



# TTAG January 28, 2016 Meeting Summary

## Attendees:

Jaymes McClain	Whatcom Council of Governments [WCOG]
Sylvia Goodwin	Port of Bellingham
Lethal Coe	WCOG
Becky Kelly	Whatcom Transportation Authority [WTA]
Gary Davis	Whatcom County
Ruben Hernandez	City of Sumas
Rollin Harper	Everson, Nooksack, Sumas
Kevin Renz	City of Ferndale
John Shambaugh	Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT]
Joe Rutan	Whatcom County
Chris Comeau	City of Bellingham
Bob Wilson	WCOG
Hugh Conroy	WCOG
Mary Anderson	WCOG

## Current Event updates

Mary Anderson let the group know that WCOG will be hosting a webinar called “Transportation Efficient Communities.” The webinar will occur on February 18<sup>th</sup> from 10:30am to 12pm at the WCOG office, and it will be hosted by the Washington State Departments of Commerce, Ecology, Health, and Transportation.

Sylvia Goodwin told the group that the Port of Bellingham’s cleanup of the waterfront development area continues. They have another permit for turning one of the historic mill buildings into a hotel, she said. The Bellingham airport continues to drop in enplanements, down as much as 33 percent from the projections outlined in their current master plan, she said. FAA grant funding will stop if they don't update their plan and enplanement projections. Updating their master plan with the current enplanement outlook would allow continued grant funding for projects such as facility improvements for remain-overnight airplane parking, a step to attracting more carriers and flights, she said.

Becky Kelly said that the rural Whatcom Transportation Authority [WTA] bus routes are down in boardings due in part to the current low cost of gas. As a part of their strategic planning efforts they are bringing their top service component strategies (\$2.3MM in all) to their strategic planning committees to help decide what to spend their projected funding increase of \$1MM on.



Gary Davis said that the Whatcom County planning commission has finished looking over the county's draft comprehensive plan and the document has moved on to the county council. He said that they are hoping the council makes at least a preliminary decision on whether or not to approve expansion the Bellingham urban growth area [UGA] so that Bellingham can plan accordingly. Mr. Davis also commented on yesterday's death of a 14 year-old bicyclist in the Columbia Valley area, saying that the Kendall-Columbia Valley trail project is meant to prevent such incidents by creating a bicycle-pedestrian path parallel to Kendall Rd-SR 547. Currently residents there have to use the shoulder of the state highway. Local pastor Vern Yadon is leading the funding charge, he said. About four acres of property acquisition would need to occur to create the trail, Mr. Davis estimated.

Rubin Hernandez updated the group on the heavy haul road segment being constructed in Sumas, saying that work has been halted and may pick up again in March. Hovel Estates, a cul-de-sac development in Sumas, is being constructed. Utilities are almost all in and they are close to finishing, Mr. Hernandez said.

Rollin Harper said that he is currently working on the comprehensive plans (including the transportation elements) for Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack. Everson has some UGA reduction, he said, giving some over to Nooksack.

Kevin Renz told the group that Ferndale is working on a crosswalk realignment at the Ferndale public library, where they plan to install rapid flashing beacons and a refuge island. They are continuing design on a roundabout at Labounty Dr and Main St. They are putting in new storm water conveyance from the roundabout through the defunct golf course to get to the Nooksack River.

John Shambaugh of the Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT] said that he is continuing to work on the Bakerview Rd-Interstate 5 interchange justification report [IJR]. They have trimmed down 17 alternatives to 5 and are doing preliminary design for them. He hopes to get that done in the next two months and then ship off the IJR to the Federal Highway Administration [FHWA] for their review by the end of spring. He added that the interchange improvement is a Connecting Washington project scheduled to start in 2017.

Joe Rutan updated the group on the county's Birch Bay berm-pedestrian facility project, saying that plans are at 90 percent and they are acquiring property. He said that if all goes smoothly, they could go to construction this summer. Adding to previous meetings' discussion about where pedestrian facilities will and will not be constructed, Mr. Rutan said that they will not build a pedestrian path where neighboring property owners do not want it, e.g. northwest of the Birch Bay Dr parking lot across from Cottonwood Dr.

Chris Comeau reported that there will be less construction happening in Bellingham this year than last year. They are focused more on planning this year, such as the transportation element of the city's comprehensive plan. Mr. Comeau added that the Orchard St project is getting near to 100 percent



permitting and is fully funded, but the Connecting Washington funding is in a future funding year, so they are just waiting for the funding to become available.

Sylvia Gowwdin added that the Port of Bellingham is working with Blaine to extend Marine Dr to the end of the pier where it is currently closed. This would be for recreational purposes, she said.

Hugh Conroy told the group that a funding request for the Kendall-Columbia Valley trail was added to the WCOG Council Board's legislative agenda. The request is for design money. He added that at yesterday's International Mobility and Trade Corridor program [IMTC] meeting, Canada Border Services Agency [CBSA] said that they will be looking at a major rebuild of their Pacific Highway facilities due to buildings there having settling issues. They will be starting a review and planning process in the near future.

### Newly available traffic counts

Lethal Coe let the group know that locations and summary-level data of recent traffic counts from around the county are available to view on WCOG's GIS portal. The full library of counts is available to download from the WCOG traffic counts website, and pop-up menus for the counts on the GIS portal also contain a link to the download. Mr. Coe also notified the group that Transportation Improvement Program [TIP] amendment notifications by are due to him by February 17<sup>th</sup>.

### Draft comprehensive plan certification process document - review and consideration of recommendation to Whatcom Transportation Policy Board for approval

Hugh Conroy reminded the group that this document is required by state law to be developed with local jurisdictions. He said that the goal is to edit the document with TTAG members so that a draft can be brought to the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board [WTPB] for approval. The hope is that the transportation elements will be looked at and reviewed well before comprehensive plans go to councils for adoption.

Sylvia Goodwin commented that rail as a mode is not identified in the *Conformity items* section of the document. Hugh Conroy said no local jurisdictions own or operate rail facilities. Chris Comeau and others pointed out that comprehensive plans still acknowledge rail in their plans.

Hugh Conroy suggested that a possible date for TTAG to review the document could be the last TTAG meeting before the WTPB meets in May. That would be April 28<sup>th</sup>.

Rollin Harper brought up the issue of last minute transportation project additions to local comprehensive plans and how those changes could bring their transportation elements out of



conformity or consistency if this certification process certifies transportation elements before comprehensive plans are officially adopted.

John Shambaugh commented on the possibility of waiting till comprehensive plans are adopted before fully certifying the transportation elements. A summary level report by WCOG of transportation elements could be reviewed by TTAG members who can then address any concerns there might be with conformity or consistency before plans are adopted. WTPB could then certify transportation elements after plans are adopted, potentially.

Hugh Conroy said that WCOG will build a timeline for projected dates of when certification could happen relative to comprehensive plan adoption. As currently proposed, the idea is to bring a summary level report of jurisdictions' comprehensive plan transportation elements to the WTPB for their review, and then certification letters to each jurisdiction would follow.

Hugh Conroy proposed removing the *land-use assumptions* checkbox of the *Consistency items* section since the regional plan that WCOG produces does not delve into land-use. John Shambaugh advised to keep the item, citing possible issues with airports and incompatible land-use.

Hugh Conroy talked about the *level-of-service* [LOS] checkbox of the *Consistency items*, commenting on how there are variations of LOS between jurisdictions. He added that as long as LOS standards do not contradict one another, consistency for the sake of this certification process should be fine. Gary Davis added that WCOG's regional plan does not have an LOS standard, so there is no consistency problem between the local comprehensive plans and the regional plan in that aspect.

Chris Comeau requested that TTAG members be kept in the loop if WCOG staff catch news of future funding packages.

Rollin Harper advised that in the *Process* section, the first sentence of the last paragraph should end with: "...within 60 days of receipt of a jurisdiction's transportation element." The next sentence should begin with: "If they are substantively amended, transportation elements will require re-certification if ~~they are amended~~ and when they are next updated."

Hugh Conroy said that the next TTAG meeting will include final review of the document to have it ready for the March WTPB meeting.

## 2017 MTP/RTP - Look ahead at plan elements and corresponding needs for TTAG involvement

Hugh Conroy talked to the group about WCOG's schedule for the regional plan update. They are still waiting for performance measure rules to be defined and published as required under MAP-21. He had previously shared a draft of regional planning goals taken from current local comprehensive plans that



could be used as a framework for performance measurements. As comprehensive plans are updated so will that draft of regional goals. Mr. Conroy commented on the possibility of starting earlier than usual on updating the scoring criteria for Surface Transportation Program [STP] funding, possibly a year ahead of time. He also commented on refreshing the discussion about the regionally significant system, a topic for the March 24th TTAG meeting. All future projects are projected to be loaded into the regional travel demand model by the end of August, Mr. Conroy said. He added that the July TTAG meeting is currently planned to include review of criteria for adding projects to the regional plan list.

WCOG staff are planning on creating a more dynamic regional transportation plan that will be more accessible and interesting for non-planners to read and use. They hope to use online tools like web-based GIS maps and get away from a solely paper-based document, as was the case in the 2012 update.

Lethal Coe said that they are trying to find a contact at WSDOT for financial inquiries.

John Shambaugh talked about bringing in a discussion on transportation benefit districts [TBDs], especially multi-jurisdictional partnerships therein, as part of the regional financial plan discussion. Chris Comeau added that he'd like to discuss how to more easily bring in private property owners and developers to help fund public projects that would benefit their properties. Multiple jurisdictions could consider with these strategies, ultimately expanding on the idea of local improvement districts [LIDs]. Mr. Shambaugh added that having multiple jurisdictions contribute to LIDs in a certain area is what's in question. Hugh Conroy agreed that there should be further discussion on TBDs and LIDs, potentially a workshop. Mr. Comeau suggested having Elizabeth Sjostrom of WSDOT come to a WTPB meeting and walk them through those processes.

Hugh Conroy said that WCOG staff are planning on having the regional plan draft out for review in February 2017.

Rollin Harper added that it would be appreciated if there were no large items presented to TTAG for review from now till summer due to jurisdictions' current workload with updating comprehensive plans.

## **Washington State 2016 Road-Rail Conflict Study (information from recent MPO-RTPO-WSDOT coordinating committee meeting)**

Hugh Conroy suggested that if jurisdictions have current grade-crossing projects or concerns about railroad crossing closures, WCOG staff can catalogue that information for the region.

Sylvia Goodwin said that the Laurel St railroad crossing in Bellingham is being planned for opening. She said that the BNSF railroad has talked about closing the Harris Ave crossing west of Fairhaven, which would require a circuitous access to Bellingham's Marine Park and some of the Port of Bellingham's port facilities.



Chris Comeau said that the city of Bellingham is looking into rail quiet zones as outlined by the US Department of Transportation Federal Railroad Administration. The city is advancing the Laurel St railroad crossing project, he said. Mr. Comeau also mentioned that the city's back-pocket project of moving the railroad from its current alignment through the waterfront development area to the adjacent bluff would cost about \$10MM.

## **Next meeting: February 25**

### **Workshop for WSDOT Corridor Sketch Initiative**

Hugh Conroy suggested that the February 25<sup>th</sup> TTAG meeting be dedicated to WSDOT's corridor sketch initiative, where WSDOT and WCOG's recent interviews with regional jurisdictions will be discussed. There will also be a (hopefully) brief item of approving the comprehensive plan certification process document, Mr. Conroy said.

## **Meeting adjourned 12:00PM**