

Whatcom Council of Governments
Board Minutes
October 9, 2024

In Attendance (In person or via Zoom):

Members *Voting:* **Bellingham:** Michael Lilliquist, Kim Lund, Edwin “Skip” Williams;
Blaine: Richard May; **Everson:** John Perry; **Ferndale:** Greg Hansen
(Secretary/Treasurer); **Lake Whatcom Water & Sewer District:** Jeff Knakal;
Lynden: Scott Korthuis (Chair); **Whatcom County:** Kaylee Galloway, Jon
Scanlon, Satpal Sidhu; **Sumas:** Bruce Bosch.
Ex Officio: **PUD #1:** Atul Deshmane, Todd Lagestee

Guests Tom McBride (McBride Public Affairs)

Staff Lethal Coe, Hugh Conroy, Ron Cubellis, Melissa Fanucci, Emily Moran.

A. **Call to Order**

Mr. Conroy determined that a quorum was present, and Chairman Korthuis called the meeting to order at 3:01p.m.

B. **Public Comment**

None

C. **Agenda Additions**

Mr. Conroy requested insertion of a legislative update from Tom McBride just ahead of item F.3 (Draft 2025 legislative transportation priorities). Mr. Korthuis requested a motion to add. **Motion:** Mr. Hester moved, seconded by Mr. Williams. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

D. **Consent Agenda**

The consent agenda included the minutes of the meeting of January 17, 2024, and January-August 2024 claims. **Motion:** Mr. Hester moved to approve, seconded by Mr. Williams. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

Ms. Lund asked about U.S. Bank card charges listed in the claims. Mr. Cubellis explained that the claims-reporting process needs to show both the original transactions made by WCOG employees using their U.S. Bank purchase-cards *and* the subsequent, monthly total bills from U.S. Bank (monthly totals of previously listed, vendor-specific purchases).

E. **Old Business** (none)

F. **New Business**

1. Mr. Cubellis reported on the WCOG budget period January-August 2024.
2. Draft 2025 budget: Mr. Cubellis reviewed the draft budget. Questions were asked about why consulting costs are going down so much. Mr. Cubellis explained that WCOG doesn't have a typical pattern of using consultants and that 2024 happened to include a large grant from USDOT (for the border wait-time system design). A question was also

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asked about how salaries were going up a bit while the cost of health benefits were going down. Mr. Cubellis explained that this was tied to a reduction in the number of employees' dependents (both children of employees turning 26 years of age and a new employee without dependents).

3. State legislative update from Tom McBride: Mr. McBride discussed upcoming changes to WA government in Olympia and other scenarios which depend on election results. A written summary of his update was requested. [*Mr. McBride sent that summary the next day and that is attached to these minutes.*]

4. Draft 2025 legislative transportation priorities

a) Mr. Korthuis introduced the 2024 **legislative priority list** in the packet. Mr. Korthuis asked that each member review the list for needed updates or additions and that discussion would continue. As in previous years, the intention is to identify a Whatcom County priority, a City of Bellingham Priority, a small-cities priority, and a Whatcom Transportation Authority priority. Mr. Conroy said that he would send another email to the Council Board with the current document – also including the TTAG representatives to coordinate review of projects for updates to funding needs and scopes.

b) **Interstate 5 discussion:** Mr. Korthuis recounted recent discussions, at the Whatcom County Business and Commerce Committee meeting, of concerns with deteriorating conditions on I-5 – primarily crashes and congestion – and questions of when addition of a third lane to I-5 in Whatcom County will ever be funded.

Mr. Sidhu noted that cross-border traffic is increasing, and that Hwy 9 should also be on the radar for improvement. Mr. Sidhu agreed that I-5 needs a third lane. Mr. Sidhu also discussed Slater Rd, reviewed some of the recent dynamics with funding that Lummi Nation has access to, other funding sources, and overall needs that, if taken together could become a \$200 million project that would include a Slater Rd. bridge replacement – which could also be considered for the legislative priority list.

Regarding Slater Road, Mr. Hansen noted the different assessments -- of available funding, appropriate scope, etc. – that remain.

Mr. Sidhu observed that if the U.S. House of Representatives shifts to a Democratic majority, then Rep. Larsen will be Chair of the Transportation Committee which could improve funding options for Slater Rd. After elections, we could update our project priority list.

Mr. Korthuis noted that we'd likely have to make a choice between \$200 million for a Slater Rd. project and an I-5 expansion project.

Mr. Lilliquist raised a question for Mr. McBride or staff asking whether or not past transportation investments that were funded, at least in part to reduce demand on I-5, might complicate efforts to now add capacity on I-5. Mr. McBride

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commented that there were probably too many factors involved to know how future funding decisions would be influenced. Mr. Damitio commented that WSDOT's approach, given available revenue, has been to manage demand. Mr. Scanlon asked an open question about Whatcom County and the state's High Speed Rail initiative – wanting to make sure we don't miss the right time to advocate for a stop in Whatcom County.

c) Statewide RTPO funding: Mr. Conroy gave a brief update on the collective efforts of directors of regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) around the state to advocate for increased funding for the RTPO program. (The WCOG Council Board has already voted to support this effort.) Mr. McBride has been asked to complement these efforts as opportunities arise related to the upcoming legislative session.

G. **Director's report:** None

H. **Correspondence:** None

I. **Board Open Forum:** No discussion

II.

L. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:44 p.m.

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Greg Hansen
Secretary-Treasurer

Signed by:



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Hugh Conroy
Director

Approved December 11, 2024