

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC

King County Metro RapidRide K Line – Request for Letter of Support

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DIRECTION

King County Metro's (Metro) staff is requesting a letter of support from the Council for the RapidRide K Line (K Line) draft Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). Metro staff will present information related to the draft LPA and share results of the third phase of community engagement. Bellevue staff will provide updated information related to project impacts to general purpose traffic. City of Bellevue staff is seeking direction on whether to prepare a letter for the Mayor to sign in support of the draft LPA.

RECOMMENDATION

Direct City of Bellevue staff to prepare a letter for the Mayor's signature on behalf of the Council in support of King County Metro's RapidRide K Line draft Locally Preferred Alternative.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

RapidRide is Metro's highest level of service, providing connections between regional centers. RapidRide lines are intended to make transit a convenient and attractive alternative to driving alone. Compared to the standard bus routes they replace, RapidRide lines are up to 20 percent faster and carry up to 70 percent more passengers. To make RapidRide service fast and reliable, Metro works with local jurisdictions to implement capital improvements. RapidRide service is provided seven days a week, with buses arriving every 10 minutes during peak travel hours and every 15 minutes outside of peak travel hours, for a minimum of 16 hours a day and potentially up to 24 hours a day.

RapidRide K Line

Metro is in the planning phase for the K Line. The new bus route is planned to begin service as early as 2030. It will serve Bellevue and Kirkland over a 16-mile corridor by providing connections to the Eastgate Park and Ride, Bellevue College, Bellevue Transit Center, Downtown Bellevue, the South

Kirkland Park and Ride, Downtown Kirkland, and the Totem Lake Transit Center in Kirkland (see page 6 of Attachment B for the RapidRide K Line route map). City Council received briefings on RapidRide K Line on October 28, 2019, June 11, 2024, November 26, 2024, and February 11, 2025.

In addition to connecting these regional and local centers, the K Line will also provide key regional transit connections, including Sound Transit's 2 Line, Sound Transit's future Stride bus rapid transit (BRT), and other RapidRide services. By providing a network of frequent transit connections, passengers will be able to reach more locations in less time.

The K Line will serve a variety of major employers in the medical, technology, and aerospace industries, as well as several higher education institutions and other regional destinations. The K Line is intended to operate on arterial roads within Bellevue and Kirkland. Station locations are under development as Metro gathers public input and evaluates potential roadway improvements.

Since the February 11 Council meeting, Metro has reduced the RapidRide K Line budget by \$15 million, from \$120 million to \$105 million due to budget constraints. Budget reductions were made on all RapidRide projects not currently in construction. Metro is seeking \$52 million from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) via the Small Starts Program.

The K Line is an outcome of the Bellevue *Transit Master Plan* (TMP), adopted by the Bellevue City Council in 2014. The TMP identified the need for enhanced connectivity between Totem Lake, Downtown Bellevue, Bellevue College, and the Eastgate Park and Ride. *Metro Connects*, King County's long-range transit vision adopted in 2021, included this corridor as a future RapidRide line.

Lessons Learned from Previous Implementation of RapidRide Lines

Since the first RapidRide entered service in 2010, eight RapidRide lines have been launched carrying approximately 21 million passengers or 17 percent of all of Metro's annual ridership. This accounts for nearly 67,000 weekday rides, an approximately 70 percent increase in weekday ridership over the bus routes that served those same travel markets previously. Providing more frequent, convenient, and higher quality transit service attracts more riders and moves more people than traditional local bus service. The recently launched RapidRide G and H Lines have both outperformed the underlying transit routes they replaced. As of January 2025, average weekday boardings for the G Line were 4,800 and for the H Line were 7,800.

Locally Preferred Alternative – March 2025

The RapidRide K Line project has reached a key decision point with the development of the draft Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), shown in Attachment B. The LPA is a document that presents the project vision for a transit corridor and is required by the FTA for Small Starts grant funding. Following an evaluation through a local planning process and input from the community, the LPA is adopted as the desired alternative by the lead agency and identified as the preferred alternative in the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) review process. The LPA defines the core components of the project, including the mode, alignment, roadway and transit capital improvements, and operating characteristics. As a part of identifying roadway and transit capital improvements, the LPA highlights areas along the corridor where the project will benefit from transit priority. King County Metro requires a 15-30 percent transit travel time savings for all RapidRide projects. A list of recommended speed and reliability improvements is included in the LPA for further evaluation in a future phase of design, and if

implemented, would achieve the desired transit travel time savings to warrant investment of a RapidRide service. In addition, greater transit travel time savings will increase the competitiveness of RapidRide K Line for potential grant funding.

Metro is asking the Bellevue and Kirkland city councils to provide letters in support of the draft LPA. Metro must have the cities' letters of support prior to adoption by King County Council (anticipated later this year). The LPA is "draft" until adopted by the King County Council. Once the LPA is adopted by the County Council, Metro will be able to apply for FTA Smart Starts grant funding for the K Line.

Submitting a letter of support for the K Line draft LPA demonstrates that the City of Bellevue: 1) supports the core components of the project as stated in the draft LPA, including the recommended speed and reliability projects; and 2) believes implementation is reasonable pending further design refinement and collaboration. Providing a letter of support demonstrates that the City of Bellevue will remain committed as a good faith partner to the future refinement and ultimate delivery of the project.

After receiving the letters, the County Executive will transmit the LPA to the King County Council for adoption. Metro must begin preparing an application for federal funding in the spring of 2025 to apply for FTA Small Starts funding this fall and to meet the 2030 target to begin K Line service.

Access to Transit Projects

"Access to transit" refers to the various ways people get to transit service. As part of the draft LPA, King County Metro is proposing several improvements for funding and delivery through the K Line project. These improvements are intended to enhance safety and convenience to walk, roll, or bike to the K Line. If future budget cuts are necessary, some of these access to transit projects may not be delivered with the K Line project.

Access to transit projects planned in Bellevue include the following (maps are included on pages 24-26 of Attachment B):

- **116th Avenue SE at SE 1st Street.** Upgrade curb ramps and reduce turning radii at SE 1st Street.
- **SE 1st Street east of 116th Avenue SE.** Install sidewalk along the west side of SE 1st Street between 116th Ave SE and the first business driveway to the north.
- **SE 7th Pl, just east of Lake Hills Connector.** Install sidewalk along the south side of SE 7th Place east of Lake Hills Connector.
- **SE 7th Pl, between Lake Hills Connector and 128th Avenue SE.** Install a crosswalk with rectangular rapidly flashing beacons (RRFBs) across SE 7th Place between Lake Hills Connector and 128th Avenue SE.
- **Lake Hills Connector and 134th Avenue SE.** Install a signalized crossing at Lake Hills Connector and 134th Avenue SE.
- **140th Avenue SE and SE 10th Street Intersection.** Install a crosswalk with RRFBs across 140th Avenue SE at SE 10th Street.

Speed and Reliability Projects, Including Business Access and Transit (BAT) Lanes

At the June 11, 2024 Council meeting, Councilmembers directed staff to prioritize transit consistency and reliability in the Council-adopted *RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles* (Attachment A) and in K Line

planning. Council noted that people should be able to trust that K Line buses will arrive on time.

At the November 26, 2024 Council meeting, Metro presented candidate speed and reliability improvements. These improvements are critical to meeting Metro's RapidRide targets of reducing transit travel times by 15-30 percent (compared to existing service) as well as making the project competitive for FTA grant funding. At this stage of design, Metro's transit time savings is projected to be 24 percent. Metro's proposed speed and reliability projects include implementing BAT lanes, which operate similar to bus-only lanes, but allow access for vehicles turning right into businesses, driveways and streets. Emergency vehicles are allowed to use these lanes. Other proposed treatments include transit queue jumps and dedicated turn lanes.

Business Access and Transit Lanes

Speed and reliability treatments focus on reducing delay in the most congested areas of the route; therefore, prioritizing buses within downtown Bellevue demonstrates the greatest benefit to transit along the K Line route. While dedicated bus-only lanes were initially considered as a speed and reliability treatment, Bellevue staff asked Metro to focus potential speed and reliability projects on BAT lanes to balance improved transit travel time with potential impacts to general purpose traffic. Metro is proposing all-day BAT lanes at multiple locations that would operate seven days a week to maintain speed and reliability. No bus-only lanes are being proposed in Bellevue; however, Metro is proposing two bus-only turn lanes which includes widening the road and will not impact general purpose travel lanes.

BAT lanes improve both the speed and the reliability of transit and are more effective at increasing person-throughput when compared to general purpose lanes because buses can carry more people. However, BAT lanes have the potential to increase travel time for general purpose vehicles in certain instances.

Based on the TMP and City Council's direction in June 2024, the K Line project includes candidate BAT lane projects along the corridors bulleted below. In general, each BAT lane project proposes that the existing curb lane (lane next to the curb) operates as a BAT lane. In two instances, approximately 25 total existing parking stalls would be removed or restricted to create a BAT lane. While some of the BAT lane projects were identified in Bellevue's TMP, additional projects are proposed through the K Line project to attract more riders, meet Metro's transit travel time saving targets and to make the project competitive for FTA grant funding.

The proposed BAT lanes in the draft LPA are as follows (see page 25 of Attachment B for a map):

- **116th Avenue NE northbound, from Felix Terry Swistak Drive NE (southern Overlake Hospital intersection) to NE 12th Street.** The existing curb lane from Felix Terry to NE 12th Street would operate as a BAT lane.
- **110th Avenue NE northbound, from NE 6th Street to NE 10th Street.** The existing curb lane would operate as a BAT lane between NE 6th Street and NE 8th Street. The existing parking lane between NE 8th Street and NE 10th Street would be converted to and operate as a BAT lane.
- **110th Avenue NE southbound, from NE 10th Street to NE 4th Street.** The existing parking lane would be converted to and operate as a BAT lane between NE 10th Street and NE 9th Street. The existing curb lane between NE 9th Street and NE 8th Street would operate as a BAT lane. A new curb lane being built by development between NE 8th Street and NE 6th Street would

operate as a BAT lane. The existing curb lane between NE 6th Street and NE 4th Street would operate as a BAT lane.

- **110th Avenue NE northbound at NE 6th Street.** The existing right-turn pocket would operate as a BAT Lane leading up to the intersection of 110th Avenue NE and NE 6th Street. This would require evaluating the curb space leading up to the intersection of 110th Avenue NE and NE 6th Street to determine if the existing pick-up and drop-off area can be preserved.
- **Main Street westbound, from 116th Avenue NE to 110th Avenue NE.** The existing curb lane would operate as a BAT lane.
- **Main Street eastbound, from 110th Avenue NE to 116th Avenue NE.** The existing curb lane would operate as a BAT lane.

Changes to Speed and Reliability Projects since February 11, 2025 Council Meeting

Since the February 11 Council meeting, Metro has had to reduce the RapidRide K Line budget by \$15 million, from \$120 million to \$105 million due to budget constraints. Budget reductions were made for all RapidRide projects not currently in construction. In Bellevue, this has resulted in the removal of two projects.

- **The roundabout planned for 145th Place SE at Kelsey Creek Road/24th Street.** Instead of a roundabout, the project will consider making spot improvements to improve intersection geometry and upgrade signal timing.
- **NE 10th Street eastbound BAT lane, from 110th Avenue NE to 116th Avenue NE.** Removing the eastbound BAT lane on NE 10th Street significantly reduces anticipated delays for people driving eastbound on NE 8th Street and brings the NE 8th Street and 116th Avenue NE intersection close to meeting its volume-to-capacity performance target.

NE 10th Street Westbound BAT Lane Removal

In response to Councilmember feedback on February 11, Bellevue staff requested Metro to remove the BAT lane proposal for westbound NE 10th Street between State Route 520 and 110th Avenue NE. As noted above, Metro has already removed the eastbound NE 10th Street BAT lane in this same area.

Bellevue staff performed a modeling analysis to assess year 2044 traffic impacts along NE 10th Street and other intersections in downtown. The modeling exercise compared impacts in two scenarios:

- 1) Removing the eastbound BAT lane on NE 10th Street between 110th and SR 520; or
- 2) Removing both the eastbound and westbound BAT lanes on NE 10th Streets between 110th and SR 520.
 - a. The analysis shows that removing the BAT lanes in both directions on NE 10th Street fully mitigates anticipated diversions and the eastbound travel time increase previously shared for both the NE 8th Street and NE 12th Street corridors. The 116th Avenue NE and NE 8th Street intersection also meets its volume-to-capacity performance target with the removal of the NE 10th Street BAT lanes in both directions.
 - b. In addition to reducing impacts to general purpose traffic in the year 2044, removing the recommended BAT lanes on NE 10th Street will also reduce transit travel time savings for the RapidRide K Line (planned to begin service in 2030). However, Metro anticipates

that the RapidRide K Line can still achieve adequate transit travel time savings through other transit priority treatment opportunities that Metro's project team will further evaluate during the preliminary design phase of the project.

Future Analysis

The 2026 – 2037 Transportation Facilities Plan (TFP) currently under development includes project TR-1 that describes the K Line project and Bellevue's commitment to coordinating with Metro. Following Council's letter of support for the draft LPA, Bellevue staff will be revising the project description to include analysis of general purpose traffic impacts as well as transit travel time benefits.

Transit Travel Time & Person Throughput Benefits

Benefits to Transit Travel Time

The following analysis of roundtrip travel time savings reflect conditions during the evening peak travel period (3 p.m. – 7 p.m.) for the year 2035¹. Implementing the K Line with all improvements identified in Kirkland and Bellevue is expected to provide a 24 percent reduction (or 46 minutes) in roundtrip travel time by transit between Totem Lake and Eastgate when compared to running local transit service on the same route. Overall, the draft K Line project meets or exceeds Metro's RapidRide targets of reducing transit travel times by 15-30 percent compared to existing service.

In downtown Bellevue, which experiences the most congestion, speed and reliability improvements account for a combined savings of six minutes during the evening peak travel period (3 p.m. – 7 p.m.) in 2044.

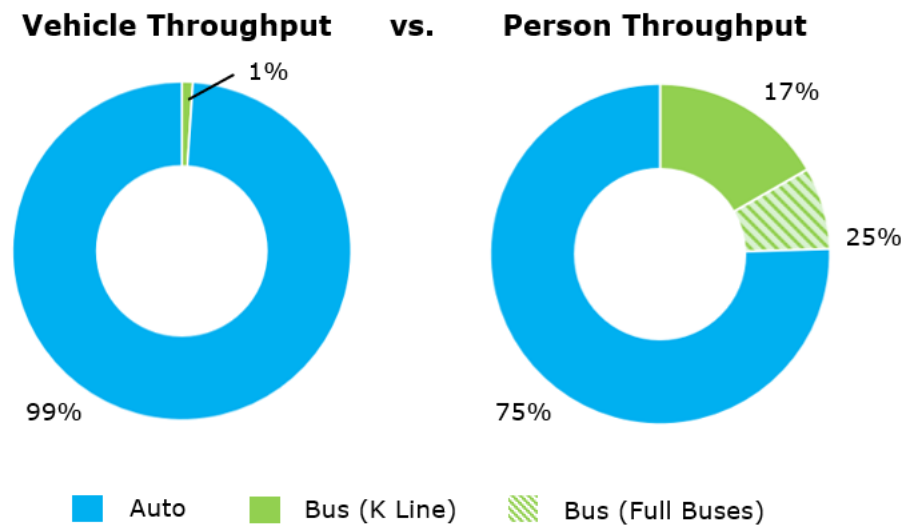
Person-Throughput

Bellevue's policy goals for a multimodal transportation system include optimizing a travel metric called "person throughput." Evaluating what roadway conditions will allow for the most amount of people, across all travel modes, to move through a corridor within a given time period is critical to optimizing this metric. When general purpose traffic lanes reach capacity, buses and other high occupancy vehicles help increase the number of people moving through a congested corridor during peak travel times.

In downtown Bellevue, the city assessed person throughput at certain locations along the K Line route assuming K Line implementation with BAT lanes. Figure 1 below demonstrates that while buses only make up 1 percent of the vehicles on the road, they carry up to 17 percent of the people travelling through the 110th Avenue NE corridor during the evening peak travel period. This person throughput was calculated using K Line ridership projections and other local bus ridership that could use the BAT lanes. When performing this same analysis with the assumption that buses are full, buses carry 25 percent of people traveling through the 110th Avenue NE corridor during the evening peak travel period.

¹ Metro used the year 2035 to analyze transit travel time savings for the entire route because this is a requirement as part of FTA Small Starts grant funding.

Figure 1. Comparing vehicle throughput versus person throughput at 110th Avenue NE, north of NE 6th Street along the K Line route (2044)

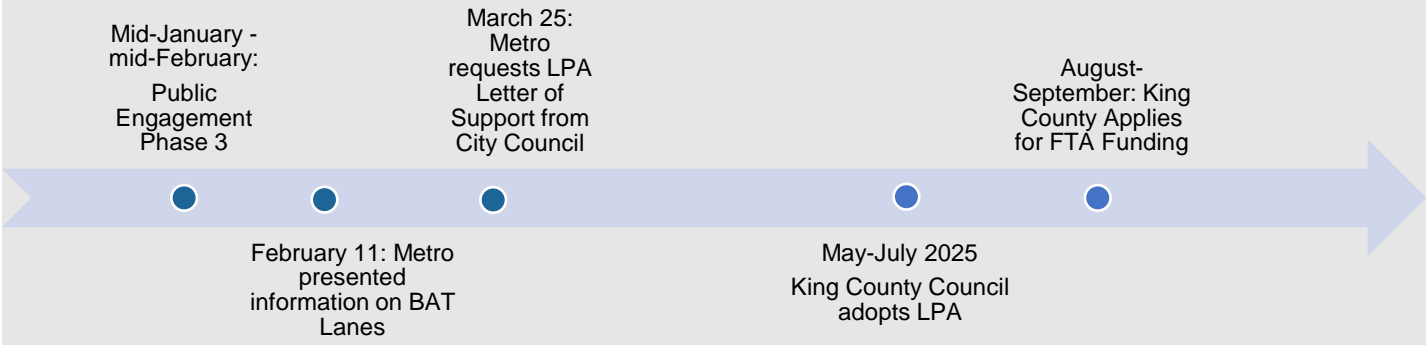


Phase 3 of Community Engagement

A third and final phase of engagement began on January 16 and ended on February 13. Metro’s goal was to collect feedback on the RapidRide K Line vision, confirm community priorities and complete the project’s planning stage. Phase 3 of community engagement included maps and survey questions introducing and requesting feedback on the proposed speed and reliability improvements, including BAT lanes. This phase focused on providing in-person briefings for community groups such as the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, Bellevue Downtown Association and Hopelink’s Eastside mobility program.

At the March 25 Council meeting, Metro will share feedback they have received in phase 3 of community engagement.

Figure 2. 2025 K Line LPA Timeline



POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

Policy Impact

The K Line is a key part of the frequent transit network envisioned in Bellevue's TMP, adopted by the City Council in 2014. The TMP identified potential transit way improvements, including HOV lanes and BAT lanes. Bellevue's partners on the TMP included King County Metro, Sound Transit, Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, Bellevue Downtown Association, Bellevue College, major employers, community-based organizations, and neighboring cities.

On June 11, 2024, Council directed staff to use Bellevue's *RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles* (Attachment A) to provide input to Metro in development of the K Line. The *RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles* are based on policy adopted by Council in the TMP, *Comprehensive Plan*, *Mobility Implementation Plan*, *Curb Management Plan*, and other policy documents. City Council requested staff refine the *RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles* to emphasize that the K Line should be consistent, reliable, and appealing. Council also noted that the K Line should connect with and improve multimodal transportation systems. Attachment A reflects Council's feedback.

The Council-adopted TMP recognizes BAT lanes as a tool to improve the speed and reliability of transit service. The TMP outlines the city's Frequent Transit Network and candidate projects to support high-quality service.

Fiscal Impact

Bellevue is contributing staff time to the project during the planning phase. The City may consider additional staff time or other contributions to the project in the future.

OPTIONS

1. Direct City of Bellevue staff to prepare a letter for the mayor's signature on behalf of the Council in support of King County Metro's RapidRide K Line draft Locally Preferred Alternative.
2. Do not direct staff to prepare a letter of support and provide alternate direction to staff.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Bellevue's RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles
- B. RapidRide K Line Locally Preferred Alternative

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A