

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

April 1, 2013
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Lee, Deputy Mayor Robertson, and Councilmembers Balducci, Chelminiak¹, Davidson², Stokes and Wallace

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

At 6:03 p.m., Deputy Mayor Robertson called the meeting to order and declared recess to Executive Session for approximately 20 minutes to discuss one item of potential litigation and one personnel matter.

The meeting resumed at 6:50 p.m., with Mayor Lee presiding.

2. Study Session

(a) East Link: Review of EIS Addendum on Cost Savings Options

City Manager Steve Sarkozy introduced staff's presentation on the East Link light rail project cost saving options and the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Addendum.

Transportation Director Dave Berg welcomed Sound Transit staff Ron Lewis, East Link Executive Director, and Don Billen, East Link Deputy Director, to describe the environmental analysis and to present animations depicting the cost savings ideas.

Mr. Berg said a peer review of the EIS Addendum noise analysis will be presented by the Greenbusch Group. Staff is seeking Council direction about whether to hold a public hearing on April 15 to take comment on the cost savings options.

Mayor Lee welcomed the guests and indicated the Council's interest in moving forward through the review process in a timely manner.

Mr. Lewis briefly reviewed the East Link project schedule, noting that it has not changed since the last visit to the Council.

¹ Councilmember Chelminiak joined the Study Session at 7:00 p.m.

² Councilmember Davidson participated via speakerphone.

Mr. Lewis showed and described slides depicting artistic representations of the 120th Avenue NE and 132nd Avenue NE Stations and photos of Link rail system public artwork. He noted that the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Addendum was published on March 26.

Mr. Billen presented the findings of the SEPA Addendum, which focuses on the three cost savings options under consideration in Bellevue as well as potential bike and pedestrian bridges in Redmond.

The cost savings option along Bellevue Way would place light rail at grade in front of the Winters House and shift Bellevue Way to the west, with or without an added HOV lane. This option preserves a 50-foot buffer in front of the Winters House and moves the driveway entrance to the south. Shifting the roadway to the west results in three additional residential displacements on Bellevue Way and 25 partial acquisitions. It results in lower wetland impacts but introduces the loss of habitat on the west side of the current road. It reduces park impacts and impacts to the Winters House but increases construction impacts.

Mr. Billen described the noise impacts resulting from shifting Bellevue Way to the west. He said that homes along Bellevue Way would actually experience lower noise levels with the East Link project than the noise levels currently experienced with roadway traffic.

Mr. Billen described the 112th Avenue road-over-rail cost savings option. Three sub-options for crossing SE 4th Street were studied: 1) Use SE 4th Street for emergency access only, 2) SE 4th Street open to general purpose traffic (right in and right out configuration), and 3) Light rail in retained cut under SE 4th Street.

The 112th Avenue rail-over-road option impacts include higher residential displacements, higher wetland impacts, and the use of a greater portion of Surrey Downs Park. There are decreased noise impacts for all three SE 4th Street sub-options as compared to the preferred alignment. These impacts can be mitigated using walls, special track work, and building insulation.

Moving to the Downtown Station, Mr. Billen described the optimized preliminary engineering alternative which has a shallower tunnel and places the station entrance closer to the Bellevue Transit Center. He noted additional ground-borne noise with the optimized PE option.

The NE 6th Street Station option is an above-ground station aligning on the south side of NE 6th Street. It has reduced noise and vibration impacts and the potential for SEM (Sequential Excavation Mining) construction along 110th Avenue NE. SEM was used for the Beacon Hill tunnel and appears to be a promising option here. The benefit is avoiding the need for cut and cover construction for the full length of 110th Avenue NE, which reduces costs. It would require running fans but Sound Transit was able to mitigate the noise of the fans in Seattle very effectively.

Mr. Billen compared the estimated ridership and walking distances of the optimized PE and NE 6th Street Station options.

Mr. Billen displayed an animation of the cost savings options with light rail coming off I-90 and turning onto Bellevue Way, passing the South Bellevue Station/Park and Ride, traveling north

along Bellevue Way and 112th Avenue to the East Main Station and to the Downtown Tunnel portal. He noted the retaining wall along the west side of Bellevue Way, as well as the 30-foot landscape buffer and 60-foot separation along the residential areas on 112th Avenue SE. The East Main Station will not be visible from 112th Avenue SE.

The animation showed the Downtown NE 6th Street Station between City Hall and Meydenbauer Center. With this station, there would be an elevated guideway crossing I-405 toward the Hospital Station.

Mr. Lewis described a conceptual sketch of the NE 6th Street Station and how it would fit into existing development (i.e., City Hall and the Bellevue Transit Center). The main station entrance is on 110th Avenue across the street from the Transit Center, and there is a secondary entrance at NE 6th Street and 112th Avenue NE.

Mr. Lewis outlined the potential cost savings for each option. For Bellevue Way, the baseline design is the retained cut. The cost savings option of shifting Bellevue Way to the west reflects \$5 million to \$8 million in savings. The 112th Avenue road-over-rail alternative with the SE 4th Street at-grade option has a potential savings of \$2 million to \$4 million. The road-over-rail alternative with the SE 4th Street retained cut reflects increased costs of \$6 million to \$11 million.

Mr. Lewis presented the near-term schedule which includes an additional Bellevue City Council briefing on April 8, a potential public hearing in Bellevue on April 15, and action by the Bellevue City Council on April 22. The Sound Transit Capital Committee will develop its cost savings recommendations during its April 11 meeting, and the Sound Transit Board is expected to make its decision on April 25.

Deputy Mayor Robertson questioned whether any of the options would trigger a reopening of the federal Record of Decision (ROD). Mr. Billen said they do not expect so, but that will be a FTA (Federal Transit Administration) decision following the Sound Transit Board's decision.

Councilmember Davidson thanked staff for the presentation.

Mr. Berg introduced Julie Wiebusch with The Greenbusch Group to describe their peer review of the SEPA Addendum.

Ms. Wiebusch said that mitigation for the options that shift Bellevue Way to the west (with and without the HOV lane) includes a sound wall on top of the retaining wall, which could reach a height of 45 feet in some areas. She was concerned about noise reflections off the wall but determined that there will not be additional noise impacts from what already exists on the roadway. There is a four-foot wall on the elevated light rail structure and a 2.5 foot safety barrier at grade.

Ms. Wiebusch said the at-grade light rail alignment eliminates potentially significant vibration issues during construction and ground-borne noise during operations for the Winters House. She said that combining the light rail and HOV project would limit construction noise and vibration to one project.

Ms. Wiebusch said the 112th road-over-rail option causes no traffic noise impacts. However, up to eight homes at 111th Place SE are potentially displaced, which introduces impacts to the next row of homes closest to light rail.

Impacts with the SE 4th Street emergency access option are pedestrian warning devices, train bells at the station, and one displaced home. The solid, movable wall to allow emergency access will help to mitigate noise impacts.

The at-grade SE 4th Street option leaves SE 4th Street open to general traffic. Impacts include a pedestrian warning device, train bells, and a warning device at the gate.

The rail under SE 4th Street option reduces noise by putting the train in a trench. There are two at-grade pedestrian crossings at the East Main Station which involve warning devices and bells. The impacts are mitigated to Sound Transit's standards.

Ms. Wiebusch said that mitigation for the 112th Avenue road-over-rail option includes sound walls six to eight feet high, pedestrian warning devices and bells, possible sound insulation in residences near the bells, lubrication of the rail for curves with a less than 600-foot radius, and special track work at crossovers.

Ms. Wiebusch encouraged further analysis of the bells and warning devices. The sound level of the bells is averaged for the study, which is consistent with federal guidelines. However, this dilutes the actual noise level of specific bell events. She encouraged the Council to monitor this issue in terms of system design. The sound of the bells is different in character than usual traffic noises and might be audible in quiet residential environments. However, the bells would likely not be heard in nearby residences with a television on, dishwasher running, and /or other noise within the home.

Moving to the Downtown Station options, Ms. Wiebusch described the PE Optimized Station and the NE 6th Street station. The optimized station causes noise impacts to the Bravern and noise and vibration impacts to the Coast Bellevue Hotel on the east side of I-405. The NE 6th Street option increases noise impacts to the Bravern due to the station bells. However, this alignment does not cause vibration impacts for the Coast Bellevue Hotel. Mitigation for both stations is potential sound insulation to surrounding buildings; the use of directional bells, shrouds, and auto-adjust bells; lubrication on the rail curves; and four-foot walls on the elevated structure near the Coast Bellevue Hotel.

Ms. Wiebusch said the Bellevue City Code requires a certain level of sound insulation for development near the I-405 corridor. She indicated that the Bravern was most likely designed to meet these standards.

Ms. Wiebusch summarized that the Downtown rail alignment corridor is characterized as a noisy urban residential area. Noise impacts are within the City Code, which exceeds federal standards.

For the overall East Link project, the noise environment will improve with the Bellevue Way option that shifts the roadway to the west. Any noise impacts are identified as able to be mitigated.

Ms. Wiebusch said the characteristic sound of an electric train is lower than buses, trucks and motorcycles. The bells and warning devices will be noticeable for residents near crossings and stations.

Ms. Wiebusch noted that this is a high level evaluation at this point, which she believes is appropriate for this stage of the design process. She encouraged the City to continue to pursue mitigation through final design, especially with regard to bells. She noted that construction noise and mitigation have not been studied to a great extent. She said that perhaps that can be addressed through permitting.

Deputy Mayor Robertson said she appreciated the comments about construction noise because that is of concern. She wondered whether mitigation measures and noise walls could be completed before construction begins.

Ms. Robertson referred to Sound Transit's mitigation efforts in the Rainier Valley. She questioned how Bellevue can be reassured that it will not have remaining impacts to be mitigated once the trains are operating. Ms. Wiebusch said she believes these issues have been very well studied and that lessons have been learned from the Central Link project.

Ms. Robertson said she found it interesting that the actual noise level for residents along Bellevue Way is expected to decrease 3 to 12 dBA, with mitigation, with the option that shifts Bellevue Way and adds the HOV lane. She noted that a number of homes are two stories, and questioned whether the noise impacts would be the same for both levels. Ms. Wiebusch said that can make a difference and noise walls only mitigate noise for the portions of structures that are visibly blocked. If residents cannot see the road or rail line, the mitigation of noise impacts is significantly improved.

Ms. Robertson said it is good that the emergency access option for SE 4th Street at 112th Avenue SE provides a movable, but solid, wall. The other two options are the right in/right out access and the trench. She said there are concerns about the noise from the train bells and pedestrian crossings in that area. She asked which of the three options provides the greatest level of noise mitigation for the homes near the East Main Station and SE 4th Street.

Ms. Wiebusch said she believes the emergency access option provides the best mitigation due to the continuous wall barrier. In further response, Ms. Wiebusch said this option is better in terms of bell impacts.

Councilmember Balducci questioned whether the estimated cost savings include assumptions about the mitigation costs for each alternative.

Mr. Lewis responded that the cost of noise walls and retaining walls has been included.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Ms. Wiebusch confirmed that her work is a peer review of Sound Transit's report, which uses federal guidelines and not Bellevue's Noise Control Code.

Mr. Wallace said he has looked through this package and, while it is somewhat encouraging, he does not see a list of specific properties that will require mitigation and/or residential insulation. He said it appears that the noise walls address the issue, with the exception of certain impacts

related to specific SE 4th Street options. Ms. Wiebusch said the sound walls will not mitigate noise at higher floors of the Bravern.

Ms. Wiebusch said she believes that the sound insulation packages are proposed for essentially any home or floor of a home that can see over the top of a noise wall. If the roadway or track is visible, a property is not likely going to benefit from the noise wall, depending on the distance from the road or track.

Mr. Wallace questioned whether noise impacts are improved for the Bellevue Way portion in front of the Winters House if trains are at grade level. Ms. Wiebusch said that raising the train at the Winters House would be beneficial because part of the concern before was vibration during construction.

Mr. Wallace said he is interested in noise impacts to the homes above Bellevue Way. He questioned whether shifting Bellevue Way to the west is the reason for the improved noise environment that she mentioned earlier. Ms. Wiebusch confirmed that she was referring to road traffic impacts and not to the train.

In further response, Ms. Wiebusch said the trench option in front of the Winters House reduces residential noise impacts. However, it causes significant vibration impacts for the historic home.

Mr. Wallace questioned whether station area bells can be mitigated according to Bellevue's Noise Control Code.

Deputy City Attorney Kate Berens said that Ms. Wiebusch did not review the project with regard to Bellevue's Noise Code. The warning bells of trains coming into the station are considered safety devices, and City Code would be consistent with the recommendations for shielding the bells/warning devices. Ms. Berens said City Code does not provide a particular maximum decibel level for safety devices of this type, but it is a tool for the City to use in working with Sound Transit.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Ms. Wiebusch said there are pedestrian bells to warn of approaching trains. Flashing lights, and not bells, would be used on traffic gates. An additional type of bell is the train bell. Ms. Wiebusch confirmed that an opening in the wall at SE 4th Street would leave the adjacent area unprotected from the sound of bells.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Lewis confirmed that there are different levels of bells on the trains. He said that, typically, as the operator approaches an intersection, there is a bell that is intended to alert pedestrians. Sound Transit has worked with the City of Seattle to adjust the pedestrian warning bells and the wayside bells according to the ambient sound of the area. The bells are adjusted to be quieter at night while still remaining effective as warning bells.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Mr. Lewis confirmed that the pedestrian warning bells on the train and the wayside bells at the intersection are employed whether or not there are pedestrians visible. However, the bell volume is lower at night.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Ms. Wiebusch confirmed that the noise of the train with the at-grade Bellevue Way option is not an issue in the neighborhood because of the

ambient noise level already experienced due to road traffic. However, the impact of the train noise increases traveling north and, in some cases, becomes the dominant source of noise.

In further response to Mr. Chelminiak, Ms. Wiebusch said the noise wall is on top of the retaining wall along Bellevue Way, which is nearly 40 feet high in some areas. Mr. Berg said this primarily applies to 200-300 feet of the alignment, including in front of the Winters House. North of the Winters House, most of the retaining wall is less than 20 feet.

Continuing to respond to Mr. Chelminiak, Ms. Wiebusch confirmed that the wall could reach nearly 50 feet along residences above Bellevue Way because it needs to exceed the backyard level to effectively block the noise.

Mr. Chelminiak observed that a dominant benefit of the homes above Bellevue Way is the view over the Mercer Slough and toward the Cascade Mountains. He believes that sound walls blocking the view is a serious tradeoff for homes on that bluff.

Mr. Chelminiak noted that construction phasing has not been worked out. Constructing both the HOV lane and the East Link system could result in a longer construction period.

Ms. Robertson suggested holding a public hearing on the cost savings options on April 15.

→ Deputy Mayor Robertson moved to hold a public hearing on the cost savings options on April 15, and Councilmember Stokes seconded the motion.

→ The motion carried by a vote of 7-0.

Mayor Lee thanked staff for the presentation and information. He noted that the Council has remaining questions and concerns regarding the options and the mitigation of noise impacts.

At 8:05 p.m., Mayor Lee declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

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