

December 4, 2017

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT

Update on East Link construction including major construction activities in the coming months, status and next steps of the pilot traffic mitigation project in south Bellevue, and overview of permitting oversight.

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POLICY ISSUES

Comprehensive Plan Policies

The Comprehensive Plan contains a body of adopted policy, which emerged from the Light Rail Best Practices work, to frame the City's role in light rail project development, including advancing the City's land use and transportation objectives and minimizing neighborhood and environmental impacts.

MOU with Sound Transit

The City and Sound Transit entered into an Amended and Restated Umbrella Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in May 2015 that defines City contributions to a downtown light rail tunnel and includes terms for both agencies regarding the Operation and Maintenance Facility; project coordination; 130th Avenue NE parcels; permitting, project certainty and mitigation; and, conveyance of property between the agencies. The MOU also calls for outreach efforts including a neighborhood involvement process regarding traffic mitigation and a public relations/marketing campaign that messages "Bellevue is open for business" through construction.

Council Vision and Priorities

In its 2016-17 Priorities, Council maintained focus on ensuring that light rail served Bellevue residents and businesses in a manner that enhanced the community, with a focus during this timeframe on implementing "plans to mitigate construction impacts on our residents and businesses".

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL

ACTION

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DIRECTION

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INFORMATION ONLY

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With heavy civil construction occurring in all East Link contract package segments in Bellevue, staff will provide a status report on:

1. Major East Link construction activities;
2. Update on permitting as it relates to regulating noise and other construction activity;
3. Status of the traffic mitigation pilot program in south Bellevue; and,
4. City communications.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

Major East Link Construction Activities

Since March, East Link construction is underway in earnest in South Bellevue, Downtown, and BelRed. Most of the construction activity in recent months has involved utility work requiring roadway closures, structure demolition, and vegetation removal. In the coming six months, construction will continue to build the guideway in these three areas of the City. Staff will share information about upcoming construction milestones and activities as construction progresses through the end of 2017 and early 2018. Below is a list of some of the major activities anticipated over the next several months.

South Bellevue

- Continue work on the elevated guideway over I-90 to the Blueberry Farm. Expect I-90 ramp closures.
- Continue work on the South Bellevue Park and Ride garage and station foundation.
- Overhead to underground utility conversion along Bellevue Way SE, including removal of power poles.
- Start of guideway construction along Bellevue Way SE and 112th Avenue SE.
- Ongoing lane closures on Bellevue Way SE and 112th Avenue SE.
- No additional weekend closures of Bellevue Way SE until later in the project for roadway restoration.

Central Bellevue

- Continued closure of a portion of 110th Avenue NE through summer 2018.
- Installation of girders over 112th Avenue NE requiring a full nighttime closure of 112th Avenue NE between NE 4th and NE 6th Streets.
- Continue guideway construction.
- Demolition of a portion of north garage at City Hall.

BelRed

- Retained cut for guideway under 120th Avenue NE.
- Aerial guideway over Kelsey Creek West Tributary.
- At-grade guideway in center median of NE Spring Boulevard and 136th Place NE.

As construction has intensified in recent months, the City, Sound Transit, and its contractors are better understanding its impacts to residents, businesses and the traveling public. Anticipated impacts were addressed in agreements between the agencies and carried forward into permit conditions. As construction progresses, the impacts of construction noise, traffic control, and environmental protection are being realized and the City continues to work with Sound Transit to minimize these impacts.

Permitting and Construction Oversight Update

The 2015 MOU between the City and Sound Transit included specific goals and mitigation measures intended to minimize disruptions to City businesses and residents to the greatest extent practicable. To achieve that result, Sound Transit and the City, agreed to work cooperatively with representatives of businesses and neighborhoods affected by the project, those interaction and communications are ongoing.

Construction permits for the entire East Link alignment have been issued and work is progressing in all segments of the project. To ensure work is advancing in compliance with City codes and permit conditions, an East Link inspection team was formed to provide a consistent level of oversight in response to the scale, complexity, and duration of this project. Recent attention by the inspection team has focused on compliance with noise mitigation and construction hour limitations, maintenance of effective erosion controls to protect sensitive areas, managing traffic controls and traffic safety, and ensuring the numerous utility modifications meet City standards. These areas have recently created challenges and the need for corrective actions to satisfy City permit requirements and expectations. Focused attention will remain on these elements of the project as work progresses.

Coordination and communications between Bellevue inspectors, Sound Transit staff, and the multiple contractors working on East Link is essential to meeting city and community interests and successfully advancing the project to completion. Steps taken to facilitate that coordination and communication include;

- Daily jobsite visits by City inspectors.
- Weekly meetings with contractors, Sound Transit staff, and City inspectors to review construction activities over the past week, coordinate activities for the week ahead, and to resolve issues.
- Weekly review of noise monitoring reports, related complaints, and corrective actions.
- Issuance of correction notices when violations are identified and discussion of required corrective measures with contractors and Sound Transit Representatives.
- Regular meetings between senior staff from Bellevue and Sound Transit.

During tonight's Study Session, staff will describe in more detail how the City is providing oversight of construction activities to ensure compliance with City codes and permit conditions, and steps taken to correct violations when they occur.

Status of Traffic Mitigation Pilot Program

The 2015 MOU calls for a neighborhood involvement process to address the concerns residents expressed about an increase of commuter traffic in neighborhoods during light rail construction. Following a year of meetings with the Neighborhood Traffic Mitigation Committee (NTMC), a pilot traffic mitigation program was implemented in early September to discourage afternoon commuter traffic within the neighborhoods near the South Bellevue East Link project corridor (Attachment A). Turn restrictions were implemented Monday through Friday, 4 to 7 p.m. which currently:

- Prohibit all southbound motorists from using 108th Avenue SE south of SE 16th Street (inhibiting through access to locations south of SE 16th Street, including Bellevue Way; southbound traffic must turn on to westbound SE 16th Street); and

- Prohibit westbound SE 16th Street motorists from turning southbound onto Bellevue Way and from traveling westbound (straight) on SE 16th Street (across Bellevue Way).

The restrictions do not apply to transit (including Bellevue School District transportation buses) and bicyclists.

Results of a September (post pilot launch) traffic study show decreases in traffic, particularly on 108th Avenue SE. Based on community feedback and enforcement experiences, plans are underway to modify and extend the pilot to increase compliance and residential access. (See Attachment B)

The efforts of the NTMC have reflected on finding the best balance of mitigation that would holistically discourage commuter traffic in Surrey Downs, Bellecrest, Enatai and Beaux Arts Village during light rail construction while allowing access to neighborhoods to the extent possible. Finding the right balance has been an important, albeit difficult task, and the pilot continues to provide learning opportunities for staff to make adjustments.

City Communications

In some circumstances, City communications tools reach a more direct, yet wider, Bellevue audience than Sound Transit's communications. East Link construction alerts are posted to the City's webpage, distributed via listserv emails/texts and posted to social media. In August, homes and businesses received the first "Access Bellevue" mailer that was intended to inform readers of upcoming light rail construction activity and to provide resource information. A feature article about the project is regularly published in "It's Your City" (direct mailer) and often featured in the monthly "Neighborhood News" online publication.

The private neighborhood social media tool, Nextdoor, seems to be a common medium for neighborhood conversations about light rail construction impacts. Those conversations are not viewable by City staff. However, staff do post construction updates to Nextdoor (City-wide and neighborhood-specific) and often receive a "reply" by individual subscribers.

In response to recent community feedback, upcoming City communications strategies will include:

- Construction Noise – acceptable hours/how to report complaints
- "What's Next" – public information on upcoming construction milestones
- Mitigation Checklist
- Pilot Program – postcard (Attachment B)

Community Feedback

The East Link construction project is like no-other the City has experienced. There is a dedicated outreach staff person in the Transportation Department who is responsible for communicating construction information, responding to individual and collective concerns, coordinating with Sound Transit on public information and maintaining public information tools (e.g. webpage, social media, printed materials). When complaints are raised by members of the public, they are logged by Sound Transit and the complaint log is shared with the City. The purpose of the complaint log is track concerns in a central location so patterns can be identified, and to ensure timely follow up and resolution has occurred.

The City recognizes that areas of concern City-wide about light rail construction are most commonly traffic impacts, construction noise, and environmental protection. Our experience to-date is:

South Bellevue

- Very minimal complaints received about spillover parking following the May 31 closure of the South Bellevue Park and Ride.
- Moderate complaints about weekend closures on Bellevue Way/I-90 ramps, including why ramps were closed when no work was being performed.
- Moderate complaints about the deteriorating condition of Bellevue Way.
- Minimal complaints about concern for wildlife in/near Mercer Slough Nature Park.
- Minimal complaints about construction noise.
- Moderate complaints about the pilot traffic mitigation program at SE 16th Street.

Central Bellevue

- Minimal complaints about construction impacts to City Hall (e.g. parking).
- Minimal complaints about construction noise from demolition and utility work.
- Minimal complaints from key downtown stakeholders about employee and customer access to buildings.
- Minimal complaints regarding loss of on-street parking due to bicycle detour as a result of 114th Ave NE cul-de-sac closure.

BelRed

- Minimal complaints about business access.

OPTIONS

N/A

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Pilot Program Modifications and Extensions mailer to South Bellevue Neighborhoods
- B. Pilot Project to Discourage Evening Commuter Traffic in South Bellevue due to East Link Construction mailer

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL DOCUMENT LIBRARY

N/A