

Frequently Asked Questions

August 2011

WHAT IS THIS PLAN UPDATE ALL ABOUT?

This work will update the transportation portion of the Downtown Subarea Plan which was adopted in 2004. That long-range planning effort included a horizon extending out to 2020 – a date that is rapidly approaching. There is a need to plan further out to 2030 to assure the Downtown transportation system can function well and support expected new jobs and housing in the longer term.

The plan update will consider and incorporate forecasted growth in population and employment through 2030. This updated and extended planning effort will include planned transit improvements such as Rapid Ride bus service and East Link light rail. Other regional projects, including SR 520 improvements and its tolling, will also play a key role in the function of Bellevue’s transportation system. These and other projects and plans, such as the City’s updated Bel-Red Plan, were not included in the currently adopted Downtown Subarea Plan and need to be reflected moving forward.

WHAT WILL BE NEW IN THIS PLAN UPDATE?

The transportation plan will include an updated list of transportation improvements that will accommodate expected growth in Downtown, the city’s primary growth center. There is already a list of transportation improvements in the current Downtown Plan. Part of the work will be to update the project list to accommodate all types of trips – driving trips, as well as transit, walking and bicycling trips - that will help residents, employees and visitors get around in Downtown Bellevue. The plan update will also look at ideas and options to increase the amount of on-street parking and loading zones to benefit Downtown businesses and residents.

WHY FOCUS THE PLAN UPDATE JUST ON DOWNTOWN?

Downtown Bellevue is designated in regional plans as a regional growth center. Based on current forecasts, Downtown Bellevue is expected to accommodate approximately 75 percent of the City’s planned employment growth and over 50 percent of the planned residential growth between now and 2030. Therefore much of the city’s ability to attract new economic development and housing is dependent on Downtown mobility. This project will take a comprehensive look at Downtown mobility and closely analyze transportation projects that can sustainably accommodate expected growth. The scope of the work will also include roadway

corridors people use to get to and from Downtown and the possible effect of traffic on the quality of life for Downtown residents and in surrounding neighborhoods.

In summary, the work will identify an updated “multimodal” strategy to accommodate Downtown transportation demand. The product of this work will include recommendations to improve roadways, transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and traffic signal operations, as well as outlining possible measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from Downtown transportation sources.

WILL THIS PLAN UPDATE ADDRESS CONGESTION?

Since there will be a “multimodal” strategy, the plan update will address roadways, transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities – striving to balance the needs of everyone who will want to get around in Downtown Bellevue. All of the projects already identified in the Downtown Subarea Plan and the Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan will be reviewed to make sure that they are still the right projects to meet expected needs, or if a different approach may provide a better solution.

MY BUS GETS STUCK IN TRAFFIC – WILL THIS PLAN UPDATE FIX THAT?

Downtown Bellevue transit service in 2030 will be a combination of light rail and bus service. A significant focus of this work will be to improve transit reliability by helping buses get through congested traffic and to help pedestrians get safely and comfortably to the bus or train. Preliminary ideas include adjusting signal timing on transit routes, and providing better transit rider facilities such as shelters and real-time transit information.

WILL PEDESTRIANS AND BICYCLISTS BE CONSIDERED IN THIS PLAN UPDATE?

Every year, more pedestrians and bicyclists are using Downtown sidewalks and streets for commuting, errands, and recreation. The Downtown Transportation Plan Update will look at ways to better accommodate these “non-motorized” trips that will continue to grow in number as new offices, retail and housing is built. Recommendations for projects that improve the environment for pedestrians and bicyclists will likely be a key part of the strategy to improve Downtown mobility.

WILL TRAFFIC SIGNAL ADJUSTMENTS BE INCLUDED IN THE PLAN UPDATE?

Bellevue uses advanced technology in its traffic signals to improve the efficiency of the roadways, and travel time savings have already been reported. Intelligent transportation systems (ITS) technology can continuously adjust signal timing; provide real-time traffic information, system monitoring and performance measures; reduce transit delays and help

emergency services. Through this plan update we will look for additional opportunities, including advances in technologies to improve signal operations Downtown.

WHEN WILL PROJECTS IDENTIFIED IN THIS PLAN UPDATE GET BUILT?

This plan update will include an updated project list and extend the planning horizon to 2030, and it will also recommend a phased implementation plan, a prioritization strategy and potential funding resources for improvements to the transportation system. As part of the phasing and prioritization considerations, threshold conditions will be described that would trigger the need to implement a project – such conditions may include poorly functioning intersections, increased traffic volume, inadequate transit capacity, or increased transit or auto travel time. Some projects could be designed and implemented within the next few years while other projects will take longer to implement as need dictates and funding is available. An effort will be to define projects that achieve multiple benefits so that they are competitive for grant funding and support Downtown economic vitality.

HOW WILL THE PUBLIC BE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING THIS PLAN UPDATE?

There will be a wide range of innovative and emerging strategies in public involvement used throughout the plan update, such as web based information-sharing and social networking, as well as the more traditional approaches of community meetings, focus groups and newsletters. The City Council has directed that the Transportation Commission serve as the primary advisory body to oversee the work program and to provide a set of final recommendations to Council. The Commission will meet on the second Thursday of the month to work on this plan update, and these meetings are always open to the public. Staff will provide briefings to other boards and commissions, in particular the Planning Commission, which will be responsible for providing recommendations on possible amendments to the Downtown Subarea Plan. There will also be significant input and ongoing interaction with the Bellevue Downtown Association and other Downtown and neighborhood stakeholders.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE PLAN UPDATE IS COMPLETE?

When its work is completed on the plan update, the Transportation Commission will send a final report to the City Council. After reviewing recommendations in the final report, the Council may initiate amendments to the transportation portion of the Downtown Subarea Plan, which would require a comprehensive plan amendment. Amendments to the Downtown Subarea Plan would be managed by the Planning & Community Development Department and processed through the Planning Commission.

WHAT IS THE TIMELINE FOR THIS PLAN UPDATE?

The work on the Downtown Transportation Plan Update will take approximately 18 months. At the end of the plan update, the Transportation Commission will transmit a recommendation to the City Council.

The following graphic highlights key anticipated milestones for the Downtown Transportation Plan Update.

