

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

February 16, 2010
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

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

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 p.m. by Mayor Davidson. There was no Executive Session.

2. Study Session

- (a) East Link – Review and Discussion of Findings of Downtown Bellevue Light Rail Alternatives Concept Design Report

City Manager Steve Sarkozy opened discussion regarding the findings of the Downtown Bellevue Light Rail Alternatives Concept Design Report.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman recalled discussion of the report during Council's special joint meeting with the Sound Transit Board on February 11. He noted that staff will provide an update on the B and D Segments as well.

Bernard van de Kamp, Regional Projects Manager, reviewed the East Link light rail project timeline. The draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) was released in late 2008. The Council reviewed alternatives and submitted recommendations to the Sound Transit Board, which identified its preliminary preferred alignment last year. Since that time additional review has occurred, and new alternatives have been studied. Mr. van de Kamp noted the project goal of completing 30-percent design of the preferred alternative by the end of this year. The final EIS is to be released at the end of the year, and a final decision is anticipated from the Sound Transit Board in early 2011. Light rail operation is to begin in 2020.

Mr. van de Kamp recalled that last year the Council selected alternative C2T, with a tunnel configuration, for the downtown light rail segment. Sound Transit selected alternative C4A, an at-grade alignment using one-way operations on 108th and 110th Avenues. Sound Transit indicated that option CT3 would be considered if additional funding could be identified for this tunnel alignment.

Mr. van de Kamp noted that Sound Transit revenues are down approximately 20 percent for the Phase 2 package. A series of expert reviews has identified new alternatives for consideration, including an elevated alignment along 114th Avenue. Mr. van de Kamp noted that public workshops and stakeholder meetings were held in November and December 2009, which helped to define new alternatives for consideration.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed the Segment C alternatives that were presented during the February 11 meeting. C9T is the shorter tunnel alternative which travels under 110th Avenue NE and has three stations. C9A is an at-grade configuration along 110th Avenue NE with three stations. C11A is an at-grade option using 108th Avenue NE. Alternative C14E connects from either B3 or B7, and is elevated on 114th Avenue parallel to I-405. There is an elevated station between NE 4th and NE 6th Streets (with a pedestrian structure to Bellevue Transit Center and Meydenbauer Convention Center) and a station near the hospital district. Possible additions to C14E are a park and ride lot and a circulator bus system for Downtown Bellevue.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed the evaluation criteria presented in the report including cost, land use accessibility, light rail ridership, traffic operations, environmental impacts, construction impacts, construction risks, and consistency with City policies and interests. He described the analysis of the walking distance to stations for each alternative. Downtown employment is expected to double to 79,000 individuals by 2030, and downtown residents will reach 19,000. Based on the walking distance analysis, alternative C11A (108th Avenue NE at-grade) serves the largest percentage of the downtown population, followed by the 110th Avenue NE alternatives. The 114th Avenue NE alternative serves the least number of riders.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed the analysis of ridership and travel times for each of the Segment C alignments. The 110th Avenue NE tunnel alternative and the 108th Avenue NE at-grade option serve the most riders. He noted that Sound Transit included in its analysis the potential park and ride lot and Downtown circulator bus, and found no significant difference in ridership numbers for the C14E alternative.

Mr. van de Kamp said City and Sound Transit staff worked together to analyze traffic operations associated with each alternative in order to ensure that both agencies were using consistent assumptions about the operation of Bellevue's street system. He noted that the City's traffic system gives priority to NE 4th and NE 8th Streets for the high volume of east-west travel.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Mr. van de Kamp said light rail trains do not receive light pre-emption or priority under any of the alternatives. Vehicle travel on NE 4th and NE 8th Streets will remain a top priority in terms of the amount of time with green traffic lights. Mr.

Sparrman explained that the City has a responsibility to expedite travel out of the downtown and to mitigate intersection congestion during the evening peak period.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. van de Kamp said staff has not modeled full light preemption through the Downtown, based on the intention of maintaining the optimal functioning of the street system. Mr. Sparrman added that the Council could choose to prioritize the trains over the east-west travel on NE 4th and NE 8th Streets if desired.

Continuing the presentation, Mr. van de Kamp reviewed additional criteria related to traffic operations under each light rail alternative. He said staff can provide additional details regarding the impacts to specific streets if requested by the Council.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Kevin O'Neill, Assistant Director of Transportation, said the analysis indicates clear differences in travel times between at-grade and grade-separated alternatives. Responding to Mayor Davidson, Mr. O'Neill confirmed that the modeling assumes a reduction in vehicles due to light rail usage.

Councilmember Wallace questioned the relevance of Bellevue Way and 106th Avenue NE when the light rail trains do not travel that far west.

Mr. O'Neill explained that for purposes of the analysis, staff wanted to show data for a broader area of the Downtown, as well as a smaller area within the Downtown. The findings show that within the broader area of downtown, there are differences between at-grade and grade-separated configurations. They tend to be less when you look at a more focused area, however. Mr. O'Neill noted that while differences of a few seconds in average delay might seem insignificant, the cumulative effect can be a matter of hours of congestion during an evening peak period. As the analysis narrows its focus to smaller subareas and specific intersections, the difference in delays become even more significant.

Councilmember Balducci stated she would find it helpful if staff could provide more details underlying the numbers, so the Council can see what is really happening in specific locations within the Downtown. She said it would be interesting to see modeling that incorporates light preemption, as such information could be helpful in making future decisions.

Mayor Davidson related the experience of light rail in San Diego, and their discussions about this issue due to congestion backing onto the freeway. The San Diego system has been operating for approximately 20 years.

Councilmember Degginger said it would be useful to see where bottlenecks would occur under a light preemption scenario. He questioned which intersections would most likely be degraded.

Mr. O'Neill said staff can provide more information in both data and mapping formats. Generally speaking, the intersections experiencing the most change in degradation are the intersections on 108th Avenue NE between Main Street and NE 8th Street, and the intersections

on 110th Avenue NE between Main Street and NE 6th. The City is also seeing changes on 112th Avenue NE at SE 8th Street and Main Street due to light rail operations.

Responding to Councilmember Degginger, Mr. O'Neill said the modeling assumes completion of the NE 4th Street extension project, but it does not assume the extension of NE 6th Street. Mr. Sparrman added that the I-405/SR 520 braided ramp project is assumed in the modeling network. Projects that are not currently funded are not included in the modeling. Mr. O'Neill clarified that the City had fairly extensive negotiations with Sound Transit and WSDOT about what projects to assume in the network. Staff can come back with detailed information about which projects are in and which are not, if desired by the Council.

Councilmember Robertson asked for an analysis of car traffic impacts, including accidents, on light rail train travel. Mr. Sparrman responded that the model analysis incorporates average operating conditions. Sound Transit accepts that the City is the road authority, and that the City's input into this model analysis has been that light rail is not given priority treatment or light preemption.

In further response, Mr. Sparrman said Sound Transit's East Link trains are designed for four car operations, which dictates the station platform length. With Bellevue's large blocks, there should not be a problem with the trains blocking intersections.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. van de Kamp said alternative C14E was not analyzed using an option of three stations instead of two stations. He speculated that the addition of a station would bring some increase in ridership, with some riders shifting from one of the other stations, and some of the increase reflecting the expansion of the service area. Mr. van de Kamp observed that the increase would not approach the ridership of the other alternatives.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Mr. van de Kamp said City staff could talk to Sound Transit staff about running another model reflecting three stations for option C14E.

Councilmember Degginger observed that there is a qualitative difference in station locations between C7E, with a station at 112th Avenue NE and NE 6th Street, and C14E, which does not have a station at that location but one that is located farther south and east.

Mr. Sparrman noted that the alignment of C14E across the Red Lion site needs further study to determine its feasibility.

Mayor Davidson suggested moving on with the cost comparisons and then coming back to this discussion.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed the cost estimates for each Segment C alternative. The costs for the C9T tunnel option are roughly \$285 million above the current Sound Transit budget of \$705 million. The remaining three alternatives are estimated below the \$705 million budget for the Downtown segment.

Mr. van de Kamp reviewed possible connections between the B and C segments, assuming connection to the B3 side running bypass or B2 at-grade alternatives preferred by Sound Transit. The 112th Avenue bypass route requires less noise mitigation, and an option using the median of 112th Avenue has lower ecosystem impacts. Alignments along 112th Avenue reduce Segment B costs by \$50 million to \$100 million.

Responding to Mayor Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp said the B2A alternative along 112th Avenue widens the roadway to add a median between SE 8th Street and Main Street. This alternative is included in the DEIS analysis. This alignment becomes elevated between SE 6th Street and SE 4th Street, shifts to the east side of 112th as it nears Main Street, and then turns west to cross over 112th and to travel along the south side of Main Street. Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp said this alternative comes from Sound Transit's analysis last summer. However, there are a number of ways to transition into the Downtown from SE 8th Street and 112th Avenue.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. van de Kamp said an alignment along 112th from the south up to Main Street would require the acquisition of a portion of the Red Lion site.

Responding to Mayor Davidson, Mr. van de Kamp said a cut and cover tunnel approach would involve construction staging along the route.

Councilmember Balducci stated her understanding that the reduced cost of the B2A option is due at least in part to not having to acquire the entire Red Lion site. Mr. van de Kamp concurred, adding that the option's at-grade station is less expensive than the elevated station with alternative B3.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. van de Kamp said the cost of alternative B7 is roughly the same as Sound Transit's original B3 alignment, which is approximately \$500 million. However, he does not have a cost estimate for the B3 side running option at this point. In further response, Mr. van de Kamp said B7 does not avoid the impacts to Sturtevant Creek found in B3.

Responding to Councilmember Degginger, Mr. van de Kamp said staff is reviewing the work of the City's tunnel consultant and can report that information to the Council in the near future.

Mayor Davidson said the Council needs to hear this information as soon as possible.

Councilmember Balducci concurred. She recalled that at the end of the workshop with Sound Transit, the group talked about what the best decision path might be toward the Sound Transit Board's decision slated for April.

Deputy Mayor Lee agreed. He stated that the frustrating part for him is the ongoing process to identify and study more options and to present more information, which then raises new questions and makes it difficult to focus the decision. He spoke to the differences between alternatives B7 and B3. He opined that the B3 alignment, which goes behind the Hilton and fronts 114th, has significant impacts to the creek. However, B7 goes along I-405 and is on the

other side of Sturtevant Creek. He does not think the two options are comparable in terms of environmental costs.

Deputy Mayor Lee observed that the Council needs to make some decisions, which will not be based on all of the studies. He said there will be significant changes in the community and traffic patterns by the time light rail is implemented. He noted the need to come up with a system that is good for Bellevue land use, not one based on budget numbers that are uncertain. The bottom line is that the decision rests on the Council to use good sound judgment from its understanding of the environment, relative costs, and future expansion.

Councilmember Chelminiak agreed that it is important to know the decision path for the Council, and for citizens, who want to provide input on Segment C. He questioned the specific objective of tonight's Council discussion.

Mayor Davidson explained that he wanted this to be Council's opportunity to hear the presentation from City staff, and to talk about what questions need to be answered before the Council makes its decision and recommendation for the Sound Transit Board.

Noting Mr. Lee's reference to land use, Councilmember Degginger said he would be interested in knowing the extent of currently developed square feet in the Downtown, and what the additional development capacity is for the 2030 horizon. He would like the same information for the Wilburton area as well

Planning and Community Development Director Matt Terry provided general numbers and said he can provide more specific number next week. There is approximately 20 million square feet of development in the Downtown today of all types (i.e., Commercial, Residential, Retail). The 2030 forecast adds approximately 10 million square feet. In addition, the City is forecasting land use growth in Wilburton ranging from 3 million to 6 million square feet. None of the Wilburton growth is assumed in the City's 2030 forecast or in the light rail modeling. Mr. Terry noted that the Wilburton figures are based on full buildout, while additional Downtown growth could occur beyond the 2030 projections.

Councilmember Chelminiak questioned the future of the Wilburton area, particularly in light of concerns regarding auto row. Mr. Terry stated that approximately two years ago the Council adopted an update to the Wilburton Plan that contemplated the expansion of CB zoning and the Wilburton retail village concept on 120th. It was left for a future debate and discussion to determine how to handle the special opportunity area between NE 4th and 8th Streets, and between I-405 and the BNSF rail corridor.

Responding to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Terry said the growth assumption in the Wilburton Plan assumes the completion of the NE 4th Street extension and 120th improvement projects.

In further response, Mr. Terry said most core Downtown blocks will reach buildout by 2030. However, some additional growth beyond 2030 is anticipated for the areas between NE 8th and

NE 10th Streets and between NE 4th and NE 2nd Streets. Mr. Terry said staff can bring back additional graphics to illustrate current and future land uses.

Mr. Sarkozy commented that most of the development anticipated would be similar in scale to what has already occurred between NE 4th and NE 8th Streets.

Continuing the presentation, Mr. van de Kamp reviewed depictions of the B3 side running, B7 (Analyzed in DEIS), and B7 modified alignments.

Deputy Mayor Lee stated that he is frustrated because everyone thinks the Council is talking about the B7 modified alternative, but he does not recall the Council suggesting this alternative. He questioned whether the Council should talk about it. He has never considered it.

Councilmember Balducci recalled that the Council sent a letter, with Mayor Davidson's signature, to Sound Transit asking them for more information on this alternative. Sound Transit has not yet responded to the Council.

Responding to Mr. Lee, Mayor Davidson recalled that at the January retreat the Council talked about moving the South Bellevue Park and Ride farther south. Dr. Davidson described the potential alignment which travels across the Mercer Slough to the BNSF right-of-way.

Mayor Davidson opined that an elevated line on pillars across the slough presents fewer problems for the wetlands than traveling along the wetlands and slough as in the B3 route. He clarified that he is interested in the B7 modified alternative.

Mr. Sarkozy described his recollection of the proposal. The Council had talked about a line going north from I-90 and touching at the current South Bellevue Park and Ride, which would be expanded with a 400-foot station. The alignment then veered to the east as quickly as possible in order to cross the wetland. The new idea that the Council talked about was the possibility of relocating entirely the South Bellevue Park and Ride, and moving it south toward I-90. This would allow the crossing of Mercer Slough with an elevated light rail line that is closer to I-90 than previously allowed.

Mr. Terry and Land Use Director Carol Helland reviewed the Segment B impacts, mitigation approach, and regulatory issues. The impacts to wetlands, wetland buffers, parks, and the Winters House are known for the original B7 option. However, more information is needed on the B3 side running and B7 modified alternatives.

Mr. Terry described staff's review of Sound Transit's project documents. Sound Transit avoids environmental impacts where at all possible, and minimizes and mitigates necessary impacts. Sound Transit's criteria for evaluating alternatives include preserving environmental quality, minimizing potential adverse operating impacts on the natural and built environment, and minimizing construction impacts. Sound Transit acknowledges that the local, state and federal regulatory environment will influence the ultimate alignment decision.

Ms. Helland explained that local light rail permitting includes both use and compliance with applicable performance criteria. The approval of use is accomplished through a traditional conditional use permit (CUP), which requires demonstrating consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and Land Use Code. The project area is also subject to Shoreline Overlay District regulations and Critical Areas regulations. Ms. Helland noted the Critical Areas Overlay criteria state that the City can only permit development to occur where there is no technically feasible alternative with less impacts.

Responding to Mayor Davidson, Ms. Helland said a formal investigation of the wetland will be needed to recategorize the areas with some specificity. However, she noted areas that are assumed likely to be Category 1 wetlands.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted the significant ground field associated with the KKMW towers in the slough.

Mr. Terry reviewed state and federal regulatory standards that will be applied to the light rail project, including a prohibition on using significant public park land for a transportation project unless there is no feasible and prudent alternative. Additional regulations that apply include the Land and Water Conservation Act, the Clean Water Act, hydraulic project approval, Coastal Zone Management, and NPDES (National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System).

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Terry said Sound Transit is evaluating the extent to which the state and federal requirements affect the light rail alternatives. These impacts will be quantified in the final environmental impact statement (FEIS).

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. van de Kamp said full information on the B3 modified alternative should be available to the Council by early April. Staff is expecting a submittal of the preliminary engineering and accompanying evaluation of some of the impacts of the B3 modified/side running alternative.

Councilmember Balducci interjected that there is no April decision scheduled for the Sound Transit Board with regard to the B7 alignment. The decision in front of Sound Transit was the preliminary local preferred alternatives to go into the final EIS. She explained that the Board is revisiting Segment C because it had not previously narrowed down to one preliminary local preferred alternative. Sound Transit's study since that time has generated new alternatives for consideration as well.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Ms. Helland said to her knowledge there are no regulations in place that protect agricultural land. However, critical areas regulations address agricultural areas, as do some parks policies.

Councilmember Robertson said she would like a matrix comparing B3 to the B3 modified alternative requested by the Council approximately one year ago, in order to compare what the Council requested with what the Sound Transit Board has agreed to do. In addition, she would like environmental information about Segment B and a travel analysis for Segment B, including

a traffic evaluation summary and the traffic options. Her understanding is that I-90 was built on the south side of the wetland because the soil is firmer and the area is away from the primary salmon spawning area to the north. She encouraged an alignment based on the identification of the least sensitive critical areas, if that is possible.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. van de Kamp said Sound Transit will analyze all of the Segment B alternatives equally for the final EIS. The main difference between the alternatives is happening at the engineering level. Sound Transit staff has direction from the Board to proceed with the B3 side running alternative, which is slightly different as defined by the Board than what the City Council defined a year ago. That preferred alternative is being advanced to 30-percent engineering by the end of this year. Mr. Sparrman said all comments on the draft EIS received by Sound Transit will be addressed in the final EIS as well.

Noting the reported lack of data on the B3 side running alternative, Councilmember Chelminiak stated that the impacts will likely be very similar to the impacts identified for the original B3 alternative. He recalled that the wildlife impact associated with B7 was in the 3.5-acre range. The wildlife impacts were minimal for B3. The wetland impact was significantly less for alternative B3 than the 1.8 acres identified for B7. Mr. Chelminiak said it bothers him that the table in the presentation states that data for the B3 side running option is not yet available, because while that may in part be accurate, there is very similar data available for the original B3 option.

Councilmember Wallace stated that he is frustrated with comments suggesting that the Segment B alternative has been decided, because he has been led to believe that all options are still under consideration. All Segment B options have severe environmental impacts to Mercer Slough. He feels more scientific data is needed to specify and quantify the impacts to the slough, salmon, and other wildlife for each of the alternative alignments. Mr. Wallace said a more sophisticated scientific analysis, beyond the DEIS, is needed to fully evaluate and understand the impacts. He would like more information on construction staging impacts, detailed maps of the B3 routes, information about impacts to the Mercer Slough blueberry farm, and a depiction of the B3 alternatives and their relationship to the Winters House.

Mr. Wallace expressed concern about noise impacts to neighborhoods, which he feels need further analysis. He observed that Sound Transit seems to have ignored the SE 8th Street jog, which appears to have a lower environmental impact because it does not run through the Sturtevant Slough. This is an acceptable alternative to him, while 112th is not. Mr. Wallace would like some discussion about reaching a compromise on potentially running light rail down SE 8th Street. Or if B7 is the preferred alternative of a majority of the Council, he suggests moving forward to make sure it is implemented correctly.

Deputy Mayor Lee said he is frustrated as well. He is concerned about the risk of choosing an alternative that will be found to be environmentally unacceptable during the final EIS process.

Councilmember Balducci clarified that she did not say that the decision on Segment B is final. There is a two-step process in which the Sound Transit Board identifies the preliminary preferred alternative and conducts a lengthy study, which is followed ultimately by a final decision. She

noted that this is the typical government process of identifying and comparing alternatives, and then making a series of decisions. Ms. Balducci said staff regularly references this process, and highlights the difference between the preliminary preferred alternative decision and the final decision, in its presentations to the Council. She objects to comments that too much information is frustrating. Councilmember Balducci said the Council needs as much information as possible in order to make a good decision.

Councilmember Degginger questioned how construction would be staged for alternative C14E and whether there would be construction impacts to NE 4th Street. Mr. Sparrman said staff will provide that information to the Council.

At 7:58 p.m., Mayor Davidson declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

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