



Meeting Summary

Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG]

Thursday, January 25, 2018 10:00 – 12:00

Whatcom Council of Governments
314 E Champion St, Bellingham, WA

Attendees:

Rollin Harper	Everson, Nooksack, Sumas
Jaymes McClain	Whatcom Council of Governments [WCOG]
Lethal Coe	WCOG
Hugh Conroy	WCOG
Chris Comeau	City of Bellingham Public Works
Chad Schulhauser	City of Bellingham Public Works
Tom Stacey	Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT]
Mehrdad Moini	WSDOT
Mary Anderson	Whatcom Transportation Authority [WTA]
Joe Rutan	Whatcom County Public Works
Matt Aamot	Whatcom County Planning
Ravyn Whitewolf	City of Blaine
Sylvia Goodwin	Port of Bellingham
Mike Hogan	Port of Bellingham

Member Updates

Joe Rutan reported that around Christmas-time a log went into a culvert under Graveline Rd, causing the nearby creek to flood and wash over the road. The road is currently closed. Whatcom County is looking at options for fixing and possibly improving that roadway and culvert.

Tom Stacey said that the Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT] Mt. Baker office is doing operational analyses on the I-5 main line, mostly looking at volumes. There has been significant growth in traffic volumes recently. They are also looking at origin-destination data vendors such as INRIX and Streetlight, which use in-vehicle GPS and cellphone probe data to create trip profiles useful for measuring congestion and providing origin-destination data on the transportation network. Mr. Stacey said that such data may be limited in this area, however they are still investigating options. Workshops in Blaine over the design of I-5 Exit 274 finished up this winter, and they will soon draft a design proposal to give to the legislature.

Mehrdad Moini reported that for the 2017-19 northwest region biennium, the total allocation is \$146MM. Only \$9.6MM is currently obligated. There is currently a patent issue with rectangular rapid flash beacons [RRFB], and since the U.S. Department of Transportation [USDOT] doesn't allow funds to go to installing patented devices, they are currently disallowing future use of RRFBs (except for those already in a construction phase). Mr. Moini also informed the group that if an issue with ADA (American Disabilities Act) or DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise Program) compliance causes a hang up in a project's schedule, let WSDOT know and there will be a 90-day extension to get the issue resolved.

Sylvia Goodwin reported that the Port of Bellingham received a safety grant for improving the Harris Ave rail crossing. They are also improving the rail crossing that at the Fairhaven boat launch. Once all the rail crossings in Fairhaven are improved for safety, the Port can apply to USDOT for a rail Quiet Zone. Ms. Goodwin also said that the roads through the Bellingham waterfront development are being constructed. They have a new proposal for the Bay St intersection, where infrastructure would provide pedestrian access from the Chestnut-Bay bridge down to the waterfront development. This is a long-range plan. Ms. Goodwin is retiring this year and Mike Hogan will take over as the Port of Bellingham's voting member for TTAG.

Matt Amit explained that last year the state legislature appropriated funds to make comprehensive guidance changes to the Buildable Lands Program, which requires large counties in the state (including Whatcom) to develop a Buildable Lands report every 8 years that looks back on development and land uses and how they relate to growth needs in county comprehensive plans. The Washington State Department of Commerce has hired a consultant to meet with stakeholders and develop a new set of guidelines for the program. The consultant's final report will come out in December 2018. Mr. Amit also said Whatcom County Planning Director Sam Ryan is retiring this year.

Ravyn Whitewolf reported that the City of Blaine participated in several practical solutions workshops with WSDOT for the design of I-5 Exit 274. They have focused in on one practical solution, but the Federal Highway Administration [FHWA] has concerns because it only addresses one direction of traffic. The City obligated its Boblett St project and will be interviewing 2 firms to complete the project. They are also looking for authorization to start construction on the Hughes Ave project next year.

Chad Schulhauser reported that the City of Bellingham is going to construction with the Mahogany Ave project this year. Roeder Ave will be closed from the end of January to mid-March for improvements. The Ellis St bridge over Whatcom Creek will go to construction next year for critical improvements. The City has also received rail safety funds to improve the F St rail crossing.

Chris Comeau said that Roeder Ave will be closed again this summer for resurfacing. The City of Bellingham plans on constructing the Cordata Pkwy-Stuart Rd roundabout this summer as well.

Rollin Harper reported that the City of Everson's Lincoln St project phases I and II are in the final stages of property acquisition. The City is hoping to obligate for construction in February or March. The City also received Transportation Improvement Board [TIB] funding for improvements to Reeds Lane.

Mary Anderson shared Whatcom Transportation Authority [WTA] ridership numbers for 2017. Ridership has been trending down in Whatcom County and across the nation. WTA estimates about 20,000

boardings per day in the county when Western Washington University [WWU] is in session and about 10-12,000 boardings when it is not. WTA recently acquired new transit planning software, *Remix*, and planning staff will start training in the new software soon.

Jaymes McClain informed the group that the traffic counts layer on the Whatcom Council of Governments' [WCOG] GIS page has been revamped and updated with the traffic counts that WCOG contracted in 2017 for the WSDOT Freight and Goods Transportation System [FGTS] update.

Merdad Moini said that the new Active Transportation Unit at WSDOT will manage the call for projects for the Pedestrian and Bicycle Program and the Safe Routes to Schools Program. The grants will still be managed by Local Programs.

Tom Stacey reported that a WSDOT design team is still working on the Bakerview Rd-I5 interchange, however support at headquarters is dwindling. Engineers have been asked to do additional evaluations for the Bakerview Rd-I5 bridge bridge.

Joe Rutan reported that the Marine Dr bicycle lane project is planned to be obligated in 2021.

Hugh Conroy reported at the last State-MPO meeting there was an agreement that MPOs in Washington State would adopt the State's Target Zero strategy for safety performance measures.

STBG and TA project status and estimation for 2018 obligations

Lethal Coe presented Surface Transportation Block Grant Program [STBG] and Transportation Alternatives [TA] project obligation statuses. The obligation target for this year is \$4.8MM. Mr. Coe said that the region should exceed that target by about \$2MM. There is currently \$1.5MM in obligated funds.

Travel Demand Model

Household Travel Survey

Lethal Coe reported that a Request for Qualifications [RFQ] for a 2018 Whatcom County household travel survey has been posted for consultants. He has received about a dozen requests. The request deadline is early February, after which WCOG staff will review the consultant applications and pick three to interview by the end of February.

Hugh Conroy informed that group that WCOG is interested in developing a supplemental questionnaire on travel behavior in addition to the household travel survey travel diaries. They will discuss this notion with the selected consultant. This could be a biennially updated questionnaire involving the same participants each time. The travel behavior questionnaire will gather participants' feedback on such topics as transportation mode choice, electric and autonomous vehicles, vehicle ownership, household location choices, and burgeoning technologies in transportation.

External Survey

Lethal Coe reported that a Request for Qualifications [RFQ] is being developed for a Whatcom County external traffic count survey. This project aims to gather data on traffic movements across Whatcom County borders to help inform the WCOG travel demand model. WCOG staff are interested in using traffic cameras to record license plate information to track vehicles as they drive through the county. They also hope to observe vehicle classifications.

In addition to real-time data capture, staff are looking at the feasibility of acquiring vehicle- and potentially cellphone probe data to analyze vehicle origins and destinations.

Hugh Conroy explained that the external survey can tie into other projects that may be occurring in 2018, such as the International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program's [IMTC] 2018 passenger vehicle intercept survey and the Border Policy Research Institute's [BPRI] ongoing license plate survey.

Land Use 2017

Lethal Coe said that he has gathered feedback from jurisdictions regarding modifying the transportation analysis zone [TAZ] geography in the WCOG travel demand model. He is in the process of acquiring household and employment data to improve the model's land use layer to a 2017 base year.

WCOG interjurisdictional corridors – draft performance measures

Hugh Conroy discussed with the group the draft transportation corridor segments he has been developing to help better analyze the transportation connections between jurisdictions in Whatcom County and measure their performance. All transportation modes are considered. He showed an example of measuring safety between Ferndale and Bellingham, where collisions and fatalities over a 5-year period were plotted along the Ferndale-Bellingham corridor. Mr. Conroy is also developing transit performance measures and looking at transit travel versus drive time using the USDOT's transit value index.

Mary Anderson suggested that corridors be added for Kendall-Bellingham and Mt. Vernon-Bellingham.

Hugh Conroy said that vehicle/cellphone probe data is being investigated for this application as well.