

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Special Meeting
Joint Meeting with Sound Transit Board

February 11, 2010
1:30 p.m.

Meydenbauer Center
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Davidson, Deputy Mayor Lee, and Councilmembers Balducci, Chelminiak¹, Degginger, Robertson, and Wallace

ABSENT: None.

1. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order at 1:40 p.m.

Aaron Reardon, Chair of the Sound Transit Board of Directors, provided opening remarks and thanked the City for hosting the event.

Mayor Davidson welcomed the following Sound Transit Board Members in attendance:

Aaron Reardon, Chair
Fred Butler, Vice Chair
Claudia Thomas, Vice Chair
Claudia Balducci
Dow Constantine
Jan Drago
David Enslow
Jake Fey
Paula Hammond
John Marchione
Joe Marine
Mike McGinn²
Julia Patterson
Paul Roberts
Pete von Reichbauer.

¹ Councilmember Chelminiak arrived at 2:20 p.m.

² Mayor McGinn arrived at 2:30 p.m.

Mayor Davidson said he looks forward to opening this dialogue between the City Council and the Sound Transit Board. He introduced David Knowles, facilitator for the meeting, and thanked Sound Transit and Bellevue staff for their work on this project.

Mr. Knowles noted his previous experience working with both the City of Bellevue and Sound Transit. He thanked citizens for their involvement in the planning process, and announced an open house scheduled for February 18 at Bellevue City Hall from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Knowles briefly reviewed his background in municipal planning and noted his current work as a consultant with CH2M Hill. He reviewed the plan for today's meeting, and introduced Kristin Hull, public involvement consultant from the CH2M Hill Portland office.

Mr. Knowles set the stage for the discussion and its purpose of finding common ground regarding the implementation of light rail through Bellevue. He asked attendees to introduce themselves and to comment on both their hopes and fears regarding Bellevue and the region.

Chair Reardon, Snohomish County Executive, said he hopes to create an open dialogue from which to go forward, with each party gaining an understanding of each other's interests. He looks forward to an outcome that will meet the needs of Bellevue and the region.

Mayor Davidson noted his profession as a dentist. In 1993, he was a Bellevue City Councilmember and was appointed to the Regional Transit Authority (RTA), the predecessor to Sound Transit. More recently he served as Council liaison to Bellevue's Light Rail Best Practices Committee, which studied systems nationwide and visited some jurisdictions on the West Coast with light rail. Dr. Davidson serves as Chair of the WRIA 8 (Lake Washington/Lake Sammamish/Cedar River) Salmon Recovery Council. He noted his interest in the impacts of public policy to wildlife and habitats, as well as to humans.

Vice Chair Butler, Issaquah Deputy Council President, said he hopes to leave the meeting with a greater understanding of the various alternatives under consideration for Downtown Bellevue and their related issues. He said it is important to keep in mind the commitments made to the voters who supported Sound Transit Phase 2 and its light rail projects. Responding to Mr. Knowles, Mr. Butler invited the Bellevue City Council to maintain an open mind and a willingness to consider any and all comments.

Ms. Patterson, King County Councilmember, said she too is here to listen and to keep an open mind in determining the best solution for Bellevue. She noted her obligation to be true to the promises of the regional ballot measure with regard to ST 2 and its costs. Ms. Patterson said she represents South King County, an area in which light rail has gone through two suburban cities, Tukwila and Seatac. She is aware of how difficult this process is for suburban cities.

Councilmember Degginger said he has served on the Bellevue City Council for approximately 10 years, and his family has lived in the Puget Sound region for four generations. His hope for light rail is that it helps Bellevue to continue to be the major metropolitan center that it is within the region. He noted that Bellevue has a critical role in the economic health of the region as the

second largest sales tax generating city and the second largest job center in the state. Mr. Degginger hopes that light rail will be part of the solution for the long-term transportation needs of Bellevue, which is currently underserved by transit. He wants a light rail alignment that will complement local land uses. He would like light rail's development through the Bel-Red corridor to become a model for the region and nation, and he hopes that future generations will be able to say that this generation got it right. Mr. Degginger said he fears that solutions could be determined by political and/or economic expediency.

Mayor Marine, Mukilteo, described the Board's role of working with communities to plan a light rail system that will serve them well. He feels that today's meeting provides a good opportunity to discuss and consider a number of alternatives and suggestions.

Mayor Enslow, Sumner, said he is pleased to have the voters' support for light rail on the Eastside. He recalled the creation of the Cascade Water Alliance to meet regional water needs, which he feels provides a good model for regional light rail planning as well. Mr. Enslow looks forward to a solution that meets the needs of both Bellevue and the region.

Councilmember Balducci noted that she is a member of the Sound Transit Board, but that she is speaking as a Bellevue City Councilmember. She recalled her interest, when she decided to run for the City Council, in the Great Place Strategy outlined for the downtown. The tenets of the strategy are that the downtown be viable, livable, and memorable. Her hope for light rail is that it serve these three goals in meeting the community's significant transit needs. Ms. Balducci noted her background in labor negotiations, and spoke to the need for both sides to be open to compromises.

Ms. Thomas, Lakewood City Councilmember, said she considers Bellevue citizens as her citizens as well, because she is serving in a regional role and has a responsibility to all cities and their residents. She hopes that today's meeting will bring greater understanding and knowledge, and she noted that trust is built over time. Ms. Thomas encouraged a look to the future in building a light rail system. She feels it is important for the group to work together as a unit despite individual differences and to recognize that everyone will likely not be happy with every aspect of a solution.

Councilmember Robertson said she has confidence that everyone in the room wants what is best for the region and their community. She noted her background as a land use municipal lawyer, Planning Commission member, and Co-Chair of Bellevue's Light Rail Best Practices Committee. She decided to run for the City Council last fall because of her strong interest in light rail and that it be implemented right for Bellevue and the region. Ms. Robertson said it is important to connect major activity centers, and to provide light rail service that is fast, efficient, and reliable. She described the Committee's visit to light rail systems in San Diego and San Jose. When asked what they would do differently if they could do the projects over again, both agencies said they would have gone underground through their downtowns because their at-grade systems are too slow. Ms. Robertson noted that some feel that Portland's at-grade system works well. However, while Bellevue is a key destination in the region, many riders will be traveling through Bellevue and will not want to be slowed down when going through its downtown. Ms. Robertson noted her preference for using the Burlington Northern railroad right-

of-way for the B segment and a tunnel through the downtown for Segment C. She wants to build the system right the first time.

Mr. Roberts, Everett City Councilmember, thanked the City of Bellevue for suggesting and planning today's forum. He noted his background as a planning director and a public works director, and his interest today in listening and learning. He described Everett's concentration of aerospace and manufacturing employers, and commented on the importance of connecting regional activity centers, jobs, and housing. Mr. Roberts said this is the first time Everett voters have supported a Sound Transit measure, and they did so even though light rail to Everett is not included in the ST 2 package. His fear is that the project will become distracted by other major projects. He said it is critical that ST 2 be implemented as promised, in order to build future support for Phase 3.

Mr. Fey, Deputy Mayor of Tacoma, commented that many citizens are counting on effective regional light rail service. He learned through Tacoma's experience with a citizen advisory group that costs do matter, and he feels it is important to provide the system within the costs presented to voters. With regard to the Sounder commuter train, Mr. Fey said Tacoma did not get everything that it wanted but it got much of what it wanted. He noted the responsibility of elected officials to achieve compromises that benefit the public.

Deputy Mayor Lee said he is in his fifth term on the Bellevue City Council. He thanked the Sound Transit Board for this opportunity to share Bellevue's objectives and principles, and he looks forward to working toward common goals. His hope is for a light rail system that works for both Bellevue and the region. Mr. Lee's fear is that the project will not be done right. He expressed concern that despite his long history as a Bellevue elected official, no one from the Sound Transit Board has contacted him about his views. He has provided input and spoken at public hearings but has not received feedback on his communications. He looks forward to a meaningful discussion of the issues beginning with today's meeting. Mr. Lee expressed support for the B7 alternative and said he would like further analysis of this alignment. He wants to ensure that construction impacts associated with the light rail project will be minimized and mitigated. He encouraged a candid discussion about the goals and issues associated with the project.

Ms. Hammond, Secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), expressed support for an integrated transportation system that includes light rail. Her hope is to provide an alignment that will achieve the highest ridership and benefit the public in traveling to work and other destinations. One of her fears is a project that is not an asset in terms of the character and context reflected in Bellevue.

Mr. Marchione, Mayor of Redmond, said he has served on the Sound Transit Board for two years. Prior to that he worked in downtown Bellevue for 10 years and utilized public transit. He stated that the Eastside cities must work together, and they will succeed or fail together. His fear is that a decision will not be made, and that the project will not be completed in a timely manner that is responsive to the ballot measure approved by voters.

Mr. Constantine, King County Executive, said he has served on the Sound Transit Board for a number of years. His hope is that the light rail project can effectively serve the region and

individual communities. He encouraged respect for the existing character of communities, and the use of design elements that will complement individual cities. County Executive Constantine is concerned about costs and the impacts of the recession on the project. He cautioned against making decisions based on the current downturn in revenues, and encouraged a project that looks to the future.

Councilmember Wallace noted that he is a new member of the Bellevue City Council, and he works as a real estate lawyer and President of Wallace Properties. He served as Chair of the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce and Bellevue Downtown Association Transportation Committee. His hope is that the East Link project can identify a solution that balances Sound Transit's goals of providing regional light rail service with Bellevue's goals of protecting the character and quality of single-family neighborhoods and maintaining the road network. He wants East Link to complement Bellevue without radically changing it, and supports grade-separated light rail configurations for all segments. He hopes to work within Sound Transit's existing tax structure to finance light rail. He noted that Bellevue's tax revenues are needed for roads, parks, utilities, and public safety. Bellevue has all of the spending demands it can handle without raising additional taxes on constituents to pay for light rail.

Ms. Drago said she is a new member of the King County Council and of the Sound Transit Board. She previously served for a number of years on the Seattle City Council and most recently chaired its transportation committee. She has lived and owned a business in Bellevue, and has owned property in Bellevue for many years. She is focused on what this region will look like in 30 years, as she has seen significant change during the past 30 years. She noted the need for effective transportation to support growth and economic viability.

Councilmember Chelminiak has served on the Bellevue City Council for six years, and is currently President of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) Economic Development District forum. He supports a tunnel through downtown Bellevue and feels this is critical to ensuring that East Link will work. He sees light rail as a significant asset to the community and the region that must be done right. Mr. Chelminiak described his commute by bus this morning, which was interrupted by a vehicle stuck in an intersection. This is one of his fears in terms of an at-grade alignment. Mr. Chelminiak lives adjacent to downtown Bellevue. He feels that a decrease of 25 percent in downtown ridership is significant, and it would mean more cars and buses on downtown streets. His primary fear is the potential for a major transportation mistake. He noted his years of reporting the traffic from the perspective of a helicopter, and he wants to avoid the types of problems that he observed.

Mr. McGinn, Mayor of Seattle, strongly supports light rail and hopes to implement a system that is good for all communities and responds to future needs. He favors mixed use development that is connected to transit and pedestrian facilities. His fear is that current planning will be based too much on the past rather than focused on the future, which includes the potential for higher gas costs and restrictions on fossil fuels.

Mr. Knowles summarized the themes of the comments including the significance of this long-term investment and the need to do it right. He noted comments by Sound Transit Board members regarding the importance of fulfilling the commitments made to voters with the Phase 2

package. Mr. Knowles spoke to the group's comments regarding the need for mutual trust in advancing this project.

2. Presentation and Discussion of Downtown Concept Design Report

Don Billen, Sound Transit, opened staff's presentation of the key findings of the February 2010 Downtown Bellevue Light Rail Concept Design Report. This report was developed by Sound Transit and City of Bellevue staff and a team of consultants from CH2M Hill, Hewitt, and IBI.

Mr. Billen recalled that the Sound Transit Board identified an East Link preferred alternative in May. Most of the project is approximately halfway through preliminary engineering and at a 15-percent design level. Preliminary engineering for the Downtown Bellevue segment has been suspended pending the outcome of the current discussion and analysis process. The project is in its fourth year of the environmental process. Preliminary engineering and the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) are slated for completion this year. The identification of the Downtown Bellevue preferred alternative is anticipated in April. Final design would begin next year, and construction could start as early as 2013. The goal is to implement service to Bellevue by 2020 and to the Overlake area by 2021.

Mr. Billen reviewed that last year the City of Bellevue recommended a tunnel for the Downtown segment, with a crossing of I-405 near NE 6th Street in order to serve the Wilburton area on the east side of I-405 and to provide a station in the hospital district near NE 8th Street. The Sound Transit Board selected an at-grade alignment as the Segment C preferred alternative, but remained open to future consideration of a tunnel if funding could be identified.

Mr. Billen spoke to the recession and the 20 percent decrease in revenues for Sound Transit Phase 2. He noted that a collaborative review of the project has identified new alternatives for the Downtown Bellevue segment, including a shorter tunnel with a crossing near NE 6th Street as well as two new at-grade alternatives also crossing near NE 6th Street. The focus of these options is to accommodate the City's interest in serving the Wilburton area.

Mr. Billen explained that a value analysis effort resulted in a recommendation that the approach into Downtown Bellevue be reconsidered with an alignment along 112th Avenue as a potential cost-saving measure. Late last year the City requested, and the Sound Transit Board agreed to, the evaluation of an elevated alternative on 114th Avenue next to I-405. Mr. Billen noted that a series of public workshops, elected officials briefings, and stakeholder meetings, along with intensive work sessions between staff and the consultant team, resulted in the Concept Design Report presented today.

Mr. Billen reviewed the four new options under consideration. The first is C9T incorporating a tunnel under 110th Avenue NE between Main and NE 6th Street with stations on Main Street, near the Bellevue Transit Center, and in the Wilburton/hospital area.

The second is C9A, which also uses 110th Avenue NE and includes three stations. It is approximately 75 percent elevated and 25 percent at-grade. Option C11A is an at-grade alignment using 108th Avenue NE with stations at 108th Avenue and Main Street, Bellevue Transit Center, and the hospital district.

The fourth alternative is C14E, which is elevated along 114th on the west side of I-405, then travels east between NE 6th and NE 8th Streets to connect to the BNSF right-of-way, where it travels for a short distance through the hospital district. This option provides one station in the hospital district north of NE 8th Street and one station near the Bellevue Transit Center, with a moving sidewalk connecting to the Transit Center and a pedestrian bridge to Meydenbauer Center.

Mr. Billen said the evaluation criteria were drawn from the EIS process and the City's Light Rail Best Practices Committee process. These include costs, land use accessibility, light rail ridership, traffic operations, environmental impacts, construction effects, construction risks, and consistency with plans and policies.

Bernard van de Kamp, City of Bellevue Regional Projects Manager, reviewed an analysis of pedestrian access to the light rail system under each of the four alternatives. He observed that the 108th Avenue alternative serves the highest number of people, followed by the 110th Avenue alignments, whether at-grade or in a tunnel.

Mr. Billen reviewed ridership and travel time forecasting for the four alignments. Ridership is approximately 25 percent higher with the downtown alignments than with the 114th Avenue alignment along I-405. East Link system-wide ridership is highest with the tunnel alternative, which combines good downtown access and relatively fast travel times. The 114th Avenue elevated alternative has slightly faster travel times.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed traffic operations under the four alternatives. He explained that Bellevue's traffic system prioritizes travel on NE 4th and NE 8th Streets, and this will need to be maintained to facilitate traffic flow in and out of the Downtown. This results in longer travel times on north-south streets for both cars and at-grade light rail.

Mr. Billen referred the group to page 13 of the report for a table summarizing the comparison of the four alternatives. He reviewed the costs of each alternative as follows: 1) Tunnel - \$990 million, 2) C9A - \$640 million, 3) C11A - \$680 million, and 4) C14E - \$560 million. The tunnel option exceeds the Sound Transit budget by approximately \$285 million. Mr. Billen said the value analysis team recommended changing the approach of Segment B into Downtown Bellevue to continue along 112th Avenue instead of swinging over to 114th at SE 8th Street. This has a cost savings potential of \$50 million to \$100 million for the at-grade and tunnel alternatives. The 112th/114th alignment requires slightly less noise mitigation, but the 112th Avenue alignment reduces ecosystem impacts by avoiding a creek and wetlands to the east.

Councilmember Robertson questioned whether there has been an analysis of the impact that future traffic congestion would have on at-grade light rail service. Mr. van de Kamp said assumptions regarding traffic accidents and other potential incidents were not built into the model. He acknowledged that this presents risks in terms of light rail reliability. Ms. Robertson suggested that staff analyze this issue further to better determine the feasibility of an at-grade option.

Responding to Board Member McGinn, Mr. van de Kamp said the analysis reflects a transportation mode split that is higher than current levels. He said this meets or exceeds the commute trip reduction (CTR) goals for Downtown Bellevue. In further response, Kevin O'Neill, Bellevue's Assistant Director of Transportation, said the model does not include assumptions about VMT (vehicle miles traveled) reduction. However, it is based on the City's land uses, which are factored into the PSRC adopted transportation network.

Responding to Board Member Hammond, Mr. van de Kamp said the analysis reflects a 2030 horizon that is aligned with the PSRC 2040 Plan.

Councilmember Wallace asked if ridership for the C14E alternative could be increased by adding a station. Mr. van de Kamp said the modeling did not consider a third station for that option. It is possible that an elevated station could be added at Main Street and 112th. He speculated that it would likely increase ridership somewhat. However, this would depend on the overlap of the service area for each station as well as surrounding land uses. Mr. Billen said the best opportunity for increasing ridership would be to shift the station location to the west.

In further response to Mr. Wallace, Mr. Billen said both B7 and B3 impact Sturtevant Creek along I-5. However, B7 avoids the wetlands to the south. In response to Mr. Wallace's question about the visual impacts to the Surrey Downs neighborhood, Mr. Billen reviewed simulated drawings of the alternatives.

Councilmember Degginger questioned the future impacts to surface street traffic at downtown intersections. Mr. van de Kamp said the at-grade light rail alternatives result in increased congestion, or a lower level of service (LOS), at intersections. In further response, Mr. Billen said the pedestrian facility reflected in option C14E is a free-standing structure with a moving sidewalk and a separate traditional sidewalk.

Mayor Davidson described how a fire in downtown San Jose when he was visiting there essentially shut down their at-grade light rail service.

Mr. Knowles suggested a discussion of decision criteria and the next steps in this process. He noted that Sound Transit and City staff worked hard with the consultants to complete this analysis within a short period of time.

Councilmember Wallace asked about the status of a tunnel option with a portal on the current Red Lion site at Main Street and 112th Avenue. Mr. Billen said it is considered a feasible alternative. However, it adds \$30 million to \$35 million to the current cost estimate because it results in a longer and deeper tunnel. Mr. Wallace would like further consideration of this option because it protects the Surrey Downs neighborhood.

Councilmember Chelminiak observed that there is a separate cost of providing transit services to downtown travelers who would not utilize the C14E alignment.

Councilmember Balducci expressed an interest in data showing the origin and destination of riders. She further expressed an interest in estimates on the frequency of incidents that could

interfere with at-grade light rail service as well as ways to manage this aspect of transit operations.

Responding to Councilmember Degginger, Mr. Billen said there are no locations within the Sound Transit regional light rail system in which an at-grade configuration co-exists with streets serving parking garages to high-rise buildings. Mr. Billen said the peer review panel that looked at at-grade alternatives recommended median-running light rail to avoid conflicts between light rail and parking garage traffic.

Deputy Mayor Lee spoke to the need to look to the future in planning for light rail. He observed that I-405 is the mainline through Bellevue and that transit should be focused there as well.

Board Member Enslow expressed appreciation for the discussion. However, he suggested a focus on costs and on which alternatives or elements can be provided within the budget.

Mr. Knowles suggested discussing how best to move forward.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Joni Earl, Sound Transit CEO, said the Sound Transit Board anticipates making a decision on Downtown Bellevue in April.

Ms. Balducci summarized that the City has an interest in light rail that supports the local land use vision and that limits impacts to existing land uses and the transportation network. She has heard comments from the Sound Transit Board about the need to deliver light rail service as presented to voters. She suggested identifying some options that meet these two perspectives.

Mr. Knowles noted general agreement to move forward with discussions within the framework articulated by Ms. Balducci.

Mayor Davidson stated that the Bellevue City Council is not intending to slow down the light rail planning process. He suggested that the Sound Transit CEO and the City Manager work together to devise a plan for reaching a solution within an orderly and timely manner.

Ms. Patterson said she appreciates today's meeting and the interest in collaboration. However, she questioned what progress has been made today.

Mr. Knowles provided his perspective that there has been communication at this meeting that has not previously occurred, and there is agreement regarding the need to move toward a timely decision. The Sound Transit Board is concerned about delivering what it promised to the voters, and the Bellevue City Council is concerned about how light rail impacts its community.

Ms. Patterson said she hopes the Board and City Council are not asking their staff to do work that they should do themselves. She questioned Ms. Earl's perspective on how to move forward.

Ms. Earl commented that her dominant thought is the need to consider the tradeoffs associated with each light rail segment. She feels there are tradeoffs that need to be made across the A through E segments. She sees staff's role as framing the tradeoffs in a way that will help the Board and the Council make decisions.

Mr. Knowles suggested the consideration of an approach comprised of incremental decisions that will build toward making an overall decision.

Ms. Patterson observed that the Concept Design Report articulates a number of tradeoffs in its description of the evaluation criteria and comparison of alternatives. She questioned whether staff will create scenarios for further consideration.

Ms. Earl acknowledged Mr. Knowles' suggestion about incremental suggestions. However, she feels it will be necessary to evaluate the East Link project as one corridor. For example, Segment C might not have all of the tradeoffs needed. But it might be possible to identify tradeoffs between Segment C and other segments to reach the best solution.

Deputy Mayor Lee concurred that an evaluation of the entire system can identify tradeoffs and cost savings that can make the system work. He is optimistic about the potential for future federal funding to assist with light rail as well.

Board Member McGinn observed that current Sound Transit policy appears to dictate that a municipality choosing a tunnel over a surface option should cover the additional costs and the risk of cost overruns. He suggested that the Bellevue City Council look at these issues, given this regional policy. However, he noted that he does not necessarily agree with the regional policy.

Councilmember Robertson suggested allowing time for staff to respond to today's requests, and then continuing with discussions to meet the April deadline.

Councilmember Degginger offered his thoughts on the progress made today. One is that everyone received the same information at the same time on the Concept Design Report, which was developed by staff from both agencies. Responding to Mayor McGinn, he noted that Bellevue has been looking at alternative funding sources, which can be discussed further at a future meeting.

Board Member Drago suggested putting together a menu of options or elements as a way of moving toward a decision.

Councilmember Chelminiak repeated two principles that he heard today, which are an interest in completing the project on time and within budget, and ensuring that Phase 2 does not adversely affect the ability to achieve voter approval for Phase 3. He noted that the Bellevue City Council is not unanimous in terms of its alignment preference. However, a majority of the Council has a strong interest in effectively serving Downtown Bellevue, with a preference for utilizing a tunnel.

Mr. Chelminiak noted that the budget gap for the tunnel has been reduced from \$500 million. He encouraged a system-wide analysis to identify additional cost savings. He feels it is possible to close the \$285 million funding gap currently reflected for the tunnel option. He would like a commitment from the Sound Transit Board that this can be done, as he feels this is the best option for Bellevue and the region.

At 4:14 p.m., the meeting was adjourned.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

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