



Meeting Summary

Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG]

Thursday, March 23, 2017 10:00 – 12:00

Whatcom Council of Governments

314 E Champion St, Bellingham, WA

Attendees:

Jaymes McClain	Whatcom Council of Governments [WCOG]
Rollin Harper	Everson, Nooksack, Sumas
Hugh Conroy	WCOG
Lethal Coe	WCOG
Sylvia Goodwin	Port of Bellingham
Matt Jensen	Lummi Nation
Bill Bullock	City of Blaine
Bob Wilson	WCOG
Chad Schulhauser	City of Bellingham Public Works
John Shambaugh	Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT]
Mehrdád Moini	WSDOT

Current Event Updates

Bob Wilson informed the group that the Washington State House of Representatives and Senate transportation committees have released transportation bills, but in their current state there are no projects on them. As the legislative session moves forward, the bills will continue to take shape. Mr. Wilson said he will keep the group informed on legislative transportation matters.

Rollin Harper reminded the group that the city of Everson’s Kirsch Dr project went out to bid last month. The bid was awarded below the engineer’s estimate. The Transportation Improvement Board [TIB] funds they have will cover the costs. The city is also working to obligate funds for the Lincoln St project phases 1 and 2. The city of Nooksack recently was part of a meeting with the Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT] about the intersection of SR 544 and SR 9. Mr. Harper reported that WSDOT has agreed to implementing stop signs in the intersection on a trial basis. They had discussed the possibility of a roundabout, but the intersection’s accident history doesn’t warrant putting in a roundabout.



Sylvia Goodwin reported that Bellingham Airport traffic continues to decline. Enplanements are down by as much as 25 percent. The Port of Bellingham is heavily subsidizing the airport at this point. She said they are trying to recruit more east-west flights. The port is updating the airport master plan, and as a part of the update they are conducting flight projections. With the opening of Everett's Paine Field to commercial flights, the port is anticipating low enplanements at Bellingham Airport for a while, Ms. Goodwin said. She also reported that the port is moving forward with proposals to build sidewalks in the industrial area around the airport. The waterfront development is continuing – the Whatcom Waterway Park will be finished next year, as they are waiting for the next fish window to redevelop the beach.

Chad Shulhauser told the group that the city of Bellingham's James St-Woodstock Way project is now out to bid. Regarding the Maplewood Ave project, they are awaiting the consultant's 80 percent design plans. The Mahogany Ave project property acquisition is coming along. Mr. Shulhauser also said the W Holly St overlay project will continue for another couple of months.

Bill Bullock updated the group on city of Blaine's Hughes Ave project. They have decided not to federalize the whole project. The Sweet Rd to City Limits section will be completed this summer. The other half of the project will be completed in 2018. The project is still within their funding capability, but there are some unknown parts of the project involving the BNSF railroad. If project costs are down and the city has sufficient funds left over, there is a possibility of constructing a pedestrian cantilever on WSDOT's Hughes Ave bridge that runs over I-5.

Mehrdad Moini announced that WSDOT is scheduling its annual meetings with counties and local jurisdictions. On May 2nd they will meet with the Whatcom County jurisdictions at the county's maintenance office. At the meeting they'll discuss funding issues, quarterly project reporting [QPR] expectations, and have a general meet and greet. WSDOT is looking to get feedback from a couple jurisdictions, Mr. Moini said. They will also go over the approved legislative budget at the May meeting.

Hugh Conroy reported that the Surface Transportation Block Grant [STBG] application form was approved by the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board at their March 8th meeting. There were suggestions at a previous TTAG meeting about having an additional policy board meeting to approve projects before applications are due for TIB. Instead, the schedule for the STBG application process is moving up. Project applications are now due May 12th, which will give jurisdictions time to supplement any TIB applications they may have with a STBG award letter from WCOG. Also at the meeting, the policy board approved WCOG's certification of each jurisdiction's comprehensive plan transportation element. At the May 10th meeting, Mr. Conroy said the policy board will potentially approve the WCOG Unified Planning Work Program [UPWP]. This year's UPWP update will describe WCOG's planning priorities for the next 2 years. The UPWP includes WCOG's unfunded interests in better data collection, such as external station counts for the travel demand model [TDM]. In discussions with WSDOT and the Skagit Council of Governments [SCOG], Mr. Conroy said that the station counts project could turn into a larger freight flow study that could benefit multiple agencies.



Hugh Conroy informed the group that Mary Anderson at WCOG applied for a \$40k pedestrian safety grant from the Washington State Traffic Safety Commission. The funds could go towards a pedestrian safety design workshop for planners and engineers as well as pedestrian safety outreach. WCOG, as part of a coalition with the Arc of Whatcom County, Whatcom Transportation Authority [WTA], the Whatcom Community Foundation, and the Whatcom Coalition on Aging, did receive a \$100k accessible transportation grant from Easterseals. Of the funds, \$25k will go to planning and \$75k would go to implementation. Bill Bullock suggested using Easterseals funds as a match for a potential Transportation Alternatives [TA] project. About \$570k in TA funding is being allocated to the Whatcom region for 2021-2022.

Mehrdad Moini announced that there is a new Active Transportation Director at WSDOT. She will be working out of Seattle and Olympia, but her work will cover all of Washington. Mr. Moini said that the city of Seattle is getting rid of bicycles from their cancelled bike-share program – bike stations, racks, and helmet bins will be put into storage, and the city will be looking for buyers, ideally within the region. In the future, the city may look at electric bikes.

Hugh Conroy reported that he is in the process of putting together a funding coalition for the International Mobility and Trade Corridor program [IMTC]. WSDOT is committing \$100k each for fiscal years 2018 and 2019. He said they will start up conversations with Canadian transportation agencies after the May elections in British Columbia. They are hoping to round out a three-year funding ask (\$720K total for three years) with regional funds. Inspection agencies, who benefit greatly from the IMTC forum, unfortunately do not have a mechanism to cost share with local agencies. Mr. Conroy said they will start a dialogue with federal agencies for an ongoing mechanism for programmatic border-planning funding, similar to the Federal Highway Administration's [FHWA] now defunct Coordinated Border Infrastructure [CBI] program, that may secure funding for the group beyond three years.

Lethal Coe announced that he would like Transportation Improvement Program [TIP] amendment notices by April 19th in advance of the May 10th Whatcom Transportation Policy Board meeting.

WA Freight and Goods Transportation System (FGTS)

Lethal Coe reminded the group that in the summer of 2015 WCOG contracted to get traffic counts on select roadways in the region, mainly within jurisdictional boundaries where WSDOT does not have counters, to track freight truck routing as part of an update to WSDOT's Freight and Goods Transportation System [FGTS]. The traffic counts differentiated vehicle classifications, which included bicycles. Tubes laid across the roadway track the number of axels (and spacing of axels) to determine classification.

Mr. Coe suggested conducting the traffic counts again in the same areas in 2017 in an effort to provide a continuous dataset.



Rollin Harper commented that in Sumas, when there is border congestion backing up on Cherry Ave (SR 9), border-crossing commercial trucks are manually rerouted west on Front St to go through Bob Mitchell Ave, which then connects to Garfield St. He suggested capturing counts of trucks making their way out of the Bob Mitchell Way industrial area during the rerouting.

Sylvia Goodwin noted that some Port of Bellingham commissioners are interested in freight commodity data in Whatcom County. Hugh Conroy said that the IMTC conducts a freight study roughly every 5 years, where both commodity and origin-destination data are collected. The database for the 2016 IMTC Border Freight Operations study was shared last year with the port. Mr. Conroy added that there are talks between WSDOT, WCOG, and the Skagit Council of Governments [SCOG] about a possible freight study focused on freight trucks entering and exiting the county region.

Hugh Conroy also said that a household travel survey may be appropriate in the near future. Lethal Coe explained that the survey would update the regional travel demand model [TDM], and the trip-behavior data would be shared with local jurisdictions. He added that they may seek Surface Transportation Block Grant [STBG] funding if there is a regional appetite for the survey. Mr. Coe said that there will be further discussion on the survey in future TTAG meetings.

Federal Funds Obligation Timing

Lethal Coe explained that while in the past the mantra has been to obligate federal surface transportation funds sooner rather than later, the region has to make sure it does not over-obligate its target. He presented a table showing the remaining unobligated federal STBG funds going towards advanced construction [AC], where jurisdictions front the money for their project and get reimbursed with their awarded federal funds a year later. Projects can be moved around in the obligation schedule, such as the city of Bellingham moving federal funds up in order for the region to meet its 2017 obligation authority target.

Mr. Coe showed that there is about \$800k remaining in 2017 for AC, assuming projects scheduled to be obligated this year go through. There is about \$500k being overspent in AC in 2018, however that figure goes down if Whatcom County's Birch Bay berm project is obligated in 2019 instead of 2018. In 2019, there is about \$1.6MM available for AC.

Rollin Harper asked if a jurisdiction can jump ahead of others and obligate a project before them, potentially pushing other jurisdictions' projects down the road. Lethal Coe said that a reordering of the obligation scheduling like that would first come to this forum (TTAG) for discussion.



Regional Plan Update - Whatcom Mobility 2040

Recently completed draft sections

Hugh Conroy informed the group that the update to the regional transportation plan, WCOG's Whatcom Mobility 2040, will for the first time have its own website and online analysis tools. An offline version will also be available. The draft plan sections available for download on WCOG's website will have their own sections on the new website. There are only couple sections under the "Strategies to meet our region's future transportation needs" chapter left to be completed, Mr. Conroy said.

Community open house events

Hugh Conroy said that as part of WCOG's public outreach efforts for the regional transportation plan update, they are convening open house events around the county. WCOG staff are looking at tabling at the Saturday Bellingham farmer's market and holding more formal open houses in Kendall, Blaine, and Everson on weeknights. Mr. Conroy suggested that FHWA's Every Place Counts toolkit could be used as a discussion format at outreach events, giving interested parties some guidance on how to participate in the transportation planning process.