

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

August 2, 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

Deputy Mayor Lee called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., and declared recess to Executive Session for approximately 20 minutes to discuss one item of property acquisition.

The Study Session resumed at 6:50 p.m., with Mayor Davidson presiding.

2. Study Session

- (a) Review of the status of NE 15th/16th Street Corridor Pre-Design and Coordination with other entities, including Sound Transit East Link light rail and Wright Runstad Development Concepts

City Manager Steve Sarkozy briefly reviewed the importance of this project. In March, the Council authorized moving forward with pre-design for the NE 15th/16th Street corridor to better define how the multi-modal elements might be integrated, while minimizing the roadway cross-section and associated impacts. Pre-design engineering will look at how the improvements integrate with Sound Transit's East Link system engineering and station elements.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman reviewed the outline of the presentation. He recalled previous concerns from the Council regarding the width and cross-section of the roadway elements.

Rick Logwood, Capital Projects Manager, explained that the pre-design effort addresses the evaluation of alignments (Roadway and Light Rail), updates to traffic data, interim and long-term phasing feasibility, corridor options, non-motorized system, urban design and frontage elements, and light rail stations/Park and Ride facilities. Corridor design principles include multi-

modal transportation corridor; phasing and interim use of system improvements; connectivity with Downtown, Wilburton area, and regional systems; significant green space along the corridor; and environmental system enhancements.

Kevin O'Neill, Assistant Director of Transportation, provided background information on the Bel-Red Subarea Plan and the overall land use vision reflected in the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Use Code. Redevelopment of the Bel-Red corridor is concentrated around two major development nodes. The area between 120th and 124th Avenues NE is focused primarily on office uses, although the forecast also reflects retail and housing uses. The area around 130th and 132nd assumes fairly intensive development, with a primary focus on housing. This area also contains some retail and office uses. Mr. O'Neill explained that it is important when looking at travel demand to think about the overall land use vision and overall transportation network, because this provides the context for travel demands on NE 15th/16th Street.

Mr. Logwood described the East Link Segment D elements and the criteria to be used in screening options for subsequent Council discussion about the roadway cross-section. Evaluation criteria encompass economic development, land use and compatibility, multi-modal operations, cost, schedule, environmental stewardship, and stakeholder/community input.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Sparrman said the criteria evaluation matrix is primarily tailored to address the NE 15th/16th Street corridor, which has a unique set of challenges. Ms. Balducci expressed concern that too many elements and features are to be incorporated into this corridor. Mr. Sparrman agreed that determining the right balance is the challenge for the Council and staff.

Councilmember Chelminiak pointed out that minimizing costs was not identified as a criteria in the Bel-Red Plan. The vision reflects a robust plan for the corridor.

Councilmember Robertson recalled that when she was the Chair of the Planning Commission, the Commission expressed concerns about the NE 15th/16th Street corridor becoming too wide and too expensive.

Mr. Logwood continued his review of the evaluation criteria.

Mr. O'Neill explained that the 2030 traffic modeling analysis has been updated to incorporate the NE 6th Street extension project and the Park and Ride at the 130th Avenue NE light rail station. The update reflects a trip distribution that varies from the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), including more accurate HOV data showing more people per vehicle.

Mr. O'Neill reviewed three options involving two to four lanes at different segments of the corridor. The Bel-Red Plan reflects four lanes on NE 15th/16th from 116th Avenue NE to 136th Avenue NE, and three lanes from 136th Avenue NE to NE 20th Street.

Councilmember Wallace noted current traffic volumes on SE Bellevue Way and NE 8th Street, and questioned whether NE 15th/16th Street will be able to carry the projected traffic volumes.

Mr. Sparrman acknowledged that the new corridor will carry traffic volumes that are comparable to NE 8th Street. He noted that the NE 15th/16th Street roadway design contains turn lanes in certain areas, in addition to through lanes, which facilitates traffic flow.

Mr. O'Neill explained that the highest traffic volumes are at the west end of the corridor, where NE 15th/16th Street connects with NE 12th Street and proceeds into the Downtown. The most intensive land use in the Bel-Red corridor is at the west end as well. Traffic volumes decrease as NE 15th/16th Street travels east.

Continuing, Mr. Sparrman said the plan envisions a relatively high demand for through lanes to accommodate traffic volumes. Intersection operations will be refined later. Mr. Sparrman noted that traffic estimates reflect 2030 levels.

Responding to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. O'Neill said traffic projections assume the completion of the northbound I-405/SR 520 braided ramp project. Mr. Sparrman said the projections do not include the southbound braided ramp project, but they do include the new 124th Avenue NE (SR 520) ramps.

In further response to Ms. Robertson, Mr. Sparrman said staff will come back to the Council in the future to discuss the entire roadway cross-section including light rail, pedestrian and bike facilities, parking, and landscaping.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. O'Neill said the Subarea Plan reflects an additional 4 million square feet of office uses in the corridor by 2030. However, this is not the full build out of the subarea.

Councilmember Degginger said he is disappointed that tonight's presentation does not address the roadway cross-section, which is an area of concern for the Council. He feels there is insufficient information available at this point to have a meaningful discussion with the community as well.

Mr. Sparrman apologized and clarified that the purpose of tonight's presentation is to provide an update and to share general information about the number of lanes and how that relates to other variables. The road cross-section will be discussed in greater detail in the near future. However, staff wanted to start discussing the desired number of lanes for the corridor.

Councilmember Degginger observed that important building blocks for the discussion will be the cost estimates for different roadway widths and configurations.

Councilmember Chelminiak commented that the trips will occur with development. The issue is how to accommodate the trips in the corridor and in surrounding areas.

Mr. Sparrman said ongoing work will show the differences between different options. The original roadway plan for the Bel-Red system was designed to respond to the anticipated land

use scenario. Ongoing analysis will determine where trips are occurring and how many will need to be accommodated on alternative routes.

Mr. O'Neill described options 2 and 3, which have two and four lanes on slightly different portions of the roadway. He noted that reduced impacts and right-of-way requirements will likely reduce costs. However, the two options do not provide as much travel capacity as option 1, which is the broadest roadway cross-section. Options 2 and 3 disperse more traffic onto sections of Bel-Red Road, NE 20th Street, and NE 8th Street.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Mr. O'Neill said the forecast for office space in the entire Bel-Red corridor is an additional 4 million square feet by 2030. In further response, Mr. O'Neill said staff is not in favor of Option 3 due to its reduced capacity. However, this option was identified through stakeholder involvement in the planning process.

Councilmember Wallace expressed concern about the travel demands and topography challenges potentially associated with the development of the Spring District. He stated his understanding that this development essentially routes all traffic to the section of NE 15th/16th Street between 120th and 124th.

Mr. Sparrman said more work needs to be done, but initial work shows that some regrading of the site will allow access points onto both 120th and 124th Avenues NE.

Councilmember Robertson said it would be helpful to see a comparison of options 2 and 3 versus a no-build alternative. While a no-build alternative is not practical, she feels this would help to understand the impacts to the overall transportation system. She commented that actual costs for different roadway cross-sections are important, and through lanes are key to making the auto and bus portion of the transportation system work. She would like to be able to compare the costs of different roadway widths and the costs of each element (e.g., bike path, turn lanes).

Mr. O'Neill summarized that option 1 provides the highest travel capacity on NE 15th/16th Street itself, and it is also the widest cross-section. Options 2 and 3 potentially reduce the width but do not provide as much travel capacity for vehicles. Options 2 and 3 also push more trips to the surrounding transportation network.

Mr. Sparrman reviewed the schedule coordination involving Sound Transit's East Link Segment D project, the NE 15th/16th Street corridor pre-design, and other associated projects including 120th Avenue NE, light rail station area design, stream analysis, and impact mitigation.

Councilmember Chelminiak observed that costs for NE 15th/16th Street could be reduced by limiting the roadway. However, the traffic will then go elsewhere and potentially trigger the need for transportation improvements in other areas. He questioned whether funds are budgeted to address these potential impacts.

Mr. Sparrman agreed that the City needs to analyze the broader impacts as traffic volumes potentially shift to other facilities and trigger additional improvements at those locations.

Mr. Sparrman wrapped up his review of the schedules for the different Sound Transit and City of Bellevue projects.

Responding to Mayor Davidson, Mr. Logwood explained that the plan for the August 23 public involvement meeting is to share some of the information on alternatives analyses with the community. Staff will discuss the core elements of the NE 15th/16th Street project including the number of lanes.

Councilmember Balducci observed that she is not sure that meaningful public input can be obtained at this point, given the general nature of the information available. She questioned staff's conclusions so far.

Responding to Ms. Balducci, Mr. Sparrman said that staff favors option 1, and option 2 appears to function better than option 3. A key issue is to relieve traffic demands on NE 8th Street, especially at the intersection of 116th Avenue NE. Option 2 might have some viability, while option 3 does not appear to provide sufficient capacity.

Councilmember Chelminiak concurred with Ms. Balducci's concern about initiating public involvement at this preliminary stage. He agrees with previous comments that too many elements are potentially included in the NE 15th/16th Street corridor. He recalled discussions by the Planning Commission about the importance of not only the transportation functionality of the corridor, but also about how the design will influence the character of the Bel-Red area. The Transportation Commission is concerned about the width of the corridor, as well as the costs, but sees the roadway as a fundamental project in defining the urban character of the area. He does not want to forget that this project is about place-making and that decisions should not be based solely on costs.

Mr. O'Neill acknowledged that land use and roadway design will influence the character of the corridor. He noted that the 130th Avenue NE node will be focused on residential development, while the Spring District will have a strong office focus.

Deputy Mayor Lee said he and the Council have heard from a number of businesses and property owners in the corridor about their concerns and suggestions. He wants to be sure that the City's ongoing analysis addresses these concerns. He said it would be helpful to see a summary of these concerns and the planning considerations in response to the concerns.

Councilmember Robertson opined that the project should not be taken to the public until more analysis, including cost estimates, is completed. She said it is critical to have maximum travel lanes for vehicles in order to ensure effective functionality. She does not feel the project is ready to be addressed in a three-day design charrette, which is scheduled for the end of August.

Mr. Sparrman explained that the charrette is intended to facilitate a multi-disciplinary perspective on the overall design of the roadway and adjacent land uses. The charrette will involve staff, consultants, and specific stakeholders with experience in relevant technical fields.

In further response to Councilmember Robertson, Mr. Sparrman said staff will provide information to the Council on the cost of the charrette.

At 8:00 p.m., Mayor Davidson declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC

City Clerk

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