

CITY OF BELLEVUE
BELLEVUE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
MINUTES

September 23, 2021
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Virtual Meeting

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Chair Marciante, Commissioners Beason, Kurz, Rebhuhn, Ting

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT: Stash, Helland

STAFF PRESENT: Kevin McDonald, Paula Stevens, Andrew Singelakis, Eric Miller, Michael Ingram, Kristi Oosterveen, Department of Transportation

OTHERS PRESENT: Chris Breiland, Fehr & Peers

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Chair Marciante who presided.

Upon the call of the roll, all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Stash, who was excused, and Commissioner Helland.

2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was approved by consensus.

3. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Michelle Wanamaker, 4045 149th Avenue SE, said one of the reasons traffic is so bad in Bellevue is that over the years the Transportation Commission and the City Council have repeatedly approved staff recommendations to increase the vehicle level of service, which is currently measured in terms of the volume to capacity ratio at system intersections. The result is that traffic has been allowed to get much worse before developers are required to pay for their developments' full impact on the transportation system, and before the city must take action to mitigate traffic congestion. Some of the staff-recommended vehicle performance targets under consideration will repeat the mistake. In the Type I PMAs, Downtown, BelRed, Wilburton/East Main, the current V/C ratio is .90 to .95. The staff are proposing that it be increased to 1.0, allowing for significantly worse traffic. The proposal should absolutely be rejected. An increase is not acceptable anywhere. In the Type I PMAs, it should be the lowest existing V/C ratio of .90. The performance targets for the residential PMA is recommended to be .85, yet currently in Bridle Trails, Northeast Bellevue and Southeast Bellevue the standard is .80. The proposal is for an increase in residential areas, allowing significantly worse traffic before the PMA fails and mitigation is required. In every satisfaction survey the city has done for at least the past five or six years, the number one complaint of the residents by far has been traffic congestion. The Transportation Commissioners are supposed to represent their fellow residents. The Commission should insist that none of the V/C performance targets for system

intersections in PMAs should be allowed to increase. It is unclear whether or not when the city says it takes into consideration the growth in neighboring cities for the existing concurrency report that it is only Kirkland and Redmond, or if land uses in Issaquah and Newcastle are also considered. Also, Attachment C lists one of the corridors along 148th Avenue as SR-520 to NE 8th Street, but the Figure 4 map shows the corridor in two different colors, indicating there are two sections to it. The corridor should be defined as shown on the map as two sections: SR-520 to BelRed, and BelRed to NE 8th Street.

4. COMMUNICATIONS FROM CITY COUNCIL, COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS, AND MEMBERS OF THE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Commissioner Ting shared that he had done some analysis of the Engaging Bellevue survey which the Commission discussed at its meeting on September 9. It was noted that one of the answers was very bimodal: people either agreed the city should build wider roads and intersections, or they strongly disagreed with that notion. He said he broke out the data to see by area who answered the question and how. He pointed out that those who live in the Downtown strongly disagreed with building wider roads and intersections, while those who live outside of Bellevue but who work in Bellevue agreed strongly that the city should build wider roads and intersections. He stressed that the survey was not statistically valid and the number of responses rate quite low, which means no one should read too much into it. However, given the varied responses from those who live in Bellevue and those who do not, he said he analyzed the question about the importance of the city investing in certain project types. Those who live in Bellevue gave different responses from those who do not live in Bellevue but who may work in Bellevue. While the responses were similar for street crossings and sidewalk projects, the responses were very different for roadway/intersection projects and bike lane projects. Those living outside of Bellevue indicated they want to see more bike lanes and trail projects, whereas those who live in Bellevue would rather see more roadway/intersection projects. He encouraged the Commissioners to look at the comments made by the questionnaire participants, not just the questionnaire results.

Commissioner Kurz reported that he recently attended the Advancing Transportation Equity panel discussion from the Open Mobility Foundation. One of the themes that came up a lot was how hard it is to get input from the community, especially disadvantaged communities. The panel stressed that surveys are not sufficient. With regard to the Commission, it is difficult for people to find the time to attend a meeting and offer their input. The panel noted that while there are ways to increase the number of people who respond to surveys, there is no substitute for going into the community and simply talking with people.

5. STAFF REPORTS

Principal Transportation Planner Kevin McDonald reminded the Commissioners that the City Clerk's Office will be conducting a training session on the Open Public Meetings Act on October 20 from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. He said the training is mandatory for all members of the city's boards and commissions.

6. PUBLIC HEARING – None

7. STUDY SESSION

A. Mobility Implementation Plan – Performance Targets

Consultant Chris Breiland with Fehr & Peers reminded the Commissioners that the metric for the pedestrian performance targets is sidewalk width and landscape strips on arterial streets. The guidance for the performance target from the Commission was to prioritize projects to fill gaps in the pedestrian network, with particular attention paid to gaps that provide access to transit and gaps that exist in growth areas. Having a sidewalk on at least one side of the street was highlighted as a first priority. Having existing sidewalks on both sides of a street is not tantamount to those sidewalks adhering to the design standards in the code, but at least on those streets there are facilities for pedestrians to use. The city will over time continue to address sidewalk deficiencies, but from a capital planning perspective, gaps will be given top priority.

Turning to the bicycle performance targets, Mr. Breiland reminded the Commissioners that the metric is the level of traffic stress (LTS). The bicycle network is identified in the Pedestrian and Bicycle Transportation Plan and the LTS is defined in the 2017 Multimodal Level of Service (MMLOS) document. The performance target is to fill gaps in the system first, then to bring substandard systems up to the target. Gaps that connect principle growth areas of the city to other neighborhoods are to be addressed first.

With regard to the transit performance targets, Mr. Breiland said the metric is focused on bus stop amenities and transit travel time between activity centers. The Commission previously recommended looking at the transit travel time ratio, which is the ratio of how long it takes to make a trip via transit as compared to the same trip via private car. The target is a transit/travel time ratio of 1.5 or less. For purposes of the Mobility Implementation Plan, there is no performance target for bus stop amenities.

Mr. Breiland reminded the Commissioners that for the vehicle system the metrics are the system intersection V/C ratio and the corridor travel speed as measured against what is typical for urbanized areas. In terms of setting a target, he noted that the vehicle mode is different from the other modes because the streets are capacity constrained. He said his team had been waiting for new data to determine what conditions might look like in the future with a set of investments that has already been identified by both the city and other agencies. Setting targets under current conditions would be somewhat blind to the fact that the city is growing rapidly and there is a lot of investment planned for the transit network that needs to be accounted for in setting targets.

City staff worked to model the future conditions using the BKR Cast model out to 2044. The regional model includes the four-county region encompassed by the Puget Sound Regional Council. The land uses allocated by King County and projected by the city between 2019 and 2044 includes 80,000 new jobs and 35,000 new housing units, which is an increase of both by about 50 percent from current conditions. He stated that other modal projects, particularly transit, affect vehicle capacity as people shift their preferred modes, freeing up capacity. The modeling included the 2033 preliminary TFP project list, and improvements provided by other agencies such as WSDOT, King County Metro and Sound Transit. He said it was notable that the growth is not evenly distributed across the city, rather it is primarily concentrated in the Tier 1 Performance Management Areas of Downtown, BelRed and Wilburton in line with the Council's vision for growth. The Tier 2 PMAs of Crossroads, Eastgate and Factoria, will see more modest growth, mostly in housing. There will be some reduction in employment in those areas resulting from a turnover of uses. The residential PMA will see a modest amount of growth of less than one percent per year, mostly through infill development and redevelopment of employment spaces.

Mr. Breiland shared with the Commissioners the mapped results of the model run. He pointed out that the areas with the highest V/C ratios are focused around the Tier 1 PMAs and the roads that lead from high-growth areas to the regional network. The Overlake area of Redmond, which is on the border with Bellevue and which is one of the regional growth centers and has the same designation as Downtown Bellevue, is expected to add a large number of housing units and jobs. He said the vehicle travel speed from the modeling was shown in the color bands used in the 2017 MMLOS report. The slowest travel speed was shown to be in the Downtown and on the roads leading to and from large growth areas and the freeway.

Turning to the issue of performance targets, Mr. Breiland said staff and the consultant team identified preliminary targets based on the considerations put into place over the course of several meetings. With all the growth, the people coming to the city will predominantly be concentrated in the Tier 1 PMAs, and land use access will improve in those PMAs. For those in the BelRed area currently, walking to a coffee shop is tricky given that there are tire stores, tile stores, shooting ranges and many other things, but few coffee shops. As the area builds out, however, the ability to get to or obtain goods and services will be far easier by means other than a car. Improved access to land uses will improve generally throughout the city.

There is a clear desire to leverage investments made by the city, other agencies and private development. For the most part those investments will take the form of enhanced transit service and access, enhanced pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and spot intersection improvements. Those enhancements will be leveraged when considering how to balance traffic congestion against the other investments being made. Even so, it should not be downplayed that traffic volume will increase given the projected growth. If roadways are not widened, there will be more congestion during the busy times of the day, and that is a fact that must be considered in setting the targets. Ultimately the goal will be to balance the environmental impacts of widening roadways, the costs of adding vehicle capacity and changing modal priorities with the concern of the public over traffic congestion.

The staff-recommended target for the Tier 1 area intersections was V/C 1.0. Mr. Breiland allowed that that is higher than any current standard for any area in acknowledgment that as intersections reach their capacity the city will need to determine whether or not to address the issue and how to do so in the context of the land use and environmental costs as well as the modal priorities and impacts. The corridor travel speed ratio was recommended to be 0.5 or higher for the Tier 1 areas. For the Tier 2 areas, the recommended target for the intersections was V/C 0.9. In Tier 3, the residential areas, the V/C was recommended to be at V/C 0.85 for the intersections and 0.9 for the corridor travel speed ratio.

Mr. Breiland showed the Commissioners a map of the performance of intersections along with a map of the corridors, color-coded to indicate which areas currently meet the proposed performance targets and which do not. For the system intersections recently recommended to be added, the city has no data. It was pointed out that only a handful of intersections did not meet the proposed V/C target, and similarly there were only a handful of corridors that did not meet the corridor travel speed target. The maps showing the 2044 conditions showed quite a few intersections failing to meet the V/C target. Primarily those intersections are in the growth areas. Using 148th Avenue as an example, he allowed that most of the intersections along the corridor would not meet the target. It does help, however, to pair the intersections with the corridor travel speed to gain a clearer picture. Taken together, the targets are intended to draw attention to where might the city choose to invest in new capacity or in mitigations in the form of additional modal options.

Mr. Breiland stressed that none of the targets are set in perpetuity. He said the topic of discussion for the Commission's next meeting will be implementation and the Commission may want to modify the targets as part of that discussion. The Commission's initial guidance is needed, however, to inform that discussion.

Commissioner Ting pointed out that West Lake Sammamish Parkway shows on the map as yellow in one part and green in another. He asked why that would be the case. Mr. Breiland said he did some time digging into what is forecast to happen on that stretch. He said the analysis segment is from Northup Way to SE 34th Street. Under existing conditions the stretch is the slowest of all the segments of West Lake Sammamish Parkway. The BKR model shows the segment has having the most growth given that both SE 34 Street and SE 26th Street bleed off southbound traffic as SE 34th Street in particular provides access to Eastgate and I-90. The biggest issue is that under existing conditions the segment is the slowest of all and the forecast traffic growth will make it slow even more, nudging it past the threshold.

Commissioner Ting asked how the BKR model takes into account the level of commercial development, such as the issuance of permits for new businesses. Mr. Breiland said it takes into account growth in terms of commercial square footage. There is a built-in vacancy rate that is not assumed to change going forward. The model cannot, however, anticipate vacant buildings becoming active along a specific street.

Commissioner Kurz asked what time of day the model uses. Mr. Breiland said the model is calibrated to pre-pandemic conditions, using the busiest period of the day, which is the evening peak period from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. The model does not assume any major shift to different travel times.

Chair Marciante asked if the 2044 forecast reflected no-build conditions. Mr. Breiland said the data assumes all the preliminary 2033 TFP projects and all the known regional projects.

Chair Marciante asked if bus stop amenities include transit signal priority. Mr. Breiland answered that transit signal priority is baked into the transit travel time ratio. It is not a bus stop amenity, rather it is a factor to improve bus travel time. He said there are a handful of transit projects in the TFP that could be modeled in future analyses. Transit travel time ratio is proposed to be a performance target and as such it will be modeled to forecast changes.

Chair Marciante asked if the Planning Commission when planning for projected growth asks to have the model run with different land use scenarios. Mr. McDonald explained that the focus of the planning staff is the capacity of the zoning to accommodate growth. Downtown, BelRed and Wilburton all have zoned capacity and therefore will attract most of the growth going forward. The transportation system exists to support planned growth, and transportation planners share information with planning staff regarding the performance of the transportation system under various growth scenarios, primarily for specific area studies rather than on a citywide basis. The outcome of the projected growth is reflected on the modeling maps, and how to deal with the growth by addressing the performance target gaps is one of the exercises that will be undertaken every time the TFP is updated.

Commissioner Ting commented that while the transportation system supports land use and the work of the Planning Commission, it is vitally important to have the information bubble up to the Council. The Transportation Commission may not be able to change the decisions of the Planning Commission, it is imperative that the full picture be presented to the Council in a way

that will facilitate the Council making informed decisions and stand by the outcomes. It is also about creating policies that will encourage the efficient use of the transportation system. If there are underused facilities, the Council should be able to step up and think about what policies should be created to make the best use of the available resources. The Council should know that there are consequences associated with the recommendations they hear from the Planning Commission that they may not otherwise consider if they think the Transportation Department would simply prepare project recommendations to support growth.

Commissioner Rebhuhn asked what modal assumptions are associated with the forecasted 80,000 new jobs. Mr. Breiland said the model makes assumptions based on the available transportation choices where the jobs are located. It takes into account the cost of parking, transit availability, how close people are to the jobs, allowing them to choose to walk or bike. There are policy tools that could be built into model to further swing the modeshare. He stressed that not all jobs have the same impact. The proportion of vehicle trips generated by growth in the Tier 1 PMAs is lower than in the rest of the city due to mode choices, though the overall number of vehicle trips on the system is expected to increase.

Mr. McDonald added that under the existing system of permitting new development, particularly for office-type uses in the growth areas, transportation demand management is utilized to ensure that building managers and/or the employers provide substantial incentives for the workers to use commute options other than driving alone. He said that is true for City Hall where he is issued an Orca card and always either takes the bus or rides his bike to work. There is also the potential for exceptional transportation demand management above and beyond what the code encourages employers to do. That is just one non-infrastructure tool the city uses to help people be mobile.

Commissioner Ting said it would be helpful for the Commission to have a briefing on the various transportation demand management tools that are outside the domain of the Transportation Commission in order to gain an understanding of how they impact the modal data. He said he would like to know what type of impact would result from having a city shuttle operating, and suggested the Council might want to know as well to help inform their decisions about where to accommodate growth. Chair Marcianti suggested it would be within the Commission's purview to suggest new projects, such as a shuttle. The challenge will lie more in trying to model such things.

Commissioner Beason voiced concern about the Downtown and BelRed targets and said they are higher than she is comfortable with. She said she also had concerns about the Crossroads and Factoria areas in terms of the timing of when the data was collected and how it varies throughout the day. Overall the historical performance and the way it is being gauged makes sense, but there are some components that are being left out. She agreed that the information the Commission is seeing should be further pushed up and be considered in all future planning. She said she liked the idea of pushing for incentive programs that will facilitate having employers find alternative ways, such as shuttles, to bring people in and out. There are still untapped areas that need to be pursued.

Commissioner Kurz said he still did not have a full understanding of how the targets will impact the prioritization stage. He said he was not clear how much the targets will matter in that regard. What will actually change conditions on the ground is the projects that get prioritized. He also said he would like to have a better understanding of how corridor travel speed affects pedestrian safety, and if raising the corridor travel speed during the peak periods would have the effect of increasing speeds are the less congested times of day, making things

more dangerous for pedestrians.

Commissioner Rebhuhn referred to the system intersections map comparing current conditions with the modeled 2044 conditions. He said it looked to him as though the 2044 conditions shows the areas where increased capacity may be needed. Vehicles are currently the primary mode for people coming into Bellevue and the projections show that will still be the case in the future. It is also unclear what will happen when the targets are not met. He added that Sun Valley, Idaho, operates a shuttle around the city with ten-minute headways. Anyone can just jump on and go where they want to go. Something similar operating in Downtown Bellevue could be very beneficial.

Commissioner Ting commented that when prioritizing sidewalks projects, consideration should be given to whether it is more important to prioritize access to transit or growth areas, or projects that improve access to schools from residences. He said safety should be prioritized for the latter. With regard to the performance target for transit, he said he liked that it focused on a reasonable user experience. Performance targets should be set in line with what is a good experience for the user.

Commissioner Ting said key to setting targets for vehicular performance will also be the right user experience. The targets are not concurrency standards and if one fails it will not stop development. Failing to meet a target will simply indicate where there is work to do. The work might involve optimizing some intersections, but it could also mean working to increase the utilization of the overall transportation system. To that end he said he would prefer to keep the performance targets in line with where things are currently rather than degrading them. Simply making the standard easy to hit is not the answer; the city needs to be more aspirational in terms of making the user experience on every road really good.

Chair Marciante praised staff and the consultant team for the work done which is both clear and understandable. She said the focus is in fact on the user experience. Each mode has been studied independently, and targets have tentatively been set for each mode, but one thing has perhaps been left out, and that is the issue of tradeoffs. Pedestrians feel safer when walking on sidewalks next to roads where the speed of the cars is lower. It would seem that it could be expected that areas with high growth, high levels of multimodal activities, will see lower vehicle speeds, making the pedestrians feel safer. The better the V/C ratio, the more the pedestrian experience will be diminished. Where pedestrian safety is given priority, vehicle speed will necessarily be slower. What the right target number should be is unclear, and it may not matter in the end given the way in which projects will be prioritized, but the tradeoffs should be more fully and clearly understood. She added that ultimately through the TFP process the city will have to address the issue of concurrency. In order to meet concurrency, the targets will need to be achieved to a certain degree. She also agreed preference should be given to access to schools from residential areas.

With regard to the issue of sidewalks, Commissioner Ting clarified that it all boils down to addressing safety issues. It could be sidewalks connecting neighborhoods with schools, but it could also be sidewalks that connect people to parks and other destinations. With regard to the multimodal concurrency standard, he said his understanding was that so long as the city adopts a plan and executes the plan by spending dollars on needed projects, concurrency will be met by satisfying the number of mobility units created by the demand, whether or not the individual targets are met. Mr. McDonald confirmed the statement. He said the package of transportation projects identified in the TFP is the definition of concurrency. The list of transportation projects is the whole discussion of project identification and prioritization.

Mr. Breiland said the performance targets are intended to draw attention to areas where investments need to be made in the TFP. Where a target is met, the focus should be turned elsewhere. If after investments are made the targets are not advanced to a satisfactory degree, the focus should be on whether different policies are needed to manage transportation, or whether more money is needed to manage transportation.

Commissioner Ting said one reason the standards should reflect what is seen as a good user experience is that is what the public expects. The city may choose to deemphasize some areas, but that will be a separate discussion. In the spirit of transparency it will be important to be clear about what is considered to be a good user experience, and how the needle will move in that direction. That is why the targets should be kept lower and closer to what they are currently.

Commissioner Beason said it would be helpful for her to get some feedback from staff and the consultants about the feasibility of actually transitioning toward the targets and what it will take to get there in terms of policy. Mr. McDonald said the city's transportation demand management program is implemented administratively with each new development proposal over a certain size threshold. There are targets in the Comprehensive Plan that establish what the modeshare should be for different areas of the city for commute trips. Not every project has to meet the modeshare target, but overall there is an expectation that the drive-alone rate in places like the Downtown will be lower than in other places, and there are several tools employers and building managers can use to get help there. The user experience as a descriptor of how a person experiences the transportation system needs to be weighed against the reasonable expectations of that person and depending on the mode they are using and the part of the city they are in. One could argue that it is not a reasonable expectation for a driver to have a friction free and unencumbered driving experience in a downtown. The performance targets must be looked at in the context of both the location and reasonable expectations for mobility. In the places where staff have recommended a V/C ratio of 1.0, there is a paring with a reasonable expectation of people in those areas being able to walk comfortably and safely. There is a clear tradeoff.

Continuing, Mr. McDonald said ultimately the Commission will need to define what the tradeoffs are for each area when it comes to developing the TFP project list. The 2044 modeling shows a number of intersections that do not meet the target. It will not be possible to fix all of them, nor it is necessarily desirable to change all of the orange dots to green. The targets exist to highlight where there are issues in need of being addressed by being matched up with a project in the TFP. If there is no project that is reasonable, feasible and compatible with all the things the location is intended to perform in terms of land use and mobility, the intersection will stay orange. The Mobility Implementation Plan is a toolkit for the Commission to develop TFP project lists that are financially constrained and accomplishable within the time horizon. Long-range transportation planning involves a constant evolution that looks at how circumstances and resources change over time and makes incremental decisions along the way. Sometimes the vision is changed, sometimes the target is changed as needed. The Mobility Implementation Plan is evidence of the fact that the city is evolving into a new multimodal approach to mobility.

Commissioner Ting clarified that he was not advocating for free-flowing traffic. An LOS of A or B from a transportation perspective is bad because it represents an underutilization of transportation resources. Ideally the focus should be on LOS C or D where there is traffic that is not free flowing. The current V/C ratio standard for the Downtown is 0.95, which is about E-

plus, and the recommendation for a V/C ratio of 1.0 will basically move to an E-minus. It can be debated as to whether or not that is good. The user experience of all modes needs to be considered holistically. However, for the Tier 2 and Tier 3 Performance Management Areas, the targets should be held pretty close to where they are now as a good starting point. Mr. Breiland clarified that the proposed target for the Tier 2 areas is more or less the same as it is now. The proposal for Tier 3 is mostly the same, but better in some areas by virtue of applying the same target for all residential areas. The bumping of the threshold in Tier 1 was intended to acknowledge the need to retain as good a pedestrian and bicycle experience as possible. Some communities have forgone the V/C ratio approach for their Downtowns entirely, but staff and the consultant team were reluctant to go in that direction. Commissioner Ting argued in favor of opting for the lower standard as the baseline for Tier 3.

Commissioner Kurz said it should not be seen as being unreasonable to set the targets higher than they are now because that is the reality the city is facing. With the current transportation budget, it cannot be expected that everything will be able to be held to their current conditions by 2044.

Chair Marciante said she was comfortable with the numbers as proposed. She said it is understood that things will not stay the same and that in the areas that will become more multimodal can expect to see levels of service for cars degraded from current conditions.

Commissioner Ting asked what the 2044 performance targets results map would look like if residential were to be given a lower threshold of 0.80. Mr. Breiland said he did not believe it would look much different. Most of the intersections shown in green would remain green. Commissioner Ting asked if there is data showing what things would look like in only five or ten years. Mr. Breiland said the model has not been run for those target years. The fact is there is a lot of growth going on currently. It will be difficult to keep pace in the near term given the level of investment anticipated given the amount of growth in the pipeline. Essentially the long-term levels of growth are being front loaded, which means growth will eventually level off.

Mr. McDonald voiced his appreciation for the robust conversation. He said the comments and suggestions would be taken under advisement as things move into the next phase of the Mobility Implementation Plan, which is how to prioritize projects.

8. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – None
9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS – None
10. NEW BUSINESS – None
11. ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS – None
12. REVIEW OF COMMISSION CALENDAR

Mr. McDonald took a moment to review the Commission's calendar of upcoming meeting dates and agenda items.

13. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Marciante adjourned the meeting at 8:30 p.m.

Secretary to the Transportation Commission

Date