

MINUTES

Eugene City Council
McNutt Room—City Hall
777 Pearl Street—Eugene, Oregon

February 23, 2011
Noon

COUNCILORS PRESENT: Betty Taylor, George Brown, Andrea Ortiz, George Poling, Mike Clark, Chris Pryor, Alan Zelenka, Pat Farr.

Her Honor Mayor Kitty Piercy called the February 16, 2011, work session of the Eugene City Council to order. The council was joined by Lane Transit District (LTD) Board of Directors Chair Mike Eyster, LTD General Manager Mark Pangborn, LTD Director of Development Services Tom Schwetz, and LTD Director of Service Planning, Accessibility, and Marketing Andy Vobora.

A. WORK SESSION: West Eugene EmX Update

City Manager Jon Ruiz introduced Mr. Eyster. Mr. Eyster reported to the council that following the final meeting of the Joint Locally Preferred Alternative Committee (JLPAC), LTD staff had been concerned that the committee forwarded two options for the West Eugene EmX bus rapid transit route to the decision makers. One option must be selected if there was to be a build alternative. Staff discussed its concerns with the LTD board, and proposed that the process be extended to allow for more public education and public input. Board members agreed that whatever the board did, it must be consistent with the actions of the City Council. Mr. Eyster assured the council that LTD was not attempting to dictate the council's timeline, and said no board action was taken at the meeting.

Mr. Schwetz provided a PowerPoint presentation that reviewed the process to date and the remaining tasks, outlined the recommendation of the JLPAC, highlighted the evaluation criteria for the federal "Small Starts" grant program that LTD hoped to take advantage of for route funding, and compared the costs and physical impacts of the two options forwarded by the JLPAC. Mr. Schwetz quantified the construction jobs the route would create and concluded the presentation by reviewing a decision time line.

Mr. Zelenka arrived during the presentation.

Mayor Piercy supported a build option and hoped to select one sooner rather than later. In regard to the proposed West 11th/13th Avenue option, she suggested the council needed to consider both public support and project viability. She said the issue was not "transit versus everything else but transit as a part of everything else." The community needed good options for every travel mode. If all options were good, people would make good choices and the community would move forward in a way that all supported.

Mayor Piercy solicited comments from members of the JLPAC.

Ms. Ortiz commended the JLPAC process. She expressed appreciation for LTD's work in responding to community input. She also wanted to make a decision sooner rather than later.

Mr. Pryor thanked LTD for its willingness to be flexible. He said the JLPAC forwarded the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option because Eugene was in the middle of a significant discussion of land use in that area, and he believed to limit the transit options before that discussion concluded would result in a less productive conversation. He agreed that a choice was needed as soon as possible.

Responding to a question from Mr. Farr about tree removal and replacement, Mr. Schwetz anticipated that LTD would plant more trees than it removed along the route. Mr. Pangborn added that LTD would work with the City's Urban Forester on tree replanting. He said that trees were relatively expensive in the context of the project. He referred the council to the landscaping installed in connection with the Pioneer Parkway segment of the Gateway EmX route to demonstrate how LTD addressed the issue of tree removal and replacement in that context.

Mr. Farr determined from Mr. Schwetz that LTD would consider the concept of running both EmX lanes on the south side of the power poles on West 13th Avenue, which would require LTD to acquire property but would create more of a buffer.

Mr. Poling was pleased that the JLPAC forwarded the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option. He looked forward to more discussion of the merits of the two routes.

Mr. Clark asked if the council was precluded from selecting the Transportation System Management (TSM) option. Mr. Schwetz clarified that the TSM option was intended to provide an analysis of a less capital-intensive project. TSM was not an EmX corridor. From LTD's standpoint, TSM was essentially a "no build" option. Mr. Eyster indicated the council could select the "no build" option.

Mr. Clark asked if the anticipated \$30 million in State funding was in the form of lottery-backed bonds. Mr. Eyster said yes. Mr. Clark asked how the State budget deficit and the State Treasurer's recent declaration that it would recommend placing several State projects on hold affected that element of project funding. Mr. Schwetz indicated that LTD hoped to secure the needed funding over the next three legislative sessions. LTD had requested \$8.4 million from the current legislature.

Ms. Taylor asked if the money mentioned by Mr. Clark could be used to fund education. Mr. Schwetz acknowledged the legislature could redirect the funds to education.

Ms. Taylor recalled that the presentation indicated additional money saved by the West 11th/13th Avenue option could be used for additional services, but she had been told the funding for the route could not be used for other services. Mr. Schwetz clarified that the reference in the presentation was to operating costs, not capital costs. Ms. Taylor asked if it was true that EmX buses cost more to operate than a traditional bus. Mr. Schwetz said the cost per boarding demonstrated that EmX was more efficient than a traditional bus.

Ms. Taylor asked about the number of jobs created for the earlier system phases. Mr. Schwetz said the costs for those phases were less and jobs were fewer in number. Ms. Taylor asked where the construction workers went when the jobs were completed. Mr. Schwetz suggested that such workers were often local and moved onto other local construction jobs.

Mr. Brown said he would like to see the TSM option advance along with the "no build" option. He acknowledged that most of the groups surveyed by LTD had favored West 11th/13th avenues over the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option but he did not understand why. He suggested the greater number of businesses along 6th/7th avenues justified selection of that option. Referring to the information provided to the council about employment along both corridors, Mr. Brown questioned where the figures were

derived from. Mr. Schwetz indicated the source of the information was employment files that LTD received periodically from the State of Oregon.

Mr. Zelenka also favored a build option and wanted to select an option soon because of congestion, travel times, cars, climate change, and all the City's transportation planning documents, which were focused on providing choices. The community would not see the beneficial impact of those choices without the needed investment. Mr. Zelenka considered the route an investment in the future of Eugene and in creating choices. He "was not buying the Tea Party's line" that the investment was wasteful spending.

Mr. Zelenka wanted to know why the groups surveyed by LTD chose the West 11th/13th Avenue option. Mr. Schwetz could not speak for those groups but suggested they were persuaded by the technical merits of the proposal. Mr. Zelenka believed the West 11th/13th Avenue option was justified by the increased operating costs required for the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option.

Mr. Zelenka asked LTD to explain to "all the people, all of sudden, who had become mass transit experts" why it did not use smaller buses. Mr. Pangborn offered a wheelbarrow analogy. He suggested that one would always buy the biggest wheelbarrow possible to move materials around one's yard. He said that LTD was building the system for the capacity it needed in the future. The smaller the vehicle, the more vehicles were needed to carry passengers at peak travel times during the morning and afternoon. LTD could use one articulated bus to carry the same number of people that three small buses could carry. Mr. Pangborn emphasized that the greatest cost to LTD in running a bus was the cost of the driver, so it made economic sense to use larger buses. He recalled the 30-foot buses used for *The Breeze* service and said those buses could be used in some areas during mid-day but were not suitable most areas at peak hours. He concluded by saying that LTD was at financial capacity now and could not afford to deploy more buses.

Mr. Pangborn concurred with a statement by Mr. Zelenka that small buses did not provide more than modest fuel gains and larger buses had longer life-cycles. He noted that LTD did use small buses for such things as "dial-a-ride" service.

Responding to a question from Mr. Zelenka, Mr. Pangborn enumerated some Oregon systems that employed small buses, including Klamath Falls, Astoria, and Tillamook. Other Oregon communities, such as Salem and Medford, used 40-foot buses to respond to changing demand throughout the day. Mr. Zelenka asked how LTD's system compared to other systems of comparable size. Mr. Pangborn said that LTD ranked 30th in productivity (number of boardings per hour) in the nation. The system carried many University of Oregon and Lane Community College students.

Mr. Eyster suggested another benefit of the West 11th/13th Avenue option was the increase in trip time, which would make the system more desirable to "choice" riders.

Ms. Ortiz did not need any more information to make a decision. She would not recommend TSM as an option because it did nothing to take buses off the roads. The City did not have sufficient money to take care of streets it owned and if the route moved forward LTD would be responsible for the costs of maintaining dedicated bus rapid transit lanes. TSM would not address that issue and could possibly result in larger buses on the roads, which would further shorten the life cycle of the roads.

Mr. Clark said he thought funding was a valid and important consideration. He questioned if the State's financial capacity had changed the funding environment for State involvement. He requested an analysis of the State's capacity and how it affected the project.

Mr. Clark asked if the dedicated throughways required for the system would change or limit the access for businesses along the route. Mr. Schwetz said no. Mr. Eyster said in one instance, a property owner advocated for a dedicated lane because it facilitated customer access to his business. Mr. Schwetz noted that the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option ran along a facility owned by Oregon Department of Transportation and any curb changes triggered that agency's access management policy. ODOT had indicated it would work with LTD to avoid access restrictions but that issue did not exist on the West 11th/13th Avenue option as those roads were owned by the City of Eugene.

Ms. Taylor objected to Mr. Zelenka's "Tea Party" reference and likened it to people calling those they disagreed with Communists in the 1950s. She was not a member of the Tea Party but did not like name calling and did not think that people should be categorized in such a manner.

Ms. Taylor suggested that 30-foot buses would be great for the south hills, where there were fewer passengers and less service than in other areas.

Mr. Brown spoke to the perceived benefits of the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option over the West 11th/13th Avenue option, acknowledging that the 6th/7th/11th option would take slightly longer and require more upfront investment, but it take more people to where they wanted to go in terms of housing, retail, and employment centers. He suggested that it was more important to take people where they needed to go than to shave a few moments off the travel time. At this point, he thought the 6th/7th/11th option made more sense.

Mr. Schwetz said there was no doubt the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option would be a well-performing part of the system, but LTD had to consider the system in terms of phasing. He said it was not a question of which option, but when. He believed that the 11th/13th option, for the technical reasons listed, was the appropriate option.

Mayor Piercy found the conversation troubling because it veered between the preferred route and the question of whether to have EmX at all. She averred that the community decided on the EmX transit system years ago and had constructed the first two phases of the system, which were performing well. The City had goals to increase system ridership and reduce vehicle miles traveled and carbon emissions. The proposed system met federal, State, and local goals. Mayor Piercy said if the council decided to select the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option she needed to know that soon because she believed it made a substantive difference in the support the route had and could affect her position.

Mr. Zelenka understood the financial constraints faced by the community, but believed the council had the responsibility to look to the future and make the appropriate investments. He favored a build option and could live with either option with his previously expressed caveat about the increased cost of the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option.

Mr. Zelenka asked what happened if the council selected a "no build" option for West Eugene. Mr. Schwetz suggested it would be more difficult to go to the FTA and ask for more money for the next corridor. Mr. Eyster agreed.

Mr. Zelenka asked if funding had been identified for the TSM option. Mr. Schwetz said that TSM was an operations strategy that would not qualify for federal funding programs such as the Small Starts Program. The funding could come from more flexible federal funding sources, but currently LTD was spending those dollars on preventative maintenance for buses.

Mr. Zelenka wanted to see a "laundry list" of the adjustments made to the route in response to public input and the nature of those changes.

Speaking to Mayor Piercy's remarks, Mr. Farr indicated he was not ready to announce his position on an option. He asked how the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option would work with a Highway 99 route extension, what future connections would look like, and what adjustments would need to be made to the West 11th/13th Avenue option to facilitate construction of the Highway 99 route.

In response to a question from Mr. Farr, Mr. Schwetz agreed to provide the council with information about the number of on-street parking spaces that would be eliminated as a result of project construction.

Mr. Pryor said the discussion reinforced his desire to keep both build options on the table. He noted that while the cost per boarding was four cents higher for the West 6th/7th/11th Avenue option, LTD expected to have 70,000 more riders on that route by 2031. In addition, it would make important connections to other phases. He agreed that the discussion was about the future, but he was also concerned about the impact of the project on businesses in place now. He wanted to know more about how long construction would last in front of any given business.

In response to Mr. Pryor, Mr. Schwetz noted LTD's previous distribution of a letter from the Wildish Group regarding its experience in constructing the first two phases of EmX. The firm had stated it had worked in two-week, five-block segments on each side of the street. Construction did not require that access to any business during be closed. He said that LTD tried to provide as much support to businesses as possible during the construction period. Mr. Eyster added that construction could also occur during night time hours and LTD could provide signage to indicate businesses were open and how they could be accessed.

Mr. Eyster agreed with Mr. Pryor about the long-range nature of the decision and emphasized LTD's interest in being a good partner.

Mayor Piercy emphasized the need for a thoughtful decision that encompassed consideration of the community and region's future needs. She believed that the decision represented a significant moment for the community.

Mayor Piercy adjourned the work session at 1:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Forrest

Beth Forrest
City Recorder

(Recorded by Kimberly Young)