CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
PEDESTRIAN/BICYCLE MASTER PLAN WORKSHOP
MINUTES

October 9, 2014
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
City Council Conference Room 1E-113

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:	Chair Lampe, Commissioners Bishop, Simas, Tanaka, Zahn
COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:	Commissioner Larrivee
STAFF PRESENT:	Franz Loewenherz, Andreas Piller, Department of Transportation
OTHERS PRESENT:	None
RECORDING SECRETARY:	Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 p.m. by Chair Lampe who presided.

2. ROLL CALL

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Larrivee who was excused.

3. PROJECT SCOPING

Senior Transportation Planner Franz Loewenherz observed that the current pedestrian/bicycle plan was adopted in 2009. It accomplished a great deal by way of clarifying the network vision and the extensive array of improvements that are needed to make Bellevue a great place to walk and bike. Some projects have materialized but not as envisioned in the plan, which is not surprising given that there are 430 projects in the plan, all of which are outlined at a very high level.

Mr. Loewenherz said the city regularly acts to update its plans. Part of the work to update the pedestrian/bicycle plan will be focused on accomplishing a greater degree of certainty as to what the projects will look like. The update will also take into account changing market conditions and evolving land uses. The East Link project and station area planning work, along with the Transit Master Plan, highlight the importance of access to transit by pedestrians. Consistency with regional projects is a prime reason for updating the plan, including the Mountains To Sound Greenway trail, the SR-520 trail, and the Eastside rail corridor project.

In 2009 the pallet of tools with which to address network gaps was fairly limited. In the intervening time there have been a tremendous proliferation in the kinds of facilities

implemented nationwide. Some facilities were informed by projects in Canada and Europe, including protected bike lanes.

The Commissioners were provided with copies of a document that reflected the perspective of the new Secretary of Transportation relative to how to advance non-motorized projects with safety in mind. The USDOT is demonstrating a much greater degree of receptivity to some of the more innovative design treatments.

Mr. Loewenherz said the 2009 plan identifies some specific performance metrics aimed at determining success. Those metrics have been and continue to be tracked, and the process of updating the plan provides for a mid-point check-in for the ten-year targets embedded in the plan. The option also exists to make changes to the targets or think about other metrics.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Zahn, Mr. Loewenherz said one of the desired outcomes is to be more realistic in terms of what can be expected to be implemented in the coming years.

Mr. Loewenherz stated that the Commissioner members will be asked to join staff in January 2015 in requesting from the City Council direction to launch the update endeavor. The role the Commissioners will play will be focused on communicating the importance of the initiative.

Commissioner Zahn said that it was valid to undertake this project given all the reasons outlined in the presentation. It is especially relevant given the lack of momentum achieving the targets outlined in the 2009 plan.

Commissioner Tanaka said he would not be looking to move the goalposts. If progress toward achieving the targets is lagging, the community should know that. Changing the targets could make it look as though the city is further along than it actually is. The effort put into the 2009 plan was focused on providing a rational pedestrian and bicycle network; the fact that projects are not tracking with the targets should be held up as a reason to continue the commitment.

Commissioner Bishop noted that an important aspect of this plan update is making projects ready to compete with CIP projects.

Commissioner Simas noted his support for updating the plan. He said he joined the Commission at the tail end of the 2009 process. The report that came out of that process is very solid. It is dismaying that more has not been completed in the intervening years, but another full-blown in-depth analysis with the creation of a new plan is not really warranted. The real problem is not having resources committed to actually enact the plan.

Mr. Loewenherz shared with the Commission the project timeline. He noted that the scoping phase is under way and will continue until the Council approves launching the update initiative. The current schedule has January 26, 2015, as the date for going to the Council with the proposed scope, project principles, and engagement strategies. Initiation of the project is

part of the ongoing budget discussion.

Public engagement is under way informally given that the project is not officially launched. The preliminary scope is focused on the big picture but has been informed by a lot of consultation with representatives from many city departments and from external audiences who were asked to comment on how the document could be made more useful. Bellevue was recently designated as a silver-level Walk Friendly Community; the update process offers the opportunity to complete the application process for Bicycle Friendly Community recognition. The awards are useful in that they reflect a peer review. Non-motorized programs are evaluated based on engineering, encouragement, education, enforcement and evaluation. Mr. Loewenherz noted that knowing what the existing conditions are is key to initiating a planning project. Generally, taking that step requires reviewing and relying on census data. Unfortunately, the available dataset for the non-motorized arena is not as robust as that available for transit.

Commissioner Bishop asked if the list of tasks will include conducting actual pedestrian and bicycle counts. Mr. Loewenherz said there is some census data and the city has a limited count program. He said the work will include making the best use of existing data. Collision data is available and it will be reviewed to determine where pedestrian and bicycle collisions are occurring and what explanations there might be for those conflicts.

Another aspect of existing conditions will involve determining the lay of the land relative to the roadway network, specifically where the volumes are heavy and where the speeds are high. That information informs the comfort level of pedestrians and cyclists. Data concerning road widths and the number of travel lanes will be part of the analysis.

Commissioner Bishop observed that the assessment of traffic volume, vehicle speeds, and number of lanes also indicates whether Bellevue should provide bicycle facilities and/or encourage bicycle use in a given place. In some instances there may be a more appropriate parallel route. Regarding the use of GIS, staff is encouraged to consider available right-of-way (not just the existing curb-to-curb pavement width). He also requested that Bellevue improve its ability to conduct more comprehensive counts of pedestrians and bicyclists as part of this planning effort, as better data will help Council determine an appropriate level of support for non-motorized projects when allocating CIP funds. Staff should consider incorporating INRIX data into the count methodology.

Chair Lampe asked if determining pedestrian/bicycle levels of service is more of an art than a science. Mr. Loewenherz said it is an evolving practice. There is guidance from the Transportation Research Board, and some of that methodology will need to be adapted given that the city does not have all of the data that is called for.

Commissioner Zahn called attention to the protected bike lanes recently installed by Seattle that include signals for bicycles. She asked what the before and after data shows in terms of use by cyclists. Mr. Loewenherz said the lanes only recently were opened and they are

monitoring usage. The press release claimed that rider usage tripled in a week, but that claim should be viewed with some skepticism. There has already been a collision which triggered the need to remove several parking stalls that were creating a blind spot for the cyclists. Commissioner Zahn said she knows someone who lives in Switzerland, where pedestrians are separated from cyclists in order to avoid collisions between the two. Mr. Loewenherz said it is along the high-speed high-volume corridors were cyclists are the most concerned about their safety if pedestrians are sharing the facilities. In an ideal world every mode of travel would have separation.

Mr. Loewenherz allowed that the 2009 plan falls a bit short on being actionable. To correct that, the updated plan will need to dig a little deeper into what the constraints associated with implementing individual projects are. That will require some field work.

Commissioner Bishop commented that while there are 425 projects in the 2009 plan, about 125 of them are listed as high priority projects. There is, however, no attempt made to determine which of the 125 are the most important. The top ten should be made evident.

Mr. Loewenherz said undertaking the additional level of scrutiny will help to avoid scenarios like the 108th Avenue NE project where the plan calls for bike lanes on both sides, but where the community was strongly opposed to that approach. Some targeted engagement of residents living along the boundaries of the high-priority projects will be needed, along with some realistic determination of the amount of funding available to work with. The work to dig deeper will involve looking at grade and environmental constraints and will bring the high-priority projects to about the ten percent design level—far enough to identify any fatal flaws and planning level costs.

The work will play into the development of an implementation strategy for the package. The priority rankings will be retained, but the work will go further in identifying which projects should be implemented right away, all with the intent of making the plan more actionable.

Commissioner Bishop pointed out that during the process of updating the downtown plan the group identified several streets where it would make sense to use sharrows as an inexpensive option for providing bike lanes. There are very few streets in downtown where it would make sense to include bicycle lanes because of the area's superblock structure. Outside of downtown there are a few places where lanes might make sense, including along 116th Avenue NE and Newport Way from Coal Creek Parkway to 164th Avenue SE. He noted Eastgate Way as a successful example of implementing bicycle lanes without impacting other traffic.

Commissioner Zahn allowed that while the document is intended to be aspirational, it would be important to get from Council some indication of what they have an appetite for in terms of how many projects to advance. Because budgets are situational and markets change, while a five-year implementation plan is likely reasonable, a ten-year implementation plan may be too long of an outlook.

Commissioner Bishop cautioned against saying the process will move projects to ten percent design. He suggested it should be closer to one percent. Bike projects can be very expensive and it is easy to spend a pile of money on preliminary design. He proposed developing typical cross sections and a dollar-per-foot metric.

Commissioner Simas expressed support for the overall direction of the plan update. However, he pointed out that the 2009 report landed on a philosophy of building bicycle priority corridors, and he suggested that philosophy is still valid and the city should be focusing its resources on finishing those corridors. There is no need to conduct a general review and focus on little pieces here and there in light of the fact that that discussion has already occurred. The piecemeal approach to implementation yields useable but unconnected segments. Time and money spent on looking for and analyzing opportunities will use the time and money that could be put toward actually building paths and accomplishing the goals that have already been set out. If the current process were to identify five to ten projects that do not lie along one of the identified priority bicycle corridors, this would represent a change in philosophy and altering the 2009 plan may be required. The question of whether or not the existing philosophy is still valid or needs to be revised should be answered first before launching into any in-depth study.

Commissioner Bishop noted that the Commission has strongly supported a bikeway project along SE 16th Street between 148th Avenue SE and 156th Avenue SE. At the budget hearing when the Council was asking what is important, however, several representatives of that community came forward to say they had not heard any locals calling for bike lanes on that route. He said he got the strong sense that the Council would be deleting the project from consideration.

Mr. Loewenherz said it was his hope that the focus on implementation would respond to what the Commission is asking for by way of a plan. Currently there are 435 projects in the plan, most of which are high-level concepts, and many of which do not materialize as intended when they go to design. It is also true that some projects have not been sequenced in a manner that generates the greatest benefit for the entire network. The envisioned planning process presents the opportunity to go beyond the high, medium and low priorities and to develop an action strategy. That will involve focusing on the north, south, east and west corridors and asking the question of what it will take to make each real.

Commissioner Simas said he would be fully supportive of an approach that turns the philosophy into reality. If, however, there are sections that are getting blown out and therefore will never get built, that begs the question of whether the original philosophy continues to be valid. It would be worthwhile to conduct a discussion on whether or not the tenets of the 2009 plan are valid and which parts, if any, need to be changed.

In response to Chair Lampe's request for background on how the 2009 plan was developed, Mr. Loewenherz noted that the 2009 plan was heavily informed by a community outreach effort that pointed out the lack of connectedness, bike lanes that end abruptly, and regional facilities that do not connect to other regional facilities at the extremities. Mr. Loewenherz

said it would be helpful to the staff to know that the plan recommendations have teeth. The problems become manifest when moving into the design/engineering of a corridor project and a squeaky wheel along that corridor gets the attention and the connective network comes undone. He agreed there should be some discussion with the Council as to how much import they will give to the vision for a connective network.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Bishop about why some of the facilities run parallel and not too far from each other, Mr. Loewenherz explained that the needs of different cyclists are reflected in different facilities. Trails tend to appeal to families with children, those who are less comfortable biking in the streets; bike lanes on streets are more suitable to those who commute by bike and more experienced riders. There also is the fact that some projects simply will not materialize quickly. The Mountains to Sound Greenway Trail is a case in point. The $40 million project will take a long time to implement. The same is true for the Eastside Rail Corridor facility, and in both cases a nearby parallel route might be achievable sooner.

Mr. Loewenherz said the implementation strategy section will be project-specific but will also identify programmatic steps to be taken in support of the vision and goals. Equally important is the need for improved collision data collection and sharing: the police department, which records the collision record, and the engineering department, which designs safe projects, do not always talk to each other resulting in the loss of the very data needed to engineer a fix.

With regard to bicycle and pedestrian counts, Mr. Loewenherz commented that a lot of research has been done. Putting the research into practice, however, remains in its infancy. A bike counter that has been installed on the Freemont Bridge in Seattle is used both to record data and to provide encouragement and education by displaying the count. The process of updating the plan brings with it the opportunity to explore the various available technologies and to incorporate them into Bellevue's ITS Master Plan. Counts are important given that without the ability to measure success the task of justifying investments is made more difficult.

The Commissioners voiced support for exploring technologies and how to do a better job of understanding the market segment.

Commissioner Zahn commented that the 116th Avenue NE project does not involve any capital dollars; all that is envisioned is restriping the segment. She suggested, however, that the Commission needs to know what appetite the Council has for taking that action without solid data. It will not be possible to state definitively that the project will increase bicycle ridership by a certain percentage. The project puts a lot of faith in the "build it and they will come" philosophy.

Commissioner Bishop said while that is true, the beginning point is so tiny the project will almost make no difference. He said his concern is going ahead with the project and finding out that it degrades the vehicular element resulting in greater congestion. That outcome will generate a lot of resistance from the Council.

Commissioner Zahn pointed out that restriping will cost very little and once it is done the true outcomes can be calculated. The city should be willing to try new things, assess how they work, and be just as willing to take a step back if something does not work.

Mr. Loewenherz said a number of traditional methods will be used to engage the community in the process, including working with partner agencies on public events, establishing an online presence, organized rides and walks, workshops, and institutional engagement. Specific outreach will be made to businesses, seniors and youth, and it is likely social media will be utilized. Five high school students from Interlake High School are interning eight hours per week with the Transportation Department, and they will be supporting the process by interviewing their parents and fellow students in the school district. While not perfect, anecdotal information does give a personal face to data considered in the plan update.

Commissioner Bishop said his argument against using social media is that it draws self-selected interested individuals, and their comments get concentrated in a report. The city conducts a survey every two years in advance of the budget process and it goes out to a much broader range of people. Mr. Loewenherz said it will be necessary to rely on a broad array of datasets. Commissioner Zahn pointed out that those likely to self-select are the very people who are most interested in and most likely to use pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and they are the ones who need to speak up about what they want to see. Non-pedestrians and non-bicyclists are far less likely to provide helpful data about how to improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

Mr. Loewenherz commented that jurisdictions large and small across the country, from Fargo, North Dakota, to Lawrence, Kansas, have been doing temporary pop-up protected bikeways in recent years. They are intended to capture the imagination of what is possible in an experimental, fun and playful way. Such an initiative could be carried out in the spring when the weather is nicer as part of the process. It could be done in conjunction with Bike to Work Day or consistent with other events. The Commission was not fully sold on the idea but was willing to keep it in the mix of options.

Commissioner Bishop voiced his concern that any attempt to develop multimodal levels of service will be predicated on identifying bicycle projects as more important than any other mode of travel, resulting in increased weight being given to bicycles and giving them priority in the CIP. Mr. Loewenherz said no approach will be used to give bicycles an advantage over other modes of travel.

Answering a question asked by Commissioner Simas, Mr. Loewenherz suggested that the definition of a Frequent Transit Network can be a screen against which to assess which sidewalks should be given priority. Commissioner Simas agreed that is an area ripe for evaluation.

Commissioner Zahn said she was intrigued by the notion of encouraging property owners to

undertake sidewalk improvements themselves with something like an Adopt A Sidewalk program. Mr. Loewenherz said there was a jurisdiction that used something akin to crowd funding to generate money for sidewalks; the residents were able to purchase bonds and received a favorable return on their investment while contributing to the non-motorized network.

Commissioner Bishop stressed the need to sync the pedestrian/bicycle projects to the city's pavement overlay program. Mr. Loewenherz agreed it should be integrated into the concept.

The Commission was clear about wanting to be strategic relative to what can get done in the next five years. Commissioner Zahn commented, however, that conducting surveys and community outreach could result in building expectations that will not be met. Mr. Loewenherz said there is a balance to be sought. Reaffirming the vision will help to contextualize the plan. The 2009 plan is silent as to what should be done next; it essentially ends after the high, medium and low ranking of projects.

Commissioner Zahn suggested that infrastructure investments without education may still not result in more safety; both are required in a comprehensive program. Mr. Loewenherz said one thing the 2009 plan called for was a concerted effort relative to safety education, something that has not been done. He said he could bring to the Commission a presentation highlighting programs that have been implemented by other communities and the Commission could choose which one to recommend the Council should adopt. It was agreed that would be a good idea.

4. REPORTS FROM COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Bishop said he attended the neighborhood leadership gathering on October 7 representing the West Lake Sammamish Parkway Association. He said there were 125 people in the room, all leaders from their respective communities from around the city. Mayor Balducci was present and asked if traffic is an issue for any of the neighborhoods; about 100 hands were raised in response to the question. It was clear the neighborhoods are focused on what is happening relative to traffic in their areas.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Lampe adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Kevin McDonald — 11/13/14
Secretary to the Transportation Commission — Date

Kate Lampe — 11/13/14
Chairperson of the Transportation Commission — Date