

CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION

Update on the Eastside Rail Corridor NE 8th Street Overcrossing

Joyce Nichols, Intergovernmental Relations Director, 452-4225
City Manager's Office

Mike Ingram, Senior Planner, 452-4166
Transportation

Betsy Anderson, Senior Planner, 452-4280
Parks and Community Services

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL**INFORMATION
ONLY**

Work is progressing on the Eastside Rail Corridor—now rebranded as the “Eastrail”. This regional trail will connect the cities of Renton, Bellevue, Kirkland, Woodinville and Redmond, offering multi-modal transportation and non-motorized recreation opportunities. A major Eastrail project is the overcrossing at NE 8th Street, and tonight King County Natural Resources and Parks Director Christie True will provide an update on the design of the overcrossing and other Eastrail activities and opportunities. No formal Council action is requested at this time. Tonight’s briefing is an opportunity to learn more about key Eastrail projects and opportunities in Bellevue, ask questions, and provide feedback.

RECOMMENDATION

N/A

BACKGROUND & ANALYSIS

The Eastrail is a 42-mile rail line that was previously owned by the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway Company. The Eastrail extends from Renton north to Snohomish County, passing through Bellevue, Kirkland, Woodinville and portions of unincorporated King County. It also includes a spur (called the Redmond Spur) that extends about seven miles from Woodinville south to Redmond. King County owns segments of the corridor and holds a continuous trail easement along segments that are owned by others. Redmond, Kirkland, Woodinville and Snohomish County also own segments of the corridor. Sound Transit owns a 1.1-mile segment of the corridor in Bellevue and holds an easement for transit along other portions. Puget Sound Energy holds an easement for utility use along the corridor. A map of the Bellevue segment is included as Attachment A.

Although Bellevue is not an Eastrail owner, it is the permitting authority for the seven-mile segment within the City limits. The Bellevue City Council has long expressed support for the development of a

high-quality, multi-use trail for broad public use along the corridor. Council adopted an Eastside Rail Corridor Interest Statement in 2013 and updated it in 2016. The interest statements recognize the multiple uses of the corridor, identify implementation considerations, support a regional approach to planning and governance of the corridor, and recognize the need for a comprehensive and sustainable financial approach for investing in the corridor. The 2016 interest statement notes that the highly constrained area at NE 8th Street requires a grade-separated overcrossing and seamless integration with Sound Transit's East Link light rail project. The 2013 and 2016 interest statements are included as Attachments B and C.

The 2018-2020 Bellevue City Council Vision and Priorities calls for the City to:

- Work with the County and Sound Transit to ensure that the Eastside Rail Corridor from Renton to the Wilburton Trestle is completed.
- Complete the section of the trail from Kirkland to Sound Transit's Operations and Maintenance Facility East.
- Complete the interim connection through the Spring District; and
- Begin to establish community connection points to the Eastside Rail Corridor.

Since 2016, planning and design work for a multi-use trail along the Eastrail has continued, and King County has recently completed segments of an interim gravel surface trail at the north and the south ends of Bellevue. In addition, the proposed 2020-2025 King County parks, trails, and open space replacement levy includes over \$50 million for Eastrail projects.

Regional Governance

Since 2013, the Eastrail owners have worked together through the Eastside Rail Corridor Regional Advisory Council (RAC) to maintain a collaborative, regional planning process for the Eastrail. In 2017, the RAC structure was revised to include adjacent non-owner jurisdictions (Bellevue and Renton) and the Eastside Greenway Alliance (a coalition of seven community non-profit organizations interested in supporting development of the corridor). Bellevue City Councilmember John Stokes serves as Bellevue's representative on the RAC.

NE 8th Street Crossing

The County is in the final design phase for the NE 8th Street overcrossing of the Eastrail. The overcrossing will provide a safe and comfortable connection over a major arterial and allow pedestrians and bicyclists access to Sound Transit's Wilburton Station. The crossing will be a key junction between frequent transit service, vibrant neighborhoods, thriving businesses, and recreational opportunities.

King County and Bellevue collaborated on the design for the NE 8th Street overcrossing. A key design consideration has been to provide quality accommodation to people who will use the crossing to move between the south side of NE 8th Street and the Wilburton Light Rail Station. Staff from Transportation, Community Development, Parks and Community Services, and Development Services Departments participated in an initial design charrette and six major design review meetings at key milestones since

2016. Construction is expected to begin in 2020 and must be completed in 2022, in advance of East Link light rail completion.

The bridge design team selected a truss structure to span the seven lanes of NE 8th Street and to minimize the climbing distance for trail users. To support Bellevue's goals for placemaking in the Wilburton neighborhood, the design team proposed an aesthetic treatment that will express Bellevue's natural and cultural history and serve as a focal point for trail and transit users and for motorists along NE 8th Street.

Construction is estimated at \$19 million. The proposed 2020-2025 King County parks, trails, and open space replacement levy includes funds to cover this cost. The County has also applied for Station Access Funds from Sound Transit. The \$4 million bridge design work was funded by a combination of King County and federal sources, including a \$45,000 contribution from Bellevue. As an in-kind contribution, Sound Transit reconfigured the design of the Wilburton Station to facilitate a high-quality connection to the Eastrail.

New Opportunities for Eastrail

Heritage Features

Local heritage features – sites, buildings, bridges, roadways, etc. – are often incorporated into the design of new projects. An opportunity that has been identified by the Japanese American community is the NE 8th Street overcrossing. Its location, west of the former site of the Bellevue Growers Association Packing and Shipping Warehouse, was owned and operated by Japanese American farmers who used it to store and ship their produce to markets locally and nationally.

The overcrossing has been identified as an opportunity to commemorate the contributions of the Japanese American community in Bellevue, as part of a larger project—the Japanese American Commemoration Project—that is exploring potential commemoration sites throughout the region. Council will receive a briefing about this larger initiative later this year.

The bridge design team drew on this element of the site's history to inform the aesthetic treatment of the bridge.

Eastrail Partners

Last year, the RAC formed a Funding Commission to make funding recommendations for the development of the Eastrail. The Commission was made up of 17 representatives from the private and non-profit sectors. In January, the Commission recommended creation of an independent organization – “Eastrail Partners” -- to lead private-sector fundraising efforts and provide a full-corridor perspective on funding decisions and priorities for trail construction and enhancement. Several Commission members have indicated plans to participate in the new organization. The Funding Commission proposed a budget of \$200,000 for the Eastrail Partners' first year of operation and has asked the RAC members to provide \$100,000 of this initial funding. Bellevue's share of the RAC contribution would be approximately \$11,000.

At its July 12 meeting, the RAC adopted a consensus resolution in support of forming the Eastrail Partners. The resolution includes a goal for the RAC members to finalize funding contributions by September 30. The King County Parks Foundation is contributing \$50,000, and private sector partners are contributing \$43,000 to date.

Fiber Communications

This year, the County, Bellevue, Kirkland, Redmond, Renton and other Eastrail stakeholders completed a study to explore fiber installation along a 28-mile segment of the Eastrail, where the stakeholders have shared ownership agreements. This segment spans from milepost five in Renton to the Snohomish County border and includes the Redmond spur.

As you know, fiber provides a pathway for electronic communications. Almost all high-speed internet (which is also called “broadband”) is dependent on fiber-optic cables to carry signals. Increasing fiber infrastructure can allow more information to be relayed. It can also increase resiliency by adding additional fiber pathways in case one pathway is disrupted by construction, vehicle collisions, or technology failure.

Some of the benefits of installing fiber along the Eastrail include:

- Cost savings. Much of the Eastside is already developed and expanding the fiber network in highly urbanized areas can be expensive due to the cost to relocate utilities, traffic control, restoration, and potential property easements. It is more cost effective to build fiber within the Eastrail while most of the trail is unpaved.
- Equity. The fiber owners could also use revenue from leasing fiber to private sector entities to support digital equity efforts such as increased access to broadband.
- Expanding the public sector network. This will increase the information capacity and resiliency needed by education, local government, public safety agencies and medical organizations to connect to their internet, telecommunications or cloud providers.
- Increasing competition. Increased capacity allows greater competition among private sector providers. This generally benefits the public by providing more choices, which may reduce broadband costs.

Although Bellevue is not an Eastrail owner, Bellevue could choose to participate in the installation and governance of the Eastrail fiber installation. This would likely require Bellevue to contribute funds to the construction and operation of the fiber network and could secure Bellevue’s access to the fiber in the future at lower rates than as a latecomer. Bellevue would also have greater influence over the development of the fiber project as an “owner.”. Bellevue already leases its fiber infrastructure to private sector companies where the City’s infrastructure has capacity and adding capacity could be a very positive step.

POLICY & FISCAL IMPACTS

In November 2016, Council adopted an Interest Statement for the Eastside Rail Corridor that recognizes the unique quality of this corridor and its potential to serve multiple uses. The Interest

Statement identifies key interests related to projects that will be addressed in tonight's presentation, including:

- The highly-constrained area at NE 8th Street requires a grade-separated overcrossing and seamless integration with Sound Transit's East Link light rail project.
- The Eastside Rail Corridor is an integral element of the Wilburton Commercial Area, offering significant opportunities to promote trail- and transit-oriented development.
- The Wilburton Trestle, including the land under and around the structure, should be optimized for public use. Public safety should be carefully considered during the design and eventual operation of the Trestle.

The 2018-2020 City Council Vision and Priorities calls for the City to:

- Work with the County and Sound Transit to ensure that the Eastside Rail Corridor from Renton to the Wilburton Trestle is completed.
- Complete the section of the trail from Kirkland to Sound Transit's Operations and Maintenance Facility East.
- Complete the interim connection through the Spring District.
- Begin to establish community connection points to the Eastside Rail Corridor.

The following is a summary of Bellevue's funding contributions and commitments to the Eastrail development:

- Bellevue allocated \$1 million to the Eastside Rail Corridor project (G-103) in the 2015-2021 Capital Investment Program (CIP). The funding was intended to be used for the development of conceptual design, other amenities (such as plantings or gravel pathways) or purchases along the Eastside Rail Corridor. Bellevue increased the funding allocation to \$2.5 million in the 2017-2023 CIP. Council directed that \$500,000 be used to advance the design of key crossings and connections in the Wilburton segment in partnership with other regional agencies. The remaining \$2 million is intended for improvements to the Wilburton Trestle.
- In 2014, Bellevue competed for federal Surface Transportation Program funding in the Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC) countywide program. In 2016, \$350,000 was allocated to design a grade-separated, non-motorized overcrossing of NE 8th Street to enhance the interface between the planned trail and the Wilburton Station.
- In 2015, Bellevue completed a new crosswalk for the Eastside Rail Corridor at 108th Avenue NE. Bellevue's cost for this improvement was approximately \$55,000.
- In 2017, Bellevue contributed \$45,000 to the design of the NE 8th Street overcrossing.
- In 2018, Bellevue contributed \$10,000 to the Fiber Feasibility Study.

OPTIONS

N/A

ATTACHMENTS & AVAILABLE DOCUMENTS

- A. Eastrail Map – Bellevue Segment
- B. July 2013 Eastside Rail Corridor Interest Statement
- C. November 2016 Updated Eastside Rail Corridor Interest Statement

AVAILABLE IN COUNCIL LIBRARY

N/A