CITY OF BELLEVUE
CITY COUNCIL

Summary Minutes of Study Session

March 7, 2011   Council Conference Room
6:00 p.m.   Bellevue, Washington

PRESENT: Mayor Davidson, Deputy Mayor Lee and Councilmembers Balducci, Chelminiak,
            Degginger, Robertson, and Wallace

ABSENT: None.

1.   Executive Session

Deputy Mayor Lee called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., and announced recess to Executive
Session for approximately one hour and 15 minutes to discuss one item of property acquisition
and disposition.

The meeting resumed at 7:12 p.m., with Mayor Davidson presiding.

2.   Study Session

      (a)   Traffic Computer System Phase 1 Progress Report

City Manager Steve Sarkozy opened discussion regarding the traffic computer system upgrade.

Transportation Director Goran Sparrman recalled that the SCATS (Sydney Coordinated
Adaptive Traffic System) traffic control program was selected last year after a fairly extensive
evaluation process. Phase 1 involves implementing the system at 31 intersections in the
Downtown and Factoria areas. The installations were completed within the target timeframe and
budget ($630,000). There was sufficient funding allocated to Phase 1 to add seven more
intersections, which are important in order to optimize the system. This includes three
intersections at Bellevue Square and four along Coal Creek Parkway, which will be installed by
April. Bellevue is the first city in Washington to have this type of advanced traffic control
system.

Mark Poch, Engineering Manager, reviewed that the objectives of the system's implementation
were to reduce delays for vehicles and pedestrians, adapt quickly to changing traffic conditions,
lower signal cycle lengths when possible, and add new features to the City's system. He
described how the system adjusts the length of traffic signal cycles, depending on traffic
volumes, and how the overall downtown system is coordinated to manage traffic flow.

Mr. Poch reviewed new features of the SCATS program including the flashing yellow arrow, which allows left turns after yielding to pedestrians and other cars. This has reduced the left-turn delay from 38 seconds per vehicle to 16 seconds per vehicle at Factoria Boulevard and Newport Way. The improved performance at this location eliminates the need for a capital project that had been identified in recent years, at least for the foreseeable future. The flashing yellow arrow will be implemented at additional locations during Phase 2.

Mr. Poch described a feature known as phase reserve, which helps manage traffic flow and queue lengths at freeway on-ramps.

Mayor Davidson noted that WSDOT formerly controlled signals at freeway on-ramps. Mr. Poch said the City now controls on-ramp signals at NE 4th Street, NE 8th Street, Coal Creek Parkway, and 148th Avenue NE.

Mr. Poch described two additional new features known as pedestrian reserve [which optimizes opportunities for crossing the street] and pedestrian advance [which improves safety by allowing the pedestrian to start crossing the street before cars are allowed to move].

Mr. Poch reviewed operational results for sample intersections including reductions in delays, reduced travel times, and increased opportunities for pedestrian crossings.

Laurie Gromala, Assistant Director of Transportation, reported that approximately 28 percent of intersections are still on the old traffic control system, 51 percent are on the bridge system, and 21 percent (38 intersections on 5 corridors) are on SCATS. Phase 2 will complete 31 intersections in the Downtown corridors, Hospital District, and 116th Avenue corridor. The cost estimate for Phase 2 is $479,000, and the City has been awarded a federal grant of $360,000 for the project. Staff will return to Council in late spring to request consideration of a contract award for Phase 2.

Ms. Gromala briefly reviewed Phases 3 through 6, noting that the specific order of intersection implementation will likely change. Phase 3 achieves 53 percent implementation in 2012. Phase 4 is slated for 2013 (69 percent completion), Phase 5 for 2014 (88 percent completion), and Phase 6 is to be completed in 2015. Ms. Gromala noted that current funding should be sufficient to complete Phase 4. Six SCATS intersections will be built and funded as part of the SR 520 Eastside Transit and HOV project, with implementation scheduled for 2014.

Deputy Mayor Lee said he is very impressed with the effectiveness of this technology, and he noted the many benefits including enhanced customer service. He would like to implement the phases of the plan more quickly if possible.

Councilmember Chelminiak commented on traffic backups that can occur on southbound Bellevue Way between NE 10th Street and NE 8th Street, including backups into the intersection at NE 10th Street on a fairly regular basis. He questioned whether this will be improved as SCATS implementation progresses.

Mr. Poch said that the backup he describes occurs mostly during the holidays. He explained that NE 10th and NE 12th Streets run as a group, and can "marry" into Bellevue Way at NE 8th Street and farther south. Mr. Poch said it is possible that this part of the system needs to be adjusted. Councilmember Chelminiak said he has noticed the issue primarily in the late afternoon and early evening.

Councilmember Robertson complimented staff on a good presentation, and observed that the system appears to work well where implemented. She has heard a number of positive comments from citizens, and she is happy with the federal grant of $360,000 for the implementation of Phase 2.

Mr. Sparrman said staff will continue to look for opportunities to accelerate the implementation schedule to the extent possible.

Mayor Davidson noted the cost savings represented by the reduction in travel delays.

Councilmember Balducci echoed the Council's compliments. She observed that overall traffic counts appear to be down, and she wondered how much of the improved traffic flow is attributable to the slower economy versus the implementation of SCATS. Mr. Poch said that most of the performance comparisons have been made within the past few months, rather than comparing to older data.

Responding to Councilmember Wallace, Mr. Poch explained that implementation of the system involves crews installing new signal displays, wiring, and other components, which is labor intensive. Technicians working in City Hall are running the communications to the intersections, which includes installing ethernet devices and the other components needed to enable the system to communicate with traffic signals. Engineering staff are working with Transpo Group, and other staff are working on meeting grant requirements. In terms of system operation, Mr. Poch said there is still engineering work going on in terms of setting global parameters (e.g., maximum cycle length, which groups of signals can "marry in"). However, the system adapts to changing conditions.

At 7:54 p.m., Mayor Davidson declared recess to the Regular Session.

Myrna L. Basich, MMC
City Clerk

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