

Eastside Rail Corridor Regional Advisory Council

Meeting Summary

March 13, 2013, 9:00 – 11:00 AM

Selig Building, Seattle

Council members present: County Council Vice Chair Jane Hague (Co-Chair); Ric Ilgenfritz (for Sound Transit CEO Joni Earl); County Councilmember Kathy Lambert; Redmond Mayor John Marchione; Kirkland Mayor Joan McBride; County Councilmember Larry Phillips; Christie True, Director of King County Natural Resources and Parks (for County Executive Dow Constantine)

Council members excused: Dave Namura, Puget Sound Energy Manager of Local Government and Public Policy

Facilitator: John Howell, Cedar River Group

Welcome and Introductions

Jane Hague, Advisory Council Co-Chair, called the meeting to order, welcomed Advisory Council members and others attending, and invited the council members to introduce themselves. Members of the audience were asked to introduce themselves to the Advisory Council. Facilitator John Howell then reviewed the agenda and meeting logistics.

New materials. Mr. Howell pointed out several additions to Advisory Council members' notebooks, including information requests by members at the last meeting, and public comments submitted on the project's website. Mr. Howell said the Technical Work Group is still working on the best way to collect information on several requests the Advisory Council made at the last meeting, including the status and plans of non-owner jurisdictions, and the mitigation from the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) related to the Wilburton segment. An overlay map of trails in the region is included in tab 6 in the member's notebooks.

Revised Ground Rules. Members received a revised version of the Ground Rules of the Advisory Council (dated 2/27/13). The revision included the statement discussed at the February 20 meeting that Advisory Council members want to hear stakeholder interests and perspectives, but that there will be time limits for public comment at Advisory Council meetings. There was unanimous agreement at the February meeting to use the proposed ground rules (with this one change).

Project website and comment opportunity. Mr. Howell noted that all meeting materials are available to the public on the project website (www.kingcounty.gov/ERC), along with a comment form. The staff compiles the comments and distributes them to the Advisory Council. The website also includes a sign-up form to receive meeting notices by email.

March 30 King County celebration. Christie True invited everyone present to a public event King County is hosting on Saturday, March 30, from noon to 2:00 p.m. (NOTE: the time has since been changed to 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.), to celebrate the county's acquisition of nearly 20 miles of the Eastside Rail Corridor.

The family-friendly celebration will be held at the Seahawks Training Facility in Renton, and will include short tours of a corridor section.

Redmond Case Study

Mayor Marchione presented an overview of the City of Redmond's process to acquire, plan and develop the rail corridor within Redmond, which they have named the Redmond Central Connector. He also reviewed several lessons learned. (See presentation slides, "Redmond Central Connector," and handout, "Downtown Redmond, Washington: Creating Choice, Connecting Community.") The grand opening for Phase I (the downtown Redmond portion) is scheduled for September 2013. Planning and conceptual design are complete for Phase II (extending to the Puget Power Trail) and Phase III (extending to NE 124th Street). Most of the funding for Phase II has been secured, with construction expected in 2014.

The mayor said that two of the lessons learned have been especially important. One is that planning is essential. Planning needed to work from the bottom up, starting with the various underground utility easements, with the trail on the top surface. This provides flexibility, since the trail is the least expensive part to move if/when needed. For example, in some areas Redmond will use 100 feet of the Sound Transit easement until Sound Transit is ready to begin construction, then the trail will be moved. He said the underground utilities are the most difficult to plan for and construct, and the rail is the most costly. The second key lesson is to have a solid communications strategy and robust public process.

Mayor Marchione offered the following responses to Advisory Council members' questions:

- **Trail connections:** The Sammamish River Trail parallels the Redmond Central Connector for the most part and is narrower (10 feet wide).
- **Public involvement:** Redmond started the public process in 1997, with a break from 2000 to 2008. In 2008 they held public workshops about the downtown section, and by mid-2009 had good community support.
- **Zoning:** Redmond rezoned in 2001 to have buildings on the trail have two fronts—one to the street, and one to the trail. This was before most of the new development took place. This has been well received
- **Public safety:** There has been no change in crime or vandalism. The trail is currently very open with a gravel bed people can walk on.

Mayor Marchione noted that because planning with a 20-year horizon is difficult, the Redmond plan includes flexibility to accommodate changes, such as a future East Link extension.

Rick Ilgenfritz said that Sound Transit has studied the alignment in the downtown Redmond area. The Sound Transit Board has adopted an alignment for an East Link segment so that it is ready when funds can be secured. The Board directed staff to continue planning and keep the segment open as a possibility for a 2016 funding package.

Draft Charter and List of Issues

Mr. Howell noted that the Advisory Council's work is about the railbanked southern portion of the Eastside Rail Corridor within King County. The Technical Work Group has drafted a charter that describes the reasons for and roles of the Advisory Council, why the corridor is important to the region, and values for multi-jurisdictional planning. The work group also developed a list of issues the Advisory Council will need to consider. (See handouts "Proposed Charter for ERC Regional Advisory Council" and "Proposed List of Issues for ERC Regional Advisory Council," both dated March 12, 2013.)

Mr. Howell reviewed each section of the Proposed Charter and asked for Advisory Council members' questions and comments. The discussion raised the following points:

- **Description of the regional planning process:** Suggestions included: adding "seeking a coordinated vision"; adding the need for cooperation, since the corridor spans jurisdictions; and recognizing the corridor's history, and why it is important today and for the future.
- **Multiple Owners and Existing Agreements:** There were suggestions to state that the Advisory Council recognizes there are multiple owners and existing agreements, and does not want its recommendations to damage owners' interests or rights in their parts of the corridor.
- **Corridor description and uses:** It was suggested to clarify that the southern portion is railbanked and subject to the corresponding federal obligations. There was discussion about the terminology for describing the corridor's uses, and the need to define "multi-use" to include: all forms of transit and rail, biking, walking, motorized wheelchair, equestrian (as a separate part of the trail), other forms of transportation legally allowed, and connections to other regional trails and transportation. It was suggested to connect the discussion of uses to the context of the regional planning process described in the charter's first paragraph. It was suggested that the reference to possible uses in the corridor include excursion rail.
- **Purpose and roles of Advisory Council:** There was discussion about whether to incorporate the King County Council motion setting up the Advisory Council. It was suggested to note in the charter that there may be issues the Advisory Council will not be able to resolve, but that the council should "set a table that endures." There was a suggestion to include a description of how the jurisdictions want to work together after the Advisory Council sunsets, such as through periodic meetings, and developing a process for handling safety issues, complaints, etc.

Councilmember Lambert pointed out that no Puget Sound Energy (PSE) representative was able to attend this meeting. PSE needs an opportunity to provide comments on the draft, as well.

Advisory Council members' suggestions for the Proposed List of Issues were:

- Add "outcomes" to "mission, vision and values."
- Include the importance of flexibility, given the long-term nature of the planning.
- Add identifying whether there would be any cost savings in leaving track in place for possible future use.

Regarding leaving tracks in place, Mr. Ilgenfritz said that Sound Transit and the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) conducted a feasibility study in 2007-08 on operating a commuter rail service on the tracks at a 45- to 50-mile-an-hour rate, and concluded that the cost would be substantial. He said it was unlikely that Sound Transit would want to use the existing tracks.

Mr. Howell said he would revise the draft charter based on the Council member's comments, review the revisions with the technical work group, and bring the draft back to the Council at the next meeting.

Stakeholder Engagement

In the interest of time, Mr. Howell deferred this agenda item to the next meeting.

Public Comment

The following eight individuals offered public comment:

- Robert Scheuerman, Eastside Rail Now
- Peter Camp, Snohomish County
- Dick Burkhart, Sierra Club volunteer
- Byron Cole, Eastside Freight Railroad and Ballard Short Line
- Kathy Cox, Eastside Community Rail
- Lisa McConnell, Eastside Trail Advocates
- Will Knedlik, Eastside Rail Now
- Mark Miller, resident

The comments raised the following issues:

- **Commuter rail:** Eastside commuter rail is expected in Sound Transit's ST3 plan, which might go to voters in 2014. The Advisory Council should take this into account.
- **Plans for northern segment:** The Advisory Council should be aware of planning taking place in Snohomish County for the northern segment of the corridor. Plans include multi-purpose uses, connections to the Centennial Trail and Sammamish Trail, active freight rail, use of excursion trains, and possible commuter rail use. The Advisory Council should consider how the uses in the southern portion will connect to the northern portion of the corridor. Snohomish County is attempting to purchase an easement from the Port and hopes to have the purchase completed by July 2013.
- **Freight rail:** There were suggestions to consider opening the corridor to freight rail, extending this use currently operating in Snohomish County. Several commenters expressed concern that taking out tracks in Kirkland or other segments would foreclose this opportunity.
- **Excursion trains:** A commenter suggested including "excursion" in the Proposed Charter as a possible use in the corridor. A recent survey of wineries in north King County and Snohomish County showed that more than 90 percent were interested in participating in a "tasting train" project. Another commenter suggested keeping open the option for a dinner train, as well.

- **Keeping options open:** There were suggestions to consider all possible uses of the corridor, including conducting full engineering studies.
- **Bike-pedestrian commuting:** A commenter noted that the Burke-Gilman Trail and Sammamish River Trail are both used by a large number of workers who commute by bicycle. The Advisory Council should keep bicycle and pedestrian commuters in mind when planning.
- **Environmental review:** A commenter encouraged the Advisory Council to ensure that jurisdictions follow state environmental laws and conduct a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review before making changes in the corridor.

Next Steps

Advisory Council members made the following information requests during the meeting:

- Develop a list of who's who in the corridor regarding the various rail interests (e.g., rail advocacy, rail resistance, etc.).
- Obtain and compile the analyses that Redmond, Kirkland, Sound Transit and the PSRC have done related to the feasibility of using the existing rail tracks in the corridor – particularly for the portions of the corridor owned by King County.

Mr. Howell said that given the number and depth of issues raised so far, it is clear that the Advisory Council will need to meet every three weeks. The staff will send out a poll for future meeting dates. Meeting locations will rotate among the owners, with the next meeting likely in Kirkland.

The meeting adjourned at 11:05AM.