes that flash when the threshold speed has been exceeded, and in some cases the strobes have been masked over with tape.

Ms. Gonzalez said the study concluded that the signs work very well if they have sufficient sightlines and visibility. The community likes them and requests to for new installations are constantly being received. Under the established guidelines, installations will be carried out only in areas where the posted speed limits are being exceeded by at least 15 percent; where the posted speed limits are 25 to 30 miles per hour; and where physical traffic calming measures cannot be used. Some signs are planned for locations near crosswalks to test their effectiveness.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Young, Ms. Gonzalez said the state legislature has approved using cameras to ticket those who run red lights. They have not yet approved allowing radar signs to have cameras to catch speeders. The radar signs do collect data with regard to vehicle speeds for staff to study, but they are not used as enforcement tools. Photo radar systems are more comprehensive and expensive.

Commissioner Yuen asked if the radar signs can be made self-sustaining with solar panels. Ms. Gonzalez said a solar unit was tested but did not do too well. The technology is continuing to improve, however, and that may be the answer in the future. The city has and operates three mobile radar units mounted on trailers. The city also has radar signs mounted on a dolly that are fully portable and can be placed anywhere within a neighborhood; the units run on batteries that can be charged by plugging them in at night. Those units have been very popular and have a waiting list.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Wendle, Ms. Gonzalez said staff is not sure why the radar sign located on 100th Avenue NE has not proven to be effective in reducing speeds.

C. Retreat Preparation

Chair Bell commented that the Commission retreats that have been conducted over the past few years have not been overly effective. He said he would like to see more effort put into having the retreat be constructive and yield positive results.

Commissioner Young stressed the importance of taking time out annually to get the Commission together with staff, the Council liaison, the City Manager and department leaders just to touch base if nothing more. He said he would find it helpful to spend more time on regional questions such as funding and priorities and how Bellevue fits into the picture. The annual Commissioner survey is an important tool, though it should not take up a great deal of time; overall things are going quite well, but there may be some issues that need to be addressed.

Chair Bell allowed that the retreats held in the past have not been a waste of time. It would be helpful to have questions submitted ahead of time so staff can be prepared to answer them.

Commissioner Young said the fact that a new gas tax has been implemented means there will be funding available for regional projects. It would be good to have a quick review of alternative funding sources and how they could fit in with future plans for the city.

Mr. Loewenherz said it would be helpful for staff to have each Commissioner's list of discussion questions submitted by February 9.

Commissioner Wendle commented that the Commission retreat in 2005 was his first and because he was new he did not know what types of questions to ask. He proposed that the two new Commissioners may face the same issue. It would be helpful for staff to take a few minutes to share with the Commission their goals and plans for the future, both short term and long term.

With regard to the annual Commissioner survey, Mr. Loewenherz said the comments tend to be the same year after year and that the better approach is simply to send out an email asking each Commissioner to provide comment on specific areas without any attempt to providing a rating. He said retreats can mean a lot of different things to different people; they can be useful to energize groups, they can serve as teambuilding exercises, and they offer opportunities for members to get to know each other better. He said staff will support whatever approach the Commission wants to take.

Mr. Loewenherz said the retreat is slated for February 23 at the Bellevue Botanical Gardens. The City Manager, the Council liaison and the department director have all been scheduled to be there on that date. The caterer has also been lined up.

Commissioner Wendle suggested conducting a discussion of the report generated by former

Commissioner Ron Matthew on the Commission's charter and mission. It would also be helpful to hear about the work program for each of the divisions and how the Commission might help. Chair Bell agreed, adding that he would like to hear whether or not the executives believe the Commission helps them complete the work program for the Department of Transportation.

Mr. Loewenherz commented that the extent to which the Commission can help with established projects that are under way is quite limited. The Commission also has a limited role to play when it comes to regional issues. Commissioner Wendle agreed that the Commission cannot be expected to be instrumental in regional issues, but the Commission should be kept informed. The Commission is established by the Council and has standing, and the array of projects and project choices that are contemplated are certainly within the purview of the Commission to be kept up to date.

Commissioner Yuen questioned the degree to which the comments made to staff by the Commission are taken to heart. He noted that often various Commissioners will report on specific problems without ever hearing back if anything has been done to address the problems. A good example is SE 38th Street near the tunnel. The alignment was changed about three years ago and a stop sign was included for vehicles coming out of the vehicle inspection facility. Cars coming out of there encounter a three lane configuration, and the left-turn lane near Shucks narrows down to nothing; drivers think they can make a left turn but find themselves without a turn lane, and the traffic coming up behind them threatens to slam into them. He said he has raised the issue before but never got a response. Mr. Loewenherz said it is his intention to respond to every concern raised by the Commission. He asked the Commissioners to let him know if there are other concerns that need follow up.

Commissioner Yuen commented that coming out of the tunnel at night drivers encounter the island that is off center, requiring a slight turn to the right to miss it. Not all of the lights in the tunnel are working, and the situation is somewhat dangerous. Mr. Loewenherz said he will attempt to get a response to those issues from the traffic operations group.

Commissioner Young suggested the retreat should have three primary components: how things are going generally; what transportation issues the City Manager and the City Council will be looking at over the next three to five years, including how the Commission fits into the regional planning process; and what transportation issues in Bellevue will need to be addressed in the next three to five years.

Commissioner Wendle said he would like for the Commission to be given a better understanding regarding the land use choices the city continues to make relative to NE 10th, Bel-Red Road and Factoria specifically, and the city's philosophy about how to approach joint land use and transportation planning studies.

Chair Bell agreed and stressed the need to have a meeting with the Planning Commission to get their input on the subject of how land use and transportation planning is tied together. Mr.

Loewenherz allowed that the Transportation Commission has for some time wanted to meet jointly with the Planning Commission but logistics has kept it from happening; he explained that the Planning Commission's schedule is ambitious and their calendar gets booked up well in advance. He noted that some review time has been scheduled in April to focus on the Wilburton transportation/land use study, a very rigorous analysis that is under way aimed at making the corridor work with the potential redevelopment of the properties along auto row.

It was agreed that time should be taken at the meeting on February 9 to finalize the agenda for the retreat. It was also agreed to discuss the Ron Matthew memo on February 9.

8. OLD BUSINESS

Chair Bell said he has received a number of comments from citizens regarding the 156th Avenue SE trail. He said work on the trail progressed to a certain point and then just stopped. Staff has said the project is waiting for the property developer to put in some utilities; that was supposed to be done before Christmas, but nothing more has been accomplished. Mr. Loewenherz said he will check into it.

9. NEW BUSINESS – None

10. PETITIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS – None

11. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. November 10, 2005
- B. November 17, 2005
- C. December 1, 2005

Motion to approve all three sets of minutes as submitted was made by Commissioner Young. Second was by Commissioner Yuen and the motion carried unanimously.

12. REVIEW CALENDAR

- A. Commission Calendar and Agenda

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

- B. Public Involvement Calendar

13. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Young and was seconded by Commissioner Yuen.

Chair Bell adjourned the meeting at 8:31 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date

Chairperson of the Transportation Commission

Date