

CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

October 1, 2012
6:00 p.m.

Council Conference Room
Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Lee, Deputy Mayor Robertson and Councilmembers Balducci¹,
Chelminiak, Davidson, Stokes, and Wallace

ABSENT: None.

1. Executive Session

Mayor Lee called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m. There was no Executive Session.

2. Study Session

(a) East Link Light Rail: Cost Saving Work Plan Findings

City Manager Steve Sarkozy opened staff's presentation of the findings of the Cost Savings Work Plan. He noted that the East Link Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) collaborative design process identified a number of potential cost saving options intended to offset part of the City's light rail tunnel funding contribution. Mr. Sarkozy said this information was shared with the Sound Transit Board on the previous Thursday.

Transportation Director Dave Berg recalled that the Council adopted the East Link Cost Savings Work Plan in June to narrow down the number of options for continued study. He said that the MOU collaborative design process is highly functioning, with staff and consultants from both agencies involved in the work. Mr. Berg introduced Ron Lewis, the East Link Executive Project Director with Sound Transit.

Mr. Berg said no action is requested of the Council tonight. The decision-making process will continue through Spring 2013. The Cost Savings Work Plan Findings report was published on Friday. Staff hopes to narrow the list of cost saving ideas by late October for further design and environmental work.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Robertson, Mr. Berg said the Sound Transit Board is expected to make a decision on which options to move into environmental review on October 25.

¹ Councilmember Balducci arrived at 6:21 p.m.

Mr. Berg said staff will return to the City Council on October 15 to seek direction on the narrowing of options as recommended by the Collaborative Design Process Steering Committee.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Lewis said the Sound Transit Capital Committee meets next on October 11 and will receive a presentation on the findings as well.

Councilmember Davidson questioned whether a supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will be required to study the cost saving measures. Mr. Lewis said the environmental team is part of the collaborative design team. Once the cost saving measures are fully identified by the Sound Transit Board and the City Council, the environmental team will make a determination about what additional work is needed.

Dr. Davidson noted that there was a supplemental EIS for the North Link project. Mr. Lewis commented that each project is different and issues are handled individually.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Berg clarified that the work plan contains the cost saving measures identified in June by the Council for further study.

Mr. Lewis described the recent public outreach activities. A number of stakeholder briefings have taken place, and more than 360 people attended the open houses on April 26 and June 5. Informational drop-in sessions on the Bellevue options are scheduled for October 2, 3 and 4.

Responding to Dr. Davidson, Mr. Lewis said there will not be formal, recorded oral communications during the drop-in sessions. However, citizens will have the opportunity to speak to individuals and ask questions.

Mr. Lewis described three ideas for system wide cost savings of potentially \$15 million to \$20 million which have been advanced for further engineering review: 1) Refinements to the elevated guideway design, 2) Reducing stormwater vaults through low-impact development design, and 3) Expediting tunnel construction through additional temporary road closures.

Councilmember Wallace questioned the process for determining which roads would be closed. Mr. Lewis said that involves a number of factors. One activity that Sound Transit is thinking about as part of the early phase of final design is contract packaging, which addresses how the project will be delivered and in what phases. As the design progresses to the contract level, Sound Transit will address staging areas, access and egress for the contractors, road access and potential road closures.

Councilmember Wallace questioned how Sound Transit developed an estimate of cost savings related to road closures. Mr. Lewis said that preliminary engineering assumed that temporary street closures could occur in the Downtown on 110th Avenue, for example. Since that time, progress has been made on potential street closures on 110th Avenue with regard to the HEI property. Mr. Lewis said those are examples of temporary road closures that would contribute to cost savings.

Mr. Berg noted that the City will be involved in decisions about road closures and in coordinating traffic flow.

Responding to Councilmember Davidson, Mr. Berg confirmed that it is difficult and, in some instances impossible, to use low-impact development practices in a wetland.

Deputy Mayor Robertson said she is pleased to see these opportunities for potential cost savings. She asked when more accurate estimates of cost savings will be available. Mr. Berg said those items will need to be refined by the time the design gets closer to 60 percent. However, that will not occur until late 2013 or early 2014.

Dr. Davidson said he does not understand the logic of deciding on cost saving measures for the alignment now, when a more accurate cost estimate will not be available for another year. Mr. Berg said the team has spent considerable time on engineering and cost estimating to be able to gradually refine the estimates as work progresses. He said the project team is working with the best information available.

Councilmember Wallace said it appears that the allocated contingencies are not included in the cost saving estimates. He recalled that the project contingency is roughly 28 percent. Mr. Lewis confirmed that the construction costs presented tonight do not include those contingencies.

Councilmember Wallace said there is a table/exhibit in the MOU with a detailed statement of the City's \$160 million contribution to the Downtown tunnel. Before making a decision on the cost saving measures, Mr. Wallace would like to be able to compare how each line item is affected by different cost estimates. For example, how does any given cost savings measure alter the detailed table in the MOU. Mr. Wallace said the cost estimates need to get to a better level of sophistication.

Councilmember Chelminiak observed that the original cost estimates included contingencies. Responding to Mr. Chelminiak, Mr. Lewis said the estimated cost savings for each idea under consideration reflects the savings in construction costs only. Mr. Chelminiak said it is difficult to make decisions based on the estimates for cost savings only. He said it is also important to maintain service levels, and some of the cost savings measures potentially lower the service level.

Mayor Lee said it is difficult to know how to move forward. He suggested that perhaps Sound Transit could do a separate analysis/report to address these questions. Mr. Lewis said that Sound Transit staff can be available to meet individually to provide some additional information.

Mr. Lewis clarified that Sound Transit is not looking for cost savings at the expense of the operational functionality of the light rail system. He noted that some of the cost savings measures achieve enhanced operations and many involve tradeoffs. One example of an item that continues to be in flux is the extent of the elevated guideway on Bellevue Way.

Dr. Davidson recalled that Sound Transit previously established a cost savings goal of \$160 million in order to provide a Downtown tunnel. However, Sound Transit cannot tell the Council how much things are actually going to cost. Dr. Davidson said he does not follow that logic.

Councilmember Stokes observed that there are two separate issues. The \$160 million was identified in the MOU. He said he would like to hear the rest of the presentation. Responding to Mr. Stokes, Mr. Lewis confirmed that the Council is not being asked to make any decisions tonight. The purpose is to provide an update on the technical findings.

Mayor Lee observed that what Dr. Davidson asks was relevant a year or more ago, before the Council agreed to the collaborative design effort. However, he believes the process is on the right track and that we need to look forward to what cost savings can be achieved.

Moving on, Mr. Lewis described the cost saving idea to shift Bellevue Way to the west and to add a southbound HOV lane (Option 1a). There would continue to be two general purpose lanes in each direction. Mr. Lewis explained that this option eliminates the trench and retains the Winters House in its current location.

Mr. Lewis described the retaining wall along the west side of Bellevue Way, which extends to 35 feet high at its highest point. This option provides \$7 million to \$11 million in cost savings, based upon the City providing \$11 million of funding for the HOV lane. Mr. Lewis said that noise impacts can be mitigated, and most properties to be impacted already exceed the noise thresholds used by Sound Transit. He said there will be slight noise increases.

Mr. Lewis said this option reduces the length of the elevated guideway, and moves the driveway for the Blueberry Farm and Winters House to the south. He noted that the cost of building the HOV lane as a separate project is \$18 million to \$20 million, so this option achieves savings for both the HOV lane and light rail projects.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Berg confirmed that the cost saving idea could be implemented without the HOV lane.

Responding to Mayor Lee, Mr. Berg said staff has not conducted an analysis of the cost savings of this option without the HOV lane.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Lewis said that Sound Transit has not developed a cost of estimate of shifting Bellevue Way to the west without adding the HOV lane.

Responding to Ms. Balducci, Mr. Berg said that building light rail and maintaining four lanes of traffic, without the HOV lane, expands the roadway slightly to the west beginning near the existing blueberry farm/produce market and continuing north on Bellevue Way.

Responding to Deputy Mayor Robertson, Mr. Lewis confirmed that Sound Transit's existing alignment has a HOV lane south of the South Bellevue Park and Ride. Without adding the HOV lane north of the Park and Ride, Mr. Lewis confirmed that there would be lane closures on

Bellevue Way during construction. Ms. Robertson recalled that the EIS indicated that one lane would be closed for the duration of construction, and often two lanes would be closed. Mr. Berg said that adding the HOV lane before light rail construction does benefit the function of the roadway during construction.

Responding to Councilmember Chelminiak, Mr. Lewis said Sound Transit has not yet developed a specific phasing plan for project construction. Councilmember Chelminiak suggested that adding the HOV lane extends, and possibly doubles, the construction period for that section of Bellevue Way. Mr. Berg confirmed that there would be consecutive projects for quite some time.

Mr. Chelminiak said the phasing plan is critical. He believes there is a need to analyze this more fully before determining the value of the HOV lane within the broader context of construction impacts. Mr. Berg acknowledged that building the retaining wall will take time as well.

Councilmember Stokes stated his understanding that the purpose of the HOV lane is to add capacity, both during and after construction. He noted that the retaining wall will be necessary if Bellevue Way is shifted to the west, with or without the HOV lane. He acknowledged that it would increase the complexity of the project.

Mr. Wallace reiterated his request for better detail on the noise impacts and how they will be mitigated according to Bellevue's noise ordinance. Secondly, he would like better graphic designs of the project that depict existing development along the alignment.

Continuing, Mr. Berg described the cost saving idea for 112th Avenue SE, which places the rail line underneath a raised roadway (Option 2b). The height of the raised roadway is lower than the currently planned elevated rail line. Mr. Berg said this alternative has received relatively strong support.

Mr. Berg described the option of creating a new neighborhood access via Bellefield Residential Park, which has a potential savings of \$7 million to \$13 million. He described additional graphics, noting the potential for U-turns on 112th Avenue to improve circulation.

Mr. Berg said that traffic volumes into Surrey Downs from 112th Avenue SE are approximately 800 vehicles per day. This access could be restricted or provided from SE 4th Street or SE 15th Street. Mr. Berg said that noise impacts can be reduced and mitigated. An at-grade light rail train option at SE 4th Street, which eliminates the trench, saves potentially \$7 million to \$16 million.

Dr. Davidson said he does not see any reason for the East Main Station. He suggested that it could be added in the future if needed, for example, to serve transit oriented development. Mr. Berg said that eliminating the station would reduce costs. However, that cost savings would not contribute to the City's cost savings effort with Sound Transit. Mr. Berg noted that a signalized pedestrian crossing is envisioned to cross 112th Avenue at the East Main Station.

Dr. Davidson asked whether the only cost savings to be explored are those specified in the MOU. Mr. Berg reiterated that eliminating a station would not be attributed to reducing the City's \$60 million contingent contribution.

Mayor Lee said it would still be reasonable to say that there are other ways to reduce costs.

Mr. Lewis said Sound Transit has identified cost savings across the board, including materials costs. However, eliminating the station would be a scope change, and the MOU speaks pretty clearly on that point.

Councilmember Balducci recalled that, when Sound Transit's revenues decreased by 25 percent a couple of years ago, a number of projects were trimmed back significantly. She said the Sound Transit Board received a presentation the previous week which indicates that revenues are short by another five percent. She commented that there will likely continue to be tradeoffs.

Responding to Ms. Balducci, Mr. Lewis said the drop-in sessions this week will provide a profile showing the elevation of the guideway. With regard to options involving grade changes, he said it is more comfortable for the rider to have a more level alignment, versus dipping into the trench in front of the Winters House, for example. Mr. Balducci said it would be helpful to be able to see all aspects of the options including pedestrian access and safety issues.

Councilmember Chelminiak noted the environmental assessment and questioned the handling of the seven or eight homes that the City Council has identified as full, rather than partial, takings. Mr. Berg said he believes those are still listed as partial takings but he will check. Mr. Chelminiak questioned whether creating neighborhood access through Bellefield Residential Park would result in residential takings.

Councilmember Wallace spoke to the benefits of a lower elevated structure and an improved transition at Main Street. He reiterated his question about how these options can be mitigated in order to comply with Bellevue's noise ordinance. He said he felt comfortable supporting the original trench option due to concerns about noise. However, he is concerned that noise will increase with the elevated roadway.

Dr. Davidson asked about noise caused by separate segments of track. Mr. Lewis said Sound Transit's rail is welded for continuous track. He described other techniques used to reduce or eliminate light rail noise.

Councilmember Chelminiak stated his understanding that road noise does not fall into the City's noise ordinance. He suspects there could be more noise impacts associated with the elevated roadway than the elevated rail. He would like to keep everything under consideration at this point, and would like answers to the Council's questions.

Moving on, Mr. Lewis described alternative concepts for the Downtown. The Optimized Adopted project includes a station under 110th Avenue NE with two entrances on the west side of the street (Option 3e). The potential cost savings is \$6 million to \$10 million. The second

concept is the Stacked Tunnel (Option 3b), which could reduce excavation requirements. There are two station entrances, one on the east side of 110th Avenue at NE 4th Street and the other on the west side off 110th Avenue at NE 6th Street, across from the Transit Center. The estimated cost savings is \$8 million to \$13 million.

Mayor Lee said it is important to have adequate access for everybody working and moving around the affected intersections. Mr. Lewis acknowledged that details about access will need to be refined. He explained that the adopted Downtown Station design has a mezzanine, which allows access to the station from all directions.

The third Downtown option is to relocate the station to NE 6th Street as a surface station between City Hall and Meydenbauer Center, for a potential cost savings of \$23 million to \$39 million. Mr. Berg said it does slow the train down to make the turn from 110th Avenue. He noted that the diagram assumes a standard station design and not the signature station the Council discussed back in June.

Staff responded to questions of clarification regarding the NE 6th Street station.

Responding to Councilmember Balducci, Mr. Berg said that all of the tunnel options impact the City Hall parking garage.

Councilmember Chelminiak expressed concern that the NE 6th Street station would adversely affect the functionality of the system and that it would cause noise and vibration impacts to adjacent buildings. In addition, this option eliminates 188 parking spaces from the City Hall garage, which will have to be replaced at a cost to the City.

Mr. Chelminiak said he likes where the design is going with the Optimized Adopted station. He likes the station entrances at NE 4th Street and at NE 6th Street (Transit Center). He agreed with the Mayor's earlier comment that optimized tunnel access is key to achieving ridership.

Councilmember Wallace noted that the City's \$100 million obligation in the MOU requires the City to pay for replacement parking. If the replacement cost increases, that financial obligation for the City needs to be considered. Mr. Berg said the cost savings of the NE 6th Street Station does take additional parking costs, as well as right-of-way costs, into consideration.

Mr. Wallace observed that cost savings in the Downtown means the project is not saving money at the expense of residents in the single-family neighborhoods to the south. Referring to Mr. Chelminiak's earlier comment, Mr. Wallace said that, while vehicle noise is exempt from the noise ordinance, arterial improvements are not. If arterial improvements are completed in a residential area, a noise analysis and mitigation must occur.

Councilmember Stokes said he believes the design process is moving in the right direction. The NE 6th Street station has the potential for saving money, enhancing the station, and increasing ridership.

Mayor Lee said it would be helpful to know how the NE 6th Street station might affect the Metro site next to City Hall.

Mr. Berg reminded the Council of the next steps. Drop-in sessions are scheduled for this week. The findings will go to the Sound Transit Capital Committee on October 11 and to the Sound Transit Board on October 25. The City Council will address the options again on October 15.

Mr. Berg said that environmental review on the cost savings ideas is slated for the first quarter of 2013.

Councilmember Davidson requested information on the expansion joints for light rail on I-90.

At 8:04 p.m., Mayor Lee declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

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