

Eastside Rail Corridor Regional Advisory Council

Meeting Summary

May 15, 2013, 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Redmond City Hall, City Council Chambers

Council members present: Nate Caminos, Senior Local Government Affairs Coordinator, Puget Sound Energy (for Dave Namura); Sound Transit CEO Joni Earl; County Council Vice Chair Jane Hague (Co-Chair); County Councilmember Kathy Lambert; Craig Larsen, Redmond Parks and Recreation Director (for 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)

Facilitator and presenters: John Howell, Cedar River Group, facilitator; Richard Leahy, City Manager of Woodinville; Linda Sullivan, Capital Projects Manager, King County Natural Resources and Parks; Carolyn Hope, City of Redmond

Welcome and Introductions

Jane Hague, Advisory Council Co-Chair, called the meeting to order, and welcomed Regional Advisory Council (RAC) members and others attending. Co-Chair Hague invited council members to introduce themselves. Members of the audience were also asked to introduce themselves. Co-Chair Hague reviewed the agenda for the meeting. Facilitator John Howell reviewed the materials in the meeting packet, which included public comment submitted through the website since the last RAC meeting.

Mr. Howell reviewed an updated timeline for the RAC meetings, workshops and public open house. As the council has agreed, the process will extend into September, with no August meeting and two meetings in September (exact dates to be determined). The technical workshops will focus on different segments of the corridor and will take place on May 31, June 28 and July 12 from 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM. The Redmond and Kirkland segments are not included because each city is conducting its own planning process. The purpose is to bring together the staff of segment owners and other jurisdictions in the corridor to talk about the best uses of the corridor as a regional public asset. The workshop agenda addresses five topics: (1) the corridor's long-term value; (2) current plans and coordination efforts; (3) options for multi-use in the near term (0 – 10 years); (4) options for multi-use in the longer term (10+ years); and (5) summary and next steps. The RAC Technical Team is putting together the workshop materials and will provide updates to RAC members. Because of the technical nature of the workshops, they will not be open to the public.

The public open house will take place on July 31 from 5:30 to 7:30 PM, and will offer summary information from the workshops. RAC members are highly encouraged to attend the open house.

Welcome from Redmond

Craig Larsen welcomed RAC members to Redmond and highlighted recent activities in the development of the Redmond Central Connector, the Redmond segment of the corridor. In the last 10 days, work has taken place west of Bear Creek Trail toward downtown. The natural "feel" of this area is being preserved. Redmond is looking at different ways to take the trail through intersection crossings. A major

art piece has been installed by Redmond Town Center titled “The Erratic.” A drainage pond is being developed near the transit center location. The new trail will connect to the Sammamish River Trail using a ramp. The mile of the trail that runs through downtown Redmond will open in September 2013. The design of Phase II is to be complete in 2014, with construction in 2015.

City of Woodinville Presentation and Discussion

Richard Leahy, City Manager of Woodinville, offered a presentation on Woodinville’s priorities and planning work for the corridor segment through their city. (See the presentation slides, “Woodinville and the Eastside Rail Corridor.”) Woodinville believes in dual use of the corridor—rails and trails. They will be studying dual use for their segment, and also want to understand what King County plans to do, and what Snohomish County is planning to the north. Dual use is Woodinville’s top priority of eight priorities for the corridor. The second two priorities (ability to widen the railroad trestle bridge over SR 202, and ability to widen the SR 202 bridge over Sammamish River) would help relieve traffic congestion.

Woodinville sees the rail corridor as having three different kinds of segments as it runs through their area. The northern segment (highlighted in red on the bird’s eye map in the presentation) does not offer much opportunity for trail use. The central segment (highlighted in yellow) runs through a busy area, with half a million square feet of retail, a site for a new mobile home park, a potential site for a light rail station, and two bridge projects on SR 202. The southern segment (highlighted in blue) is in an industrial district, with a rail spur on either side of SR 202. The corridor also connects to the Sammamish River Trail and the Tolt Pipeline.

In response to RAC members’ questions, Mr. Leahy offered the following additional information:

- **Priorities for action** – The two bridge projects (SR 202 Trestle Widening and Sammamish Bridge Widening) are Woodinville’s top priorities for action. The Sammamish River Bridge project includes bike lanes and sidewalks. Trail elements could be added to the SR 202 trestle with cooperation of other partners. A key design issue for trail development is how to connect with Redmond’s trail and with the county’s plans. The Sammamish River Trail also is within 200 feet of both bridges.
- **Tourist area** – The tourist area of Woodinville is located from SR 202 south to 175th. By adding trailhead parking, Woodinville hopes to spread out traffic congestion on the weekends, and encourage visitors to spend more time in the area.
- **Existing rail** – There is some freight rail in the industrial area. The rail line crosses both main roads within 600 feet, so there could be a concern about traffic impacts if there were frequent trains.
- **Commuter rail** – Woodinville believes that including commuter rail in long-term planning for dual use with a trail would benefit the city. The rail could be similar to Sounder service or like Link Light Rail (the City’s use of the term “commuter rail” does not differentiate between the two types of service). It would be beneficial to have commuter rail at least to Bellevue. Some of the corridor runs through a crowded area. The city thinks there could be a rail line with a trail along side, but has not studied the possibilities yet.

Lessons Learned from Redmond’s Master Plan for the Central Connector

Carolyn Hope of Redmond presented a summary of Redmond’s master planning work for the 4.3 mile Redmond Central Connector and reflections on lessons they learned. (See presentation slides, “Redmond Central Connector.”) Among the key lessons were to set design principles to help guide planning; use the zoning code to assist with implementation; find ways to be flexible; and since other partners/owners may be in different places with their planning, using an “envelope” approach can preserve what each needs and enable the trail work to move forward.

RAC members complimented Redmond on creating a sense of place in their trail plan, while keeping options open for other uses. Responses to questions and discussion included the following points:

- **Transit** – Sound Transit has an easement through Redmond’s corridor. Redmond has accommodated them with the “Sound Transit Envelope” including space for transit service and associated facilities. Sound Transit’s easement in downtown Redmond is narrower. The north corridor is much less constrained.
- **Public involvement** – Redmond had active participation in public workshops from the beginning of the planning process. The resulting plan reflects community values, and offers different uses and character fitting for different parts of the corridor.
- **Vegetation plan and competing goals** – Redmond does have a vegetation plan, but the corridor is a long one. In the downtown area, they overplanted along the Sammamish River in order to crowd out invasive species. Doing so obstructs views of the river from the trail in the short term. Once the trees grow, Redmond will thin them to restore views of the river. This is an example of managing competing goals.
- **Zoning code** – Redmond’s requirements for a 14-foot setback of buildings along the corridor helped to preserve the space needed for all the ownership/easement interests in the corridor.
- **Environmental considerations** – Redmond took into account environmentally sensitive areas in the corridor. There is an important salmon-bearing stream nearby. RAC members noted that all corridor planning needs to consider sensitive areas.
- **Pinch points, connections** – Redmond provides a good example of dealing with pinch points and maximizing connections to other trails and features. The City acquired additional property outside of the corridor at one pinch point in downtown Redmond.
- **Envelopes** – The envelope approach Redmond used is a good one to allow for the various interests of different owners/easement holders who are in different stages of planning.

Other Multi-Use Corridors

Linda Sullivan of King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks presented the Technical Team’s research on other multi-use corridors in the United States and internationally. (See presentation slides, “Eastside Rail Corridor – Constraints, Crossings, & Connections: Creative Examples from Other Corridors”; and the handout, “Comparison of Multi-use Corridors.”) Ms. Sullivan summarized four U.S. multi-use corridors: Hiawatha/Southwest Corridor light rail in Minneapolis, Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART) in California, Santa Cruz Coastal Rail Trail in California, and Springwater Corridor in Portland, Oregon. All are in old rail corridors. Two (SMART and Minneapolis) will include regional

passenger rail with multipurpose trails; one (Santa Cruz) will be a regional trail with active rail; and the fourth (Portland) is an existing regional trail sharing the right-of-way with utilities and some active rail. Only Springwater in Portland is open; SMART began construction in 2012. Each of the four projects represents 25 years of work in acquisition, planning, and funding initiatives.

- **Minneapolis** – The third segment of their light rail line, the Southwest or Green Line (15 miles), is the most similar to the ERC. It is an interagency collaboration, including the county Regional Railroad Authority (owner of the corridor), Metro Transit (owns the light rail line), and Twin City and Western Railroad. There is a Southwest LRT Community Works Program doing collaborative regional planning. The county is committed to trail and rail co-location. Capital costs come from a county transit sales tax, the Regional Railroad Authority, the state, and an FTA grant.
- **SMART** – This is a voter-approved 70-mile passenger rail and pathway in the North Bay area north of San Francisco, with a levy of one-quarter of one cent sales tax. It is being developed in an old railroad corridor, with more than half shared with active freight rail. Construction began in 2012, including removing and recycling old rails and ties, installing new rail, upgrading road crossings, and purchasing passenger cars. The SMART path, once connected to existing and proposed paths, will be the longest continuous multi-use path in the United States.

Santa Cruz County – The Regional Transportation Commission acquired an old railroad corridor (31 miles) that is 50-60 feet wide, on average. They are planning a multipurpose path for bike, pedestrian, and freight rail. The corridor includes a variety of population areas and landscapes, and 37 bridges and trestles, all under repair. Half the population of the county lives within a mile of the trail, which links to the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail. The Regional Transportation Commission is expected to adopt a plan for the corridor this year and, if they get funding, to begin construction in five years.

- **Portland** – The 21.5 mile Springwater Corridor was acquired by the city in 1990, with additions purchased by Metro. The multi-use trail—bike, pedestrian and equestrian—opened in 1996. The trail is shared with utilities, and approximately 5 miles of it is shared with freight rail.

Ms. Sullivan also reviewed photo examples from around the world of solutions for pinch points, steep slopes, crossings, and connections. Discussion with RAC members raised the following points:

- **Other corridors to research** – The staff looked at additional corridors, but focused on those that are multiuse and are in a similar topography to ours and/or have had to deal with pinch points. RAC members asked about Boulder, CO and Austin, TX. The staff looked at Austin, but the corridor is flat and wide, so it does not match our topographic challenges. The staff will research Boulder's corridor. RAC members said they would look at the information provided and send any additional feedback to Mr. Howell.
- **Corridors to invite to a meeting** – RAC members suggested that it might be worthwhile to hear from representatives of the SMART corridor, since it seems comparable, and Minneapolis, since their corridor includes light rail. Questions suggested for any corridors to be invited were:
 - What constraints are similar to ours, and how did they deal with them?
 - What were their goals for developing the corridor, and have they met them?

- What are their lessons learned?

Mr. Howell said that the Technical Team will make further contacts with other corridors and see if a representative might come to the June 5 RAC meeting.

Public Comment

The following seven individuals offered comments:

- Will Knedlik, Eastside Rail Now!
- Roche Scheuerman, Eastside Rail Now!
- T. G. Court, Bellevue College student
- Ann Stanton, City of Snohomish and Eastside Trailways Alliance
- Ernie Wilson, Eastside Community Rail
- Mark Miller, citizen
- Georgine Foster, Kirkland resident

They offered the following comments:

- **Workshops:** There was a request to reconsider the decision not to open the technical workshops to the public.
- **Concerns:** Speakers raised concerns about: the need for good civil engineering to build on steep slopes; how actions in the corridor comply with the Environmental Policy Act; to consider the different travel needs of people living south of Bellevue and those north of Bellevue; and the desirability of keeping the northern part of the corridor open to freight rail.
- **Upcoming trail workshops:** Speakers invited RAC members to participate in an Eastside Trailways Alliance workshop on June 1 at 12:30 PM in Woodinville. The workshop will include panels on trails, excursion trains and other uses for the corridor. RSVPs are being taken by the Cascadia Center.
- **Other corridors:** A speaker recommended looking at the Lacawana Cutoff corridor in New Jersey. Another speaker who heard a presentation by SMART representatives (Sonoma, CA) said they emphasized that it was essential for that pathway to get voter approval.

Next Steps

The next RAC meeting will be on June 5 at Puget Sound Energy's offices, from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. The meeting adjourned at 3:10 PM.