

September 13, 2010: Extended Study Session Notes

Reference Materials

Agenda:

<http://ci.bellevue.wa.us/Agendas/CityCouncilAgendaExtendedStudySession9-13-10.pdf>

Study session packet (Attachment 9 most relevant):

<http://www.bellevuewa.gov/pdf/City%20Council/PackageExtendedStudySession9-13-103d.pdf>

Oral Communications

Will Knedlik (longtime ST opponent): praises the council, urging Bellevue to “take lead” on subarea equity. Wants \$350 million of prematurely issued bonds to be refunded. “Stop subsidizing Seattle’s bus transportation”—(referring to ST express bus service). Tells council to ask ST to allocate \$1.131 billion in federal grants to East King subarea for next year’s budget.

Martin P.: favors B2, ST’s preferred alignment. Has concerns about additional money to study B7, at expense of other aspects. Says it is unfortunate to appease “small constituency.”

Gary R.: ST voted 18-0 [for B2M] resulting in already extensive work on B2. Take money used on council’s desired new B7 study and “hire new policeman” or something else. No more money on East Link.

Leslie L. (Bellevue Downtown Association): talks about downtown tunnel-- promoting downtown alignment in a tunnel guideway. Pleased about the earlier term sheet agreements. Says you obviously can't “avoid impacting neighborhoods.” Believes that continuing to study B7 option is “perceived as taking a step back” to helping fund downtown tunnel. Gravely concerned that we “will wind up with an at-grade alignment.” Further reiterates not spending all of East Link money on B7.

Communications closed.

East Link Discussion

Steve Sarkozy opens discussion and gives brief background. At the 9/7 study session, the Mayor requested a proposal to continue studying B7. Inside the study session packet are materials to frame discussion. Notes that tonight is just discussion, there’s no intention for any action.

Grant Degginger expresses confusion. Notes that council just spent 300k to evaluate if DEIS treated B7 fairly—the conclusion is that it did. Degginger heard the Mayor say at the 9/7 meeting that the concern was that B7 was not at same level of study as B2M. Despite this, the attached “scope of work” does not reflect that. Questions if the alignment is still even B7.

Along with “scope of work” attachment in study session packet, there is another letter in the council’s desk packet (not available to public) from William Popp & Associates. Both letter and scope of work are apparently part of proposal in response to Davidson’s 9/7 request. Degginger asks Mayor Davidson if he directly requested such a proposal from Popp. Davidson declines.

Degginger reiterates same question to Kevin Wallace.

Kevin Wallace says he has been in “ongoing” discussion with Bill Popp and that the given scope of work builds on information we already know and factors in new elements, including A-2 station. Degginger expresses surprise that an outside consultant is directing the proposal, and wants full documents.

Degginger: "Staff didn't write what's in our packet." Begins to show frustration that a third-party assembled the materials that are directing discussion.

The letter from Bill Popp given to the councilmembers says that the downtown alignment will be “grade-separated.” Degginger wants it clear that the council unanimously supports C9T, not a generic grade-separated alignment, most likely referring to the C14E Vision Line.

Davidson reads from a report that the DEIS does not contain enough information about wetlands to make a decision on which alignment has more environmental impacts.

Claudia Balducci: If there's an inadequate amount of information, then it is merely an error and will be addressed in ST's future EIS. It does not require "thousands or millions of dollars" in additional studies. All information the consultants found will be presented to ST. **Doesn't make sense that pro-B7 members have so much faith in B7 despite also saying there's not enough information to make any sound decision on the alignment.**

Wallace thinks B7 only appears to be bad because no one is trying to refine it or address the alignment problems head on. Suggests the council has been doing just that, using the A-2 P&R as an example (Note: STB has already stated the problems with that new P&R).

Wallace: Idea is to advance B7 and C9T to improve ridership, get costs, avoid neighborhood impacts by using a rail corridor. Use "apples to apples" comparison to determine routing decision.

Wallace does not address Claudia's question of why the council quorum has been so faithful to B7 despite the purported inadequacy of information. He proposes a motion to further study along the lines of the “scope of work” (Attachment 9- written by Bill Popp) in study session packet.

Conrad Lee: With what we know, "B7 seems to be best." Then later contradicts himself by saying that there's "not enough information" about B7.

John Chelminiak: floored at "concept of light rail suspension bridge" that will be evaluated as an alternative to pile-supported bridge. Says he is philosophically opposed to consultants setting policy for this City and opposed to having "ball hidden" from other councilmembers.

Chelminiak: "Mr. Popp supports ‘doing away with ST’ entirely.” Mentions that the letter also refers to **Jim MacIsaac—member of an organization that opposes light rail (he’s referring to the ETA).** Questions if that is legal and if these kinds of contracts need to go out to bid. City Manager Steve Sarkozy confirms that that is true.

Chelminiak: A suspension bridge still requires massive pilings. He mentions a transit cable-stay bridge in Portland with only a max speed of 25mph. Also mentions a suspension bridge in Jerusalem that is not working yet because it ended up 75% more costly than a conventional concrete pile-supported bridge. Visibly frustrated, he says that the people setting policy are part of group “avowed to stopping light rail.”

Motion proposed by Wallace is to adopt "scope of work" in the study session packet for City staff to prepare for. Claudia Balducci asks what the estimated cost of work will be.

Steve Sarkozy: "less than 200k" (150k) for a basic study of the scope of work.

Balducci: "Selecting" and "designing" a new alignment-- how could it possibly be done for 150k?

Sarkozy: It would cost more to advance preliminary engineering to 10-15%.

Degginger: Isn't that what the letter says?

Balducci: There's nothing in the "scope of work" about public outreach. We "need to talk to people in South Enatai if we're talking about a 400,000 sq. foot parking garage" in their neighborhood.

Balducci expresses confusion about a point in the scope of work about GNP (Great Northern Pacific) taking over.

Wallace: the BNSF corridor is in "railbank" status, meaning potential future use for freight. Balducci asks why GNP is specifically mentioned, when a number of private companies could operate freight service. Are there ulterior motives?

Balducci continues to say that "scope of work" does not talk about public outreach for those in downtown and elsewhere along the line. Wants Point 5 (3-90) to be removed: Mr. Popp does not select the alignment, we do. "We consult with them, they do not consult with us." Balducci continues to mention flaws in the scope of work.

Jennifer Robertson: "I don't care where ideas come from," as long as we get something done. Talks about the generalized benefits of B7-- avoiding impacts to "wonderful single family" neighborhoods. Says she'll support the motion despite believing it "needs more work."

Degginger: there was "deafening silence from staff table" when it was asked: how MUCH will it cost?"

Sparman: 15% engineering for B7-like alignment will cost roughly 2-3 million based on previous estimates, may take as long as 9 months to engineer this completely new B7-esque alignment. [The proposed alignment deviates considerably from the original B7]

Degginger: "this is not your father's B7," this is something different. We have not even reviewed or approved this alignment. Scope of work does not analyze noise or traffic impacts on neighborhood being affected by new P&R. You can spend \$150k on quick and dirty study to tell you what people want to hear. Or spend 2-3 million (money we don't have) to study this completely new alternative.

Davidson says same can be said about ST engineering B2.

Conrad Lee blames ST: "we would not be here if ST had done its job" and if it was "fair."

Balducci: differentiates between \$50K peer review and full-scale design and engineering. We will not get what we want with 150K. Addresses Conrad Lee: our own consultants (tax-paid) said that ST was fair.

Balducci: We've spent money on studying B alignment, but "where is work on the tunnel?"

Chelminiak: We need to focus on mitigation. We're getting distracted. We're not bringing B7 up to 15 or 20 % engineering. We're engineering a completely new line to 5%. "It's time to get serious." Refers to a bunch of failed proposals: C14E, B7M, A-2, etc. Wants to get serious about actual mitigation, not just new proposals that might not work.

Chelminiak also mentions that B7 would condemn Foushee and Associates, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce's business of the year. [Note: the Bellevue Chamber is known to lean toward B7]

Wallace proposes a "friendly" amendment for a \$200k cost cap on the study. The amendment is ultimately withdrawn, but resurfaces as a separate motion.

There is confusion over what the motion is. Intended motion was for RFP (request for proposal), but the motion at discussion seems to adopt some scope of work.

Wallace says motion is for **staff to come back with scope of work that looks at B7-C9T with modifications that would improve ridership, analyze cost, look at A-2 station, move alignment east off Greenbaum site, eliminate that station, run along frontage road with at-grade and elevated options, with tunnel portal at Sheraton if at-grade or at 111th Ave if elevated.**

Balducci questions if just a motion is even necessary. City Manager Steve Sarkozy agrees and recommends that we forget the motion.

Wallace: first phase of scope of work will cost less than \$200k. Will be starting point.

Degginger: what will **all** phases cost? If we want apples to apples, this won't cost 200k. Doesn't want an artificial cap that is irresponsible (referring to \$200k cost cap motion).

Davidson acknowledges the City Manager's recommendation, but then disregards it by calling for a vote anyway.

Council votes 4 (Davidson, Lee, Wallace, Robertson) - 3 (Degginger, Balducci, Chelminiak) for Wallace's motion listed above.

Council votes down other motion about \$200k cost cap 3 (Davidson, Lee, Wallace) - 4 (Degginger, Balducci, Chelminiak, Robertson)