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MEMORANDUM

December 15, 2014

TO: Whatcom County's State Legislative Delegation
FROM: Bob Wilson, Executive Director
RE: **Unfunded Regional Priority Projects for 2015**

Attached please find descriptions for the twelve projects listed below. The Whatcom Council of Governments has determined that these projects are the most important among the many transportation needs throughout Whatcom County for which there is currently insufficient funding or no funding at all. The four highest-priority projects appear in bold.

- *Regional Priority No. 1: **Slater Road Intersection Improvements**, Whatcom County, City of Ferndale and the Lummi Nation*
- *Regional Priority No. 2: **Horton Road Connection**, City of Bellingham and Whatcom County*
- *Regional Priority No. 3: **I-5 On-Ramp (Northbound) at West Bakerview Road**, City of Bellingham*
- *Regional Priority No. 4: **VACIS Relocation**, City of Blaine and Whatcom County*
- *Whatcom Smart Trips, Whatcom Council of Governments*
- *Guide Meridian Road Ditch Culvert Replacement, City of Lynden*
- *Birch Bay Drive Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility, Whatcom County*
- *I-5 Exit 274 Interchange, City of Blaine*
- *Orchard Drive and Baker-to-Bay Trail, City of Bellingham*

In conjunction with the Whatcom Transportation Authority, WCOG has also identified the Region's top three *transit* projects that are in need of the Legislature's support in 2015:

- *Transit Priority No. 1: County Connector Transit Service*
- *Transit Priority No. 2: Lincoln Creek Transportation Center Improvements*
- *Transit Priority No. 3: Bellis Fair Transit Stop Safety Improvements*

Your support for these projects in the upcoming legislative session would be greatly appreciated by the elected officials constituting the Whatcom Council of Governments. If you need additional information, please call Tom Parker of Parker Northwest Associates at (206) 200-7898, or me at (360) 676-6974. You can also e-mail me at Bob@wcog.org. On behalf of WCOG, I thank you and wish you all the best for 2015!



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Regional Priority No. 1

Slater Road/I-5 Interchange Improvements, City of Ferndale and the Lummi Nation

Description:

This project will improve channelization and stop control by constructing five roundabouts on Slater Road at Northwest Road, Pacific Highway, I-5 northbound, I-5 southbound, and Rural Avenue.



This interchange provides access to I-5 for the fast-growing area south of Ferndale and north of Bellingham which has significant industrial and commercial land uses. This area is also likely to see development initiated by the Lummi Nation as well as by Whatcom County, which is planning to build a new jail in this area.

Location:

City of Ferndale, unincorporated Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham urban growth area

Intended Outcome:

When complete, this project will greatly enhance corridor safety, improve traffic flow and provide better access to and from I-5.

Project Cost:

Construction	\$14,800,000
Total Funding Requested:	\$14,800,000

Timeline:

Estimated construction time for this project is two years.

Project Status:

This project is consistent with the Whatcom Transportation Plan that has been accepted by the Federal Highway Administration and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)

1st Congressional District (Rep. DelBene)

Contact:

Tom Parker, Parker Northwest Associates
(206) 200-7898



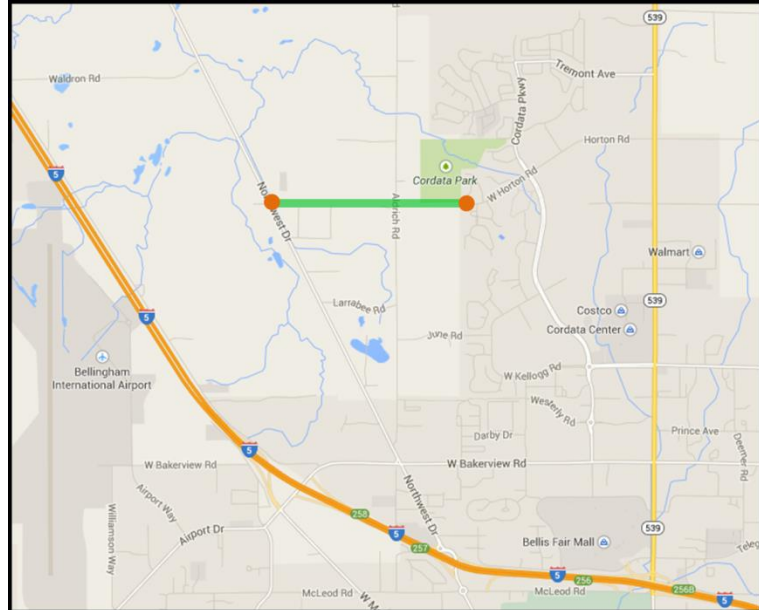
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Regional Priority No. 2

Horton Road Extension to Northwest Drive, Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham

Description:

This project would extend Horton Road west as a secondary urban arterial with sidewalks, bike lanes, turn lanes and signalized intersections that will provide a multimodal connection between two major arterials: Northwest Drive and Guide Meridian Road (SR 539). It would respond to rapid growth in this area and enable the City of Bellingham to provide appropriate access to 350 residences, a new elementary school and a neighborhood park as part of its annexation of 125 acres.



Location:

Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham urban growth area

Intended Outcome:

The proposed roadway would complete the connection between Guide Meridian Road and Northwest Drive and provide much-needed east-west access in the heavily-congested and fast-growing north Bellingham area.

Project Cost:

Construction	\$20,000,000
Total Funding Requested:	\$20,000,000

Timeline:

Estimated construction time: Phase 1 (Cordata to Aldrich), 2017; Phase 2 (Aldrich to Northwest), 2022.

Project Status:

This project is consistent with the Whatcom Transportation Plan that has been accepted by the Federal Highway Administration and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)
1st Congressional District (Rep. DelBene)

Contact:

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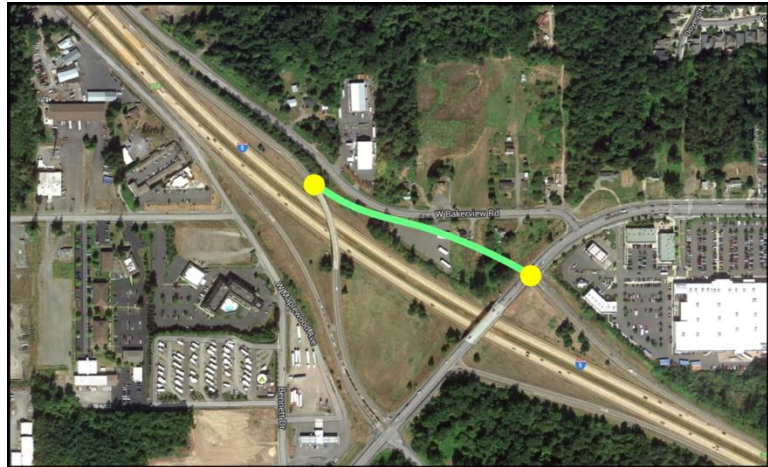
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Regional Priority No. 3

I-5 On-Ramp (Northbound) at West Bakerview Road, City of Bellingham

Description:

Construct a new northbound on-ramp on the east side of the Interstate 5/West Bakerview Road interchange (Exit 258) in Bellingham. This project was identified as “Option 2” and studied in WSDOT’s *I-5/Bakerview Interchange Value Planning Study Technical Report* (2011). This is the fastest growing area in Bellingham and Whatcom County.



Location: City of Bellingham

Intended Outcome:

Significant reduction of east-west traffic congestion, vehicle queues and travel delay, and safety and traffic-flow improvements for Interstate 5.

Project Cost:

Preliminary Engineering:	\$1,000,000
Right-of-way Acquisition:	\$1,000,000
Construction:	\$8,000,000
Total Funding Requested:	\$10,000,000

Timeline:

Early planning has occurred with WSDOT (April 2011), but additional planning – including an Interchange Justification Report – would be required (June 2014-June 2015). Right-of-way (ROW) acquisition would occur in the second half of 2016. Once funding and ROW are secured, preliminary engineering could be completed by the end of 2017, with construction scheduled for 2018-2019.

Project Status:

Bellingham completed the \$3.2-million “Option 1” from the *I-5 / Bakerview Interchange Value Planning Study Technical Report* last year and is seeking funding for Option 2. This project is consistent with the Whatcom Transportation Plan that has been accepted by the Federal Highway Administration and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)
1st Congressional District (Rep. DelBene)

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Regional Priority No. 4

VACIS Relocation, Whatcom County and City of Blaine

Description:

This project would relocate the VACIS equipment installed at the north end of the BNSF Railway’s Swift Siding (south of the Blaine city limits) to a location where key intersections serving the City and Birch Bay would not be blocked as trains slow down to be inspected. These lengthy blockages pose a risk to the neighborhoods west of the tracks by significantly delaying emergency response in the event of an emergency. They also regularly cause extensive traffic backups of up to a mile in length.



Location:

Unincorporated Birch Bay in Whatcom County

Intended Outcome:

This project would improve emergency response time as well as circulation for local and cross-border traffic traveling to west Blaine and Birch Bay . Relocation of the VACIS would also reduce the cost of the Interstate 5 Exit 274 interchange improvements by allowing for an at-grade crossing instead of an overpass that would otherwise be required to stay clear of rail traffic.

Project Cost:

Construction:	\$3,000,000
Total Funding Required:	\$3,000,000

Timeline:

Construction would occur within one year after a new location for the VACIS has been identified and acquired by U.S. Customs and Border Protection and BNSF.

Project Status:

Project is stalled due to the lack of funding.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)
1st Congressional District (Rep. DelBene)

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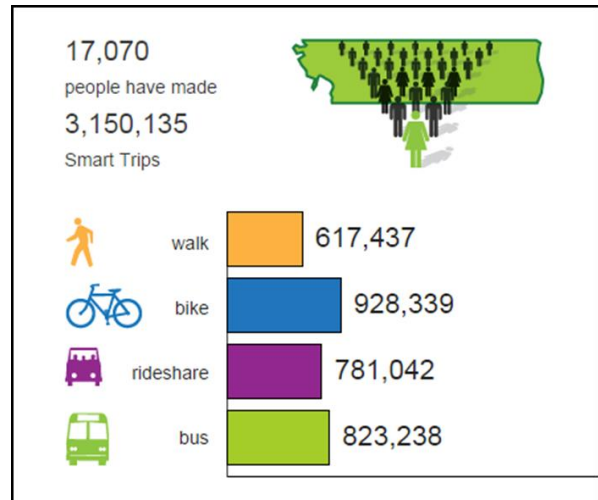


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Whatcom Smart Trips Program

Description:

Established in 2006, the Whatcom Smart Trips program has significantly reduced congestion and vehicle travel in Whatcom County by shifting trips from single-occupant vehicles to walking, bicycling, riding the bus or sharing rides. In the eight years WCOG has operated Whatcom Smart Trips, participants have walked, biked, carpooled and ridden the bus more than 49-million miles; purchased 2-million fewer gallons of gas; and prevented the discharge of 20,000 tons of air and water pollutants. The program has also taught bicycle and pedestrian safety to thousands of elementary school students throughout Whatcom County (more than 4,000 students in 2014 alone).



Location:

Whatcom County

Intended Outcome:

Whatcom Smart Trips advances several of the Region's adopted strategies in the Whatcom Transportation Plan, including transportation demand management (TDM), continued development of a multi-modal transportation network, and improving public health. Receipt of the requested funding will allow continued operation of Smart Trips beyond the summer of 2016, when its existing funding will be depleted.

Project Cost:

Project Implementation: \$300,000
Total Funding Required: \$300,000

Timeline:

Whatcom Smart Trips is an ongoing program of the Whatcom Council of Governments.

Project Status:

Whatcom Smart Trips currently has 16,000 individual participants, 175 participating employers, 120 merchant partners, and participation by most Whatcom County elementary and middle schools.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

40th State Legislative District (Sen. Ranker, Rep. Lytton, Rep. Morris)
42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)
1st Congressional District (Rep. DelBene)
2nd Congressional District (Rep. Larsen)

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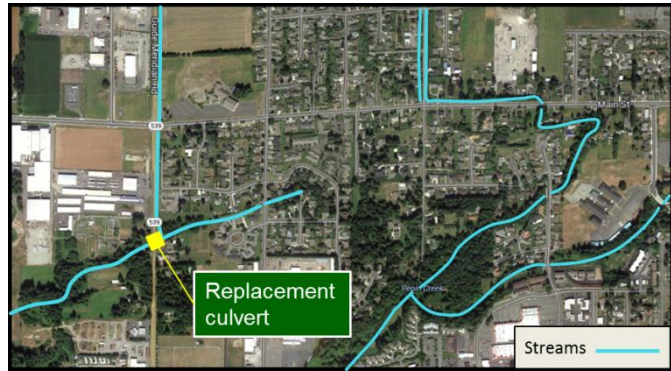


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Guide Meridian (SR 539) Road Ditch Culvert Replacement, City of Lynden

Description:

This project will replace two existing 48-inch concrete culverts that are currently failing with a single 18' x 6' x 130' box culvert. The existing culverts are included on the Department of Fish & Wildlife's inventory of fish-passage barriers for which the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington issued a permanent injunction requiring corrective action.



Location:

The culverts to be replaced serve an upper branch of Bertrand Creek and are located approximately 0.25 miles south of the intersection of Guide Meridian Road (SR 539) and Main Street in the City of Lynden.

Intended Outcome:

When complete, this project will contribute to the full widening of Guide Meridian Road through the City of Lynden; prevent the backup of storm water into the roadside drainage ditch; create additional drainage capacity for the agricultural lands adjacent to the right-of-way, and; correct an identified fish-passage barrier, which will facilitate salmon restoration and comply with the court order.

Project Cost:

Construction:	\$3,000,000
Total Funding Required:	\$3,000,000

Timeline:

If funding for this project is committed in the first half of 2015 it is anticipated that advertising will occur in September 2015, with a contract awarded in December. Construction could then start in June 2016 and would likely conclude by December of that year.

Project Status:

The design for this project is approximately 60 percent complete, all required permits have been obtained and all of the necessary right-of-way has been acquired. This project is consistent with the Whatcom Transportation Plan that has been accepted by the Federal Highway Administration and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)
1st Congressional District (Rep. DelBene)

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Birch Bay Drive Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility, Whatcom County

Description:

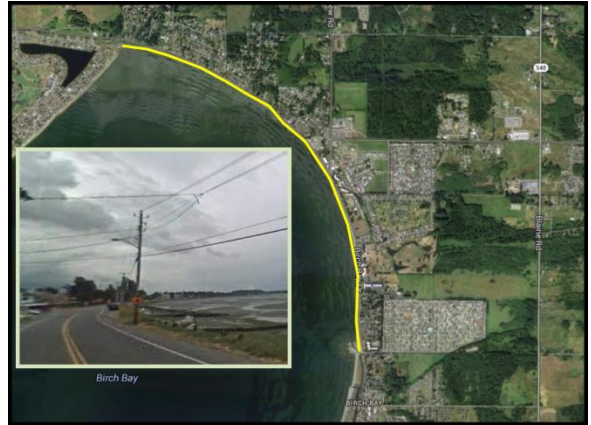
When complete, this \$11.45-million project will result in the construction of a 1.6-mile separated berm that will mitigate beach erosion; provide protection for the roadway and adjacent properties during storms; reduce flooding, and; provide a separated trail for bicyclists and pedestrians, which will improve safety.

Location:

Unincorporated Birch Bay in Whatcom County

Intended Outcome:

The berm will replace a failing seawall along Birch Bay. Also, pedestrians and bicyclists will be separated from vehicle traffic, which will improve safety, increase highway capacity and support local and regional economic development.



Project Cost:

Preliminary Engineering

Right-of-way Acquisition

Construction (portion)

Total Funding Requested: \$4,000,000

Timeline:

Phase I (feasibility study) was completed in 2006. Phase II (the preliminary construction cost estimate) was completed in 2007 and updated in 2013. Preliminary engineering began in summer 2013. Right-of-way acquisition is anticipated in 2014/15, with construction to begin in 2016.

Project Status:

Significant preliminary work has been completed. This project is consistent with the Whatcom Transportation Plan that has been accepted by the Federal Highway Administration and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)

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Interstate 5 Exit 274 Interchange Reconstruction, City of Blaine

Description:

Redesign and construct the I-5 Exit 274 interchange from its current southbound-only configuration to a tight full-diamond configuration that would provide access for both southbound and northbound traffic.



Location:

City of Blaine

Intended Outcome:

Conversion of the current partial interchange to a full diamond will prevent backups of tractor-trailers on I-5 headed to the Pacific Highway port-of-entry on the Canadian border. Pacific Highway is known regionally as “the truck route” owing to the fact that the port-of-entry there is the busiest freight crossing west of the Mississippi River, with more than \$14-billion in trade goods moving across the border there annually. This project would also improve the broader “Cascade Gateway” network of border crossings in Whatcom County by making the Pacific Highway port-of-entry a more viable alternate for the border crossings on State Route 539 in Lynden and SR 546 in Sumas.

Project Cost:

Design:	\$ 4,000,000
Construction:	\$46,000,000
Total Funding Required:	\$50,000,000

Timeline:

Project scoping, engineering and permitting are expected to take approximately three years once funding is committed, with construction to take about one year.

Project Status:

An Interchange Justification Report was prepared and was approved by FHWA in February 2009. This project is consistent with the Whatcom Transportation Plan that has been accepted by the Federal Highway Administration and the Washington State Department of Transportation.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)
1st Congressional District (Rep. DelBene)

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Orchard Drive Extension and Bay-to-Baker Trail, City of Bellingham

Description:

Rapid growth and plans for continued development in northern Bellingham require more capacity than is currently provided by State Routes 539 and 542 and their associated Interstate 5 interchanges (Exit 256, Meridian Street and Exit 255, Sunset Drive, respectively). This project involves the construction of a half-mile long arterial connection from Birchwood Avenue/Squalicum



Parkway via a former railroad bed (including a tunnel under I-5) to James Street/East Orchard Drive to more effectively distribute current and future trips and reduce congestion. In addition to the roadway there would be a bicycle lane, sidewalk and a multi-use trail, the latter of which would be incorporated into the Whatcom County-wide Bay-to-Baker Trail.

Location:

City of Bellingham

Intended Outcome:

When completed, this project will deliver a grade-separated arterial crossing of Interstate 5, a needed link for the regional network, and multimodal connectivity to new development. This project will enhance circulation, improve access to the downtown core, and provide more efficient emergency medical response by creating new access to PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center, the County's only hospital.

Project Cost:

Right-of-Way	\$ 750,000
Construction:	\$7,250,000
Total Funding Required:	\$8,000,000

Project Status:

By December 2014, 60 percent of preliminary engineering and design had been completed, with the remainder to be completed in 2016. Acquisition of the right-of-way would occur in 2015, and construction would begin in 2017, with completion of the project expected in 2018.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)
2nd Congressional District (Rep. Larsen)

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Regional Transit Priority No. 1

Preserve and Expand I-5 County Connector Transit Service Between Bellingham and Mt. Vernon

Description:

The Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) and Skagit Transit are requesting ongoing operating support in the amount of \$680,000 per year (to be split between them) to preserve and expand their highly-successful inter-county transit service between Bellingham and Mt. Vernon. With passenger loads that are often “standing room only,” this is WTA’s most effective route for removing vehicles from the congested Interstate 5 corridor, which reduces greenhouse gas emissions and directly supports the State’s transportation policy goals for “preservation” (extending the life of state-owned facilities), “mobility” (reducing congestion) and “environment” (promoting energy conservation). The County Connector provides reliable, affordable transportation to employment, medical facilities and other destinations from Bellingham to Everett for more than 350,000 passengers a year.

Location:

Whatcom, Skagit and Snohomish Counties

Intended Outcome:

To ensure the ongoing operation of this critical North Sound transportation service after its State Operating Grant runs out in July 2015, and meeting the high demand for this service by adding two round-trips per weekday.

Project Cost:

\$680,000 per year (split between WTA and Skagit Transit)

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)

2nd Congressional District (Rep. Larsen)

Contact:

Tom Parker, Parker Northwest Associates
(206) 200-7898





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Regional Transit Priority No. 2

Lincoln Creek Transportation Center Improvements

Description:

Western Washington University owns and operates the Lincoln Creek Transportation Center in Bellingham. The facility serves hundreds of commuter students each school day by providing parking conveniently located off Interstate 5. The Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) then provides students with regular bus service to campus and other locations in and around Bellingham. In addition to serving WWU students, each weekday the facility serves approximately 100 commuters using the County Connector bus service to Mt. Vernon and points south, including Everett. The Lincoln Creek Transportation Center has space for approximately 500 cars but is in very poor condition, with undulating topography, large potholes, significant drainage problems and inadequate stormwater management facilities. It also does not meet current Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards.



Location:

City of Bellingham

Intended Outcome:

The project would result in improved circulation, stormwater mitigation, surface improvements and passenger amenities that will enhance the facility's role as a regional park-and-ride lot, public transportation hub and remote parking lot for WWU, a state-operated institution. This project would also bring the facility into compliance with current ADA standards.

Project Cost:

\$6,285,000

Timeline:

WWU has completed a preliminary design for the facility. If funding is awarded, the final design for the project would begin in July 2015. Construction is anticipated to take approximately 18 months.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)

2nd Congressional District (Rep. Larsen)

Contact:

Tom Parker, Parker Northwest Associates
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Regional Transit Priority No. 3

Bellis Fair Mall Transit Stop Safety Improvements

Description:

This project involves the relocation of the Whatcom Transportation Authority's (WTA) bus pullout, the installation of safety features and improvements to the waiting area at WTA's primary transit stop at the Bellis Fair Mall, which is used by approximately 250 riders a day.

Location:

City of Bellingham

Intended Outcome:

When complete, the project will mitigate safety hazards and congestion created by recent changes to traffic circulation patterns on State Route 539, Guide Meridian Road.

Project Cost:

\$450,000

Timeline:

The project is proposed to begin in early 2015. Once underway it is projected to take approximately six months.

Project Status:

WTA and the management of the Bellis Fair Mall have reached agreement on the proposed location and design for a new bus pullout and waiting area. Site design would begin upon commitment of funding.

State and Federal Legislative Districts:

42nd State Legislative District (Sen. Ericksen, Rep. Buys, Rep. Van Werven)

2nd Congressional District (Rep. Larsen)

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