

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Extended Study Session

February 14, 2011
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room 1E-113
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Davidson, Deputy Mayor Lee, and Councilmembers Balducci, Chelminiak, Degginger, and Robertson

ABSENT: Councilmember Wallace

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:04 p.m., with Mayor Davidson presiding. He noted that an Executive Session was scheduled for the end of the meeting.

2. Communications: Written and Oral

- (a) Renay Bennett spoke on behalf of Building a Better Bellevue and expressed support for the East Link light rail B7 alignment. She recalled that in 1991, City staff recommended that a proposed rail alignment along Bellevue Way be deleted from Metro's screening process, and that any rail alignment be placed along I-405 in the BNSF corridor. On February 25, 1991, the City Council voted unanimously to adopt staff's recommendation. Ms. Bennett testified that in 2002, the City Council removed from further discussion the widening of both Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE. She provided additional history and encouraged the Council to move forward consistent with past policy decisions.
- (b) Eugenie Rivers spoke on behalf of Move Bellevue Forward, a nonpartisan coalition of community leaders from at least 20 Bellevue neighborhoods who are dedicated to a progressive long-term vision for Bellevue. She spoke in support of Sound Transit's preferred B2M light rail alignment along Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue SE, connecting to a downtown tunnel. Ms. Rivers observed that there is broad community support for the B2M alternative. She is opposed to using the City's limited resources to continue to revisit alternatives to the preferred route, and she asked the Council to consider the needs of all Bellevue neighborhoods.
- (c) Gary Ritner expressed concern about spending more money to continue to study the light rail B7 alternative. He feels this is a waste of money, given that the Sound Transit Board unanimously supports the B2M alignment.

- (d) Chris Peeters expressed concerns regarding the Puget Sound Energy (PSE) high voltage transmission project. He recalled that he testified before the Council in November 2010 about the consequences of the proposed power line location with regard to emergency radio communications. Mr. Peeters submitted a packet of information on the issues and how they have been addressed in other parts of the country.

3. Study Session

- (a) Council Business and New Initiatives

Councilmember Balducci requested an update from staff on the project addressed by Mr. Peeters.

Ms. Balducci reported that during the last Eastside Transportation Partnership (ETP) meeting, a letter from the SeaShore Transportation Forum was circulated, which comments on proposed federal legislation to terminate the Small Starts portion of the New Starts program. The letter is written on behalf of the Metro Rapid Ride program, and the ETP was asked to draft a similar letter. Councilmember Balducci said that ETP is asking the City Council to provide feedback on the proposed letter.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted that invitations have been distributed to the Council regarding the 10-year mid-plan review of the Committee to End Homelessness. The meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 2, at Bellevue City Hall.

- (b) Project Update on East Link Light Rail B7-C9T to NE 2nd Street Portal Alternative Concept Report

City Manager Steve Sarkozy opened discussion regarding the East Link light rail project, noting that this is the first check-in with the Council on the consultant's work related to the B7-Revised alternative.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman recalled that the Council approved a contract with ARUP North America to conduct a detailed analysis of the B7-Revised alternative for a portion of the East Link alignment. Mr. Sparrman introduced John Eddy, ARUP Project Manager; Richard Prust, ARUP Deputy Project Manager; and Maher Welaye, Bellevue's Project Manager.

Mr. Eddy reviewed the project timeline. Mayor Davidson noted that Sound Transit's East Link Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is scheduled to be released in June.

Mr. Eddy said that a number of agencies have provided information to the consultants including Sound Transit, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Puget Sound Energy, and King County. A public meeting on January 25 had 185 attendees who signed in, and there was considerable input on the project. Comments addressed neighborhood impacts, the A2 Station/Park and Ride, ridership, environmental impacts, traffic, property acquisition, construction, cost, and BNSF rail corridor issues. A majority (66 percent) of the comments

related to neighborhood impacts and station locations. Mr. Eddy said a second open house is scheduled for March 8 from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. Information to be presented will address stations, alignment, environmental impacts, property displacements, and traffic.

Mr. Eddy explained that ARUP is coordinating with Sound Transit to input B7-Revised alignment and station data into Sound Transit's ridership model. Responding to Councilmember Degginger, he said the model is based on standards established by the Institute of Transportation Engineers.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Lee, Mr. Eddy said ARUP understands some of the weaknesses of Sound Transit's regional model for specific studies like this, as their model works on a regional scale. He described ARUP's work as a more fine-grained local analysis. The ridership report will detail the inputs into the model as well as relative tradeoffs. It will be vetted by individuals skilled at forecasting and understanding ridership and origin-destination modeling.

Mr. Sparrman said the project team discussed this issue and determined that using Sound Transit's model would be the best way to achieve a comparable analysis.

Continuing, Mr. Eddy said that right-of-way acquisition costs are likely to be considerable. However, Sound Transit elected to not share its analysis of private property and ROW acquisitions with ARUP. As a result, ARUP will develop its own property costs using current assessor data and market comparable sales. Sound Transit has agreed to participate in a review of ARUP's analysis, which will enable everyone to understand any differences.

Mr. Eddy described the updated route alignment, which begins with the A2 station alternative at the Bellevue Way and I-90 interchange. Alternative locations also studied were SE 34th Street and the potential for splitting into two Park and Rides (A2 and 118th Avenue SE), but these were found to not be feasible.

Responding to Councilmember Degginger, Mr. Eddy said the option of two Park and Rides/Stations and the costs were not justified by the origin-destination modeling.

Mr. Sparrman noted that City staff asked ARUP to identify any opportunities for optimizing the alignment. Mayor Davidson said he appreciates ARUP's expertise in this regard.

Mr. Eddy reviewed ARUP's study of the layout of the A2 station, construction costs, visual impacts, noise impacts, as well as traffic and parking impacts to the Enatai neighborhood and the Bellevue Way and I-90 ramps. He described proposed modifications to the station design.

Responding to Mayor Davidson, Mr. Eddy said walking distances are not compared to those at airports. However, they were compared to walking distances at other Park and Rides. The walking distance at Eastgate is approximately 500 feet. The longest walking distance with the A2 station is approximately 1,300 feet.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. Prust said the Eastgate walking distance is from the corner of the parking lot to the bus loading zone. Ms. Robertson said that a number of people walk from that Park and Ride structure to the freeway on-ramp bus stop. She asked the consultants to check that walking distance.

Councilmember Degginger noted that the consultants' proposed modification moves buses to the top of the parking structure. He questioned the number of buses per day and the number of hours of operation per day. Mr. Eddy said it operates at least 20 hours per day. He will provide data on the number of buses.

Councilmember Degginger questioned whether moving the buses to the top of the structure will increase noise impacts for the surrounding neighborhood. Mr. Eddy said they will address that topic later.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Eddy reviewed graphic depictions of the A2 Station elevations from a number of perspectives. ARUP has elongated the structure in order to lower the height.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Eddy confirmed that some of the surrounding homes will have views of, and over, the roof's structure.

Mr. Eddy described key traffic issues associated with the A2 alternative. The traffic analysis will look at peak hour traffic/intersection volumes and level of service.

Mr. Sparrman noted that one potential mitigation measure for the existing South Bellevue Park and Ride is adding a southbound HOV lane. The City is in discussions with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) about whether this could be allowed. WSDOT's current position is that a traffic signal will not be allowed at that location, which potentially restricts turns into the parking structure. Responding to Councilmember Degginger, Mr. Sparrman said the issue of the southbound lane is relevant for both the existing and A2 Park and Ride options.

Councilmember Degginger questioned whether lengthening the structure requires more land. Mr. Eddy said that the footprint is the same with the design modifications.

Mr. Eddy explained that the proposed A2 site is in the environmentally sensitive Mercer Slough as well as in a high seismic area. ARUP will be investigating a longer span alternative, which was also suggested by a citizen, and some ground improvement techniques to mitigate the environmental impacts.

Responding to Mayor Davidson, Mr. Eddy said ARUP is using information, including geotechnical data and reports, from WSDOT.

Mr. Eddy reviewed issues associated with the shared usage of the BNSF rail corridor for freight and light rail including cost impacts, more stringent alignment criteria, increased vehicle

clearance, integrated signaling systems, temporal separation of freight and light rail operations, and maintenance considerations. Shared usage of the rail corridor also raises issue regarding governance of track use and rail banking. ARUP is analyzing and comparing an option with shared light rail use plus a trail or freight component versus light rail tracks only.

Responding to Councilmember Degginger about the rail banking issue and potential configurations, Mr. Sparrman said the current assumption includes a light rail track through the BNSF corridor while preserving 18 feet, which is the minimum for freight rail, to accommodate the King County trail easement legal rights. That easement could later be converted to freight rail if desired. In further response, Mr. Sparrman concurred that such a situation creates legal issues that have not been resolved.

Councilmember Balducci questioned whether the ARUP study takes legal ownership interests into consideration. Mr. Sparrman confirmed that King County has an easement right to build a trail through the BNSF corridor, which is incorporated into one option for the light rail alignment.

Moving on to Sturtevant Creek, Mr. Eddy explained that ARUP looked for an at-grade or near at-grade solution that would reduce project costs related to the creek. The creek contains Chinook and Sockeye salmon, and there is a spawning area at this location. It is a Type F stream under the Critical Areas Ordinance, which allows essential public facilities if there are no alternatives. Mr. Eddy described issues and considerations associated with the creek and three East Main Station options.

Responding to Councilmember Degginger, the consultants described modifications to Main Street. Mr. Eddy clarified that Main Street is on a bridge with the light rail underneath.

Mr. Degginger questioned the source of funding for the Main Street bridge. Mr. Sparrman recalled that the I-405 Master Plan and the NE 2nd Street interchange project require raising the Main Street bridge and shifting it slightly to the south. However, WSDOT currently has no funding for the project.

Mayor Davidson questioned whether light rail could go deeper to avoid having to build the new Main Street bridge. Mr. Prust said the elevation at the moment allows no raising of Main Street, but a structure would still be required, which is essentially what the bridge would be. Once Main Street is rebuilt, the alignment could be extended.

Mr. Welaye clarified that the independent bridge refers to the Sound Transit track only. Mr. Eddy added that the bridge would be focused on one of the alignments to accommodate light rail. It would not involve the reconstruction of the whole block of Main Street.

Councilmember Degginger requested more detailed, descriptive drawings of the proposed design.

Mr. Eddy continued his review of the three Main Station options, noting that all three connect to the Downtown Bellevue Transit Center. Option 1 is elevated with a station at the Sheraton site. Options 2 and 3 are at-grade at the creek with stations at the Red Lion site.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. Prust said the curve radius with Option 3 is the minimum allowed by Sound Transit. He said it is within Sound Transit's criteria and should not cause a wheel squeal issue.

Mr. Eddy continued to describe the Main Station options.

Mayor Davidson referred to the area around SE 8th Street, noting that it would be good to be able to avoid impacts to the Greenbaum site. He said the storage facility is designed to allow building over it.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted the potential for the future extension of light rail to Issaquah. He questioned the minimum bridge height required over the slough that would allow light rail to travel over I-405 and east to Issaquah. Mr. Eddy said they will provide that analysis at the next meeting.

Mr. Eddy reviewed upcoming milestones. Technical memoranda will be developed over the next couple of months on a number of topics including station and alignment concepts, ridership, traffic impacts, early environmental screening, costs, right-of-way acquisition, and noise. The next public meeting will be held in March, and a second Council briefing is scheduled for April.

Councilmember Degginger asked what the consultants will be presenting to the public. Mr. Eddy said it will be a condensed version of tonight's presentation. Mr. Degginger expressed concern about the ability to solicit meaningful public input without having a defined alternative and cost estimates. Mr. Eddy said ARUP wants to present their work to date, including the challenges and opportunities that have been identified. The second public meeting will address environmental impacts, Main Street Station options, traffic issues, and other items. Mr. Eddy said the information will be presented as a work in progress.

Councilmember Balducci said she likes the way the task is being approached, with ARUP bringing new creativity to the project. A key driving concept behind the study is to achieve an apples-to-apples comparison. She observed that some of the items mentioned in tonight's presentation go beyond that level of comparison. One example is mitigation, which has not been studied in great detail for any of the Sound Transit options.

Ms. Balducci said she is pleased that project notices have gone out to the Enatai neighborhood, which will be affected by the A2 station. She expressed concern, however, that the areas receiving information about the project are the only areas represented by public comment. Ms. Balducci said this is a regional and local project that is being treated as a sub-local project, and input should be solicited from the entire community. She explained that the Sound Transit capital committee recently reviewed comments on the Supplemental DEIS, which were largely concentrated in the areas most directly affected. However, there were also many comments from

throughout and outside of the community, indicating a large majority of citizens in favor of the B2M alternative. Councilmember Balducci expressed concern that input is not being solicited from the larger community.

Ms. Balducci observed that any East Link alignment will have to be coordinated with and accommodating of other government agencies. If WSDOT will not allow certain elements too close to the I-90 interchange, then those items are not a reasonable part of any alignment. If King County wants to build a trail on its easement, the City has to consider the fact that the County bought that easement.

Ms. Balducci recalled Mr. Eddy's comment that ARUP will cross-check its property and ROW acquisition estimates with Sound Transit. She encouraged them to do the same with ridership modeling and estimates.

Councilmember Balducci asked City staff to comment on how the Council and City will proceed with the study. Mr. Sparrman said the goal is to present the second update to the Council in early April, which will involve a number of technical memoranda on key issues and considerations. At that point the Council will determine whether to continue with further study.

Ms. Balducci recalled previous discussions that this study could potentially make the B7 alternative cost competitive and ridership competitive with the B2 alignment. She said the B2 has higher ridership and a cost that is approximately \$150 million lower than the B7. She is hoping that there will be sufficient information at the study's tipping point to enable a true comparison between the B7 Revised/Optimized option and the B2 alignment.

Responding to Mayor Davidson, Councilmember Balducci clarified that her intent was to suggest how the information might be organized and presented by the consultants in a way that will best help the Council to compare options and reach a decision.

Councilmember Robertson thanked the consultants for the presentation and commented that she thought the open house worked well. She wants the consultant to feel unconstrained about building a better mouse trap and looking at creative options. She is pleased that ARUP will consider mitigation work in its cost estimates. However, she noted that Sound Transit's alternatives do not include mitigation costs for comparison purposes.

Councilmember Chelminiak suggested expanding outreach efforts to downtown residents and employees. He thanked the consultants for the presentation. Mr. Chelminiak said it would be helpful to receive the consultants' materials earlier before the next update in order to have more time to review them.

Mr. Chelminiak noted that some citizens found the idea of splitting into two Park and Rides/Stations to be appealing. However, it sounds like that is not a feasible option. He questioned how this will be handled with the public. Mr. Eddy said the next open house will update the public on the consultants' findings on this and other issues.

In further response to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Eddy said ARUP focused on keeping the A2 station above ground as much as possible in order to keep costs down. He said ARUP will segregate the cost estimates for comparable features from those features that cannot be compared with Sound Transit's work to date.

Mr. Chelminiak observed that citizens might like or oppose specific aspects of the project. However, he noted that any given feature, such as a green roof on the parking structure, interacts with other aspects of the plan and has an impact on evaluating and costing the overall project.

Deputy Mayor Lee concurred with suggestions to reach out to a broader base of citizens as part of the study. He appreciates looking at innovative ideas. He sees a number of challenges with the Main Street Station and suggested there might be a better alternative.

Mr. Sparrman said that the direction to ARUP was to analyze a station at that location. However, the Council could decide to not consider a station at that location at all.

Deputy Mayor Lee opined that it would be appropriate for the Council to reconsider this issue. Mr. Eddy said the value of the station will be informed by the ridership estimates as well.

Councilmember Degginger agreed with suggestions to expand outreach throughout the broader community. He commented that the presentation demonstrates the complexities and challenges with all of the alternatives. He expressed concern with the A2 Station related to bus movements and noise, and he looks forward to the consultants addressing these issues.

Councilmember Robertson said it is important to compare the noise impacts for both the A2 and existing South Bellevue Park and Ride options. Mr. Sparrman confirmed the intent to do so.

Responding to Ms. Robertson about noticing, Ms. Sparrman said projects are included in the *It's Your City* newspaper when possible. He estimated the cost of separate direct notices to all residents to be approximately \$10,000.

Mr. Welaye noted that the East Link project has been featured in *It's Your City*, and mailings have gone to 7,000 households including those who have asked to be notified of East Link activities. Information is available on the City's web site as well.

Councilmember Balducci said it is important to send individual mailings to Downtown households and businesses, as they will be directly affected by the light rail project and station location decisions. She reiterated that East Link is a regional project and warrants a broader range of input.

Councilmember Robertson clarified that she wants the consultants to look at mitigation, despite her concern that there is not comparable data available from Sound Transit for the other alternatives. One of the priorities identified by the Light Rail Best Practices Committee was exceptional mitigation in all parts of the alignment.

Councilmember Balducci said she believes that Sound Transit's cost estimates include mitigation costs, although they are not itemized. She reiterated her suggestion from the Council's recent retreat that a study session be scheduled to discuss the mitigation measures that the Council would like to see.

Councilmember Chelminiak observed that it might be difficult to discuss mitigation details for a route that is not specifically defined. However, he would like to discuss mitigation for all alternatives along the entire East Link route.

Mayor Davidson thanked the consultants for their presentation.

4. Executive Session

At 8:28 p.m., Mayor Davidson declared recess to Executive Session for approximately 30 minutes to discuss one item of labor negotiations.

At 9:05 p.m., the Executive Session was concluded and the meeting was adjourned.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

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