

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA TOPIC**

King County Metro RapidRide K Line – Downtown Route and Public Engagement

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY****INFORMATION  
ONLY**

Metro staff will provide an update on King County Metro's (Metro) RapidRide K Line (K Line), including the recommended downtown Bellevue route, Phase 2 of community engagement results and an introduction to candidate speed and reliability improvements. Bellevue staff is seeking Council's feedback on the downtown route. In January, Metro will begin Phase 3 of community engagement—the focus of which will be to seek feedback on the candidate speed and reliability improvements. In February and March, Metro will return to Council to present Phase 3 of community engagement results and seek Council's endorsement of K Line's Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA).

**RECOMMENDATION**

N/A

**BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS**

RapidRide is Metro's bus rapid transit 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 such as arterial high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, business access and transit (BAT) lanes, new turn lanes, and traffic signals that prioritize buses. RapidRide lines have amenities such as off-board fare payment, all-door boarding, real-time bus arrival signs, and high-quality stations. 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, which will begin service as early as 2030. The new bus route will connect 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. In addition to connecting these regional and local centers, the K Line will also provide key regional transit connections, including Sound Transit's Link Light Rail, Sound Transit's STRIDE bus rapid transit (BRT), and other BRT 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 the two cities. The route and stop locations are under development as Metro gathers public input and evaluates potential roadway improvements.

Metro's K Line budget is estimated to be \$120 million, and Metro is seeking a 50 percent match 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.

### **Phase 2 of Community Engagement – Summer 2024**

Since Metro last presented to Bellevue City Council in June 2024, Metro completed its second phase of K Line community engagement. Metro intentionally sought to hear from people and groups who have been historically underrepresented or overlooked in transportation planning. In Phase 2 of community engagement, Metro re-introduced the K Line project and gathered feedback on community priorities and conceptual design plans that Metro developed in partnership with local agencies. As part of Phase 2, Metro received approximately 1,000 valid survey responses and engaged with approximately 600 people through various in-person tabling sessions and another 60 people at street team events.

Key takeaways from Phase 2 of community engagement include:

- Speed and reliability improvements would encourage people to ride transit more frequently, including improvements to travel time, more frequent transit service, routes with fewer transfers, and improvements to reliability.
- 71 percent of people surveyed agree that the proposed stations would help them get to and from the places they need to go.
- The survey asked about two proposed station locations near the Bellevue Transit Center: one option on 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and one option on 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE. Among people who had a preference between the two locations, nearly 70 percent preferred the 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE location.
- A prominent theme was the importance for K Line stations to be located close to 2 Line light rail stations.

### **Phase 3 of Community Engagement – January-February 2025**

A third and final phase of engagement is planned for January and February, which will present a complete vision of the project to the community. Metro's goal is to get detailed feedback that the project team will use to refine the project vision, confirm community priorities and complete the project's planning stage. As in Phase 2, Phase 3 of community engagement will include maps and questions in order to share the project's vision and receive feedback. This phase, however, will be more focused on providing in-person briefings for further engagement amongst stakeholder groups such as the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce and the Bellevue Downtown Association. As part of this effort, Metro will solicit feedback on proposed speed and reliability improvements, including BAT lanes.

#### **Downtown Bellevue Route**

In the June 11 update to City Council on K Line planning, Metro provided an update on potential routing through downtown Bellevue. Since then, the route option on 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE was determined to be most supported by the public and most aligned with the Council-adopted *RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles* (Attachment A). A downtown route option on 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE was also assessed but did not score as high in terms of public support nor alignment with Bellevue's *RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles*. Both routes are identified as transit corridors in Council-adopted plans. Bellevue's Mobility Implementation Plan, adopted in 2022, identified portions of 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE as a transit corridor. Bellevue's TMP was adopted in 2014 and identifies 108<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE as part of the frequent transit network.

While general station locations have been identified along the route, the design and exact location of each station will be evaluated further during the design phase, scheduled to begin in 2025. For example, the station near the Bellevue Transit Center will intersect the future Grand Connection Crossing and City Hall Plaza. This area is anticipated to accommodate over 40,000 pedestrians and bicyclists daily by 2030. The K Line and Grand Connection are distinct initiatives that will be progressing in parallel timelines over the coming years. Bellevue staff, including the Grand Connection Team, will routinely collaborate with King County Metro to ensure the station near the Bellevue Transit Center properly accommodates pedestrian and bicycle activity. Future stages of each project will involve evaluating alternative station locations, developing station design principles, establishing maintenance agreements, supporting public events, and enhancing bicycle connectivity.

#### **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.

The K Line project includes candidate capital improvements to support transit speed and reliability. Metro's K Line goal is to reduce transit travel time by at least 25 percent compared to existing service. Speed and reliability improvements make the project competitive for FTA grant funding. In an analysis of potential capital projects to improve reliability, prioritizing the buses within downtown Bellevue roadways demonstrated the greatest benefit when compared to other locations along the K Line route. Candidate speed and reliability projects include BAT lanes, transit queue jumps, dedicated turn lanes and intersection reconfigurations (for example, one roundabout is proposed at the intersection of 145<sup>th</sup>

Place SE and Kelsey Creek Road). During project scoping, King County Metro referenced Bellevue's Council-adopted TMP, which identifies a Frequent Transit Network supported by 107 candidate speed and reliability projects, including BAT lanes. A list of all recommended candidate speed and reliability projects in Bellevue is included as Attachment C.

Various speed and reliability treatments, such as dedicated bus-only lanes, were initially considered. However, to improve transit travel time while balancing potential impacts to general purpose traffic, Bellevue staff asked Metro to limit potential capital projects to BAT lanes. BAT lanes allow for transit to be prioritized within the roadway, while also allowing right turning vehicles into businesses, driveways, and streets. Emergency vehicles are allowed to use these lanes. The Bellevue City Council-adopted TMP identifies a Frequent Transit Network supported by 107 candidate speed and reliability projects including BAT lanes.

Based on the TMP and City Council's direction in June, the K Line project includes candidate BAT lane projects along the following corridors. In general, each BAT lane project proposes that the existing outside lane operates as a BAT lane. In two instances, this involves restricting use of a parking shoulder for a BAT lane. While many of the BAT lane projects were identified in Bellevue's TMP, additional projects are proposed to attract more riders, meet Metro's speed and reliability transit travel time saving targets and to make the project competitive for FTA funding. The proposed BAT lanes are as follows:

- **116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE northbound, from NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street to NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street.** This project would implement a BAT lane by widening the roadway from NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street to Felix Terry Swistak Drive NE. The existing outside lane from Felix Terry to NE 12<sup>th</sup> Street would operate as a BAT lane.
- **110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE northbound, from NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street to NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street.** The existing outside lane would operate as a BAT lane between NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street. The existing parking lane between NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street would operate as a BAT lane.
- **110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE southbound, from NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street to NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street.** The existing parking lane would operate as a BAT lane between NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 9<sup>th</sup> Street. The existing outside lane between NE 9<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street would operate as a BAT lane. A new outside lane being built by development between NE 8<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street would operate as a BAT lane. The existing outside lane between NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street and NE 4<sup>th</sup> Street would operate as a BAT lane.
- **110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE northbound at NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street.** The existing outside lane would operate as a BAT lane leading up to the intersection of 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE and NE 6<sup>th</sup> Street. This would replace the existing pick-up and drop-off area.
- **Main Street westbound, from 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.** The existing outside lane would operate as a BAT lane.
- **Main Street eastbound from 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.** The existing outside lane would operate as a BAT lane.
- **Main Street westbound, from 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to 112<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.** The existing outside lane would operate as a BAT lane.

- **NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street westbound, from SR-520 onramp to 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.** The existing outside lane would operate as a BAT lane.
- **NE 10<sup>th</sup> Street eastbound, from 110<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE to 116<sup>th</sup> Avenue NE.** The existing outside lane would operate as a BAT lane.

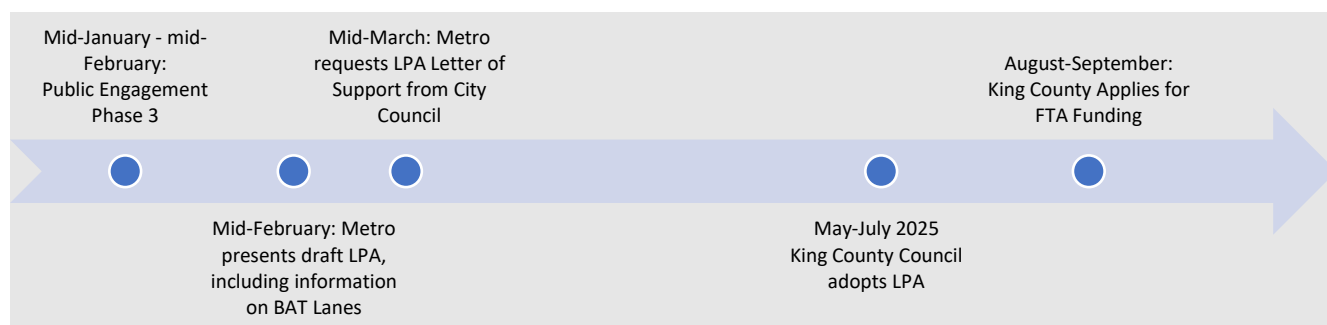
BAT lanes improve both the speed and the reliability of transit and are more effective at increasing person-throughput when compared to general purpose lanes because buses carry more people. However, BAT lanes have the potential to increase travel time for general purpose vehicles in certain instances. In February, Metro will provide more information about the BAT lane candidate projects, including person throughput, transit travel time savings, and impacts to general purpose travel.

### Locally Preferred Alternative – March 2025

A key decision point for the K Line is adoption of the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). “LPA” is a term used by the FTA and refers to an alternative evaluated through the local planning process, adopted as the desired alternative by the appropriate 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, it lists generalized speed and reliability treatments the project will consider and highlights areas along the corridor where the project will focus applying transit priority treatments.

Metro will ask the Bellevue and Kirkland City Councils to provide letters in support of the LPA in March 2025. Metro must have the cities’ letters to be able to apply for FTA funding for the K Line. Submitting a letter of support for the K Line LPA demonstrates the City of Bellevue supports the core components of the project, including speed and reliability projects, as stated in the LPA and believes implementation is reasonable pending further design refinement and collaboration. Providing a letter of support infers 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 summer of 2025 to meet the 2030 target to begin K Line service. Based on past FTA funding round, a recommendation to fund the K Line could be made in early 2026. Once rated, projects are in the pipeline for funding when available and recommended by the FTA, which could be later than 2026.

Figure 1. 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, 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.

### **Fiscal Impact**

Bellevue is contributing staff time to the project during the planning phase. The city may consider utilizing revenues generated from right-of-way or other contributions to the project.

## **OPTIONS**

N/A

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Bellevue's RapidRide K Line Guiding Principles
- B. Planned RapidRide K Line Route through Downtown Bellevue
- C. List of Candidate Speed and Reliability Projects

## **AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY**

N/A