

Whatcom Council of Governments
Board Minutes
December 10, 2025

In Attendance (In person or via Zoom):

Members *Voting:* **Bellingham:** Michael Lillquist, Skip Williams; **Ferndale:** Greg Hansen (Secretary/Treasurer); **Lake Whatcom Water & Sewer District:** Jeff Knakal; **Lummi Nation:** Terrance Adams; **Lynden:** Scott Korthuis (Chair); **Whatcom County:** Kaylee Galloway, Jon Scanlon, Satpal Sidhu.
Ex-officio: **Public Utilities District No. 1:** Atul Deshmane; **Western Washington University:** Chris Roselli; **Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA):** Les Reardanz

Staff Hugh Conroy, Ron Cubellis, Melissa Fanucci.

A. Call to Order

Mr. Conroy determined that a quorum was present and Chair Korthuis called the meeting to order at 3:43 p.m.

B. Public Comment

None

C. Agenda Additions

None

D. Consent Agenda

The Consent Agenda included the minutes of the meeting of October 8, 2025, September – October expenditures, and the proposed 2026 meeting calendar.

Motion: Mr. Scanlon moved, seconded by Mr. Williams, to approve. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

E. Budget Report

Mr. Cubellis reviewed his budget report for the period ending October 31, 2025. Mr. Scanlon asked why there was an increase in state grant funding. Mr. Cubellis explained that the funding received via the state funded Regional Mobility Grant Program was budgeted as coming from federal funds.

F. Business

1. 2025 Budget Amendment #1.

Mr. Cubellis explained that the consultant contract for the Household Travel Survey project approved by the Executive Committee in March was not in the 2025 budget. While it was initially concluded that the contract amount could fit within the 2025 budget as adopted, the project proceeded faster than anticipated thus necessitating an amendment.

Motion: Mr. Scanlon, seconded by Mr. Williams, moved to approve 2025 Budget Amendment #1 as presented. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

2. Draft 2026 WCOG Budget

Mr. Cubellis introduced and reviewed the next year's draft budget. No major changes are expected.

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Mr. Cubellis noted that the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA); that is used to calculate dues, salary increases, and WCOG's lobbying contract; was determined to be 2.9 percent.

Mr. Cubellis expanded on the annual COLA calculation. He explained that WCOG's process has, for a long time, been to base its COLA on an average of what members adopt for the upcoming year. Because Bellingham and Whatcom County have two separate COLAs for the categories of employees that best match WCOG staff, there are 11 individual rates that are entered into the averaging. There have always been difficulties with this process. Firstly, WCOG is never able to obtain all 11 numbers. Every year, at least a couple of COLAs are not adopted in time for WCOG's budget approval. This year being a good example, WCOG's COLA is based on six of the 11. Mr. Cubellis noted that he would like to put a proposal on the next Council Board agenda to formally adopt a revised procedure. Specifically, Mr. Cubellis is proposing to have WCOG use the Bureau of Labor's Consumer Price Index – Urban (CPI-U) COLA developed for Western U.S. cities in the same population band as Bellingham/Whatcom County. Of all the COLAs WCOG's members use, this West Region CPI-U COLA, over the last decade, has tracked the best (and very well) with the member-average COLAs WCOG has calculated each year.

Mr. Scanlon asked what led to using the average of members' COLAs. Mr. Cubellis recounted that it was simply "board guidance" back in 2008. A member was concerned about voting to adopt a COLA that was higher than the COLA their jurisdiction's employees would be getting so the advice of the board at the time was to base it on the average.

Motion: Mr. Williams, seconded by Mr. Scanlon, moved to adopt the draft 2026 budget as presented. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

3. Draft Legislative Priority Project List

1. Existing draft project list: Mr. Conroy, citing the draft project list in the packet, noted that it had been sent out to the Council Board and the Transportation Technical Advisory Group (TTAG) in October with a request for desired changes. Three, member local governments have submitted some changes to existing project descriptions and remaining funding needs and those are shown in track-changes. Mr. Conroy then reviewed recent meetings with our region's state legislators (supported by and participated in with our lobbyists at McBride & Benge Public Affairs). All legislators were direct in communicating that the upcoming session (also a short session) is not expected to have any opportunities for new funding. But all legislators also agreed with the practice of submitting an up-to-date list of needs if simply to illustrate that these needs continue and to maintain the projects' status as pre-existing requests. The assessment by the delegation was that this was a year to focus on "protecting what you have."
2. The state's Regional Mobility Grants (RMG) Program: Mr. Conroy introduced the memo on this topic from him and Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)

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General Manager, Les Reardanz. With the understanding (described in the memo) that the legislature's planned, two-biennia suspension of RMG funding (and a very large reduction in Transportation Demand Management funding) would remove over half the funds currently used for WCOG and WTA's Whatcom Smart Trips Program, our region's state legislators have indicated that efforts to change these plans and maintain continuity of these funds was a "protect-what-you-have" strategy and they are hopeful that they can work with their colleagues during the short session to find alternatives.

Attached to the memo in the packet is draft language that could be added to WCOG's 2026 legislative priority project list.

Mr. Deshmane asked how long the Smart Trips program had been around and noted that this may be an opportunity to rethink what kind of program would best achieve its goals. Mr. Conroy responded that the program had been around 20 years and that, over that time, the program (with efforts by WCOG and WTA) has ventured into new partnerships with employers, schools, and local governments; adopted new trip logging technologies; revamped its website, etc. So, the program has been very open to adaptation. Mr. Reardanz also noted the Smart Trips program's successful delivery of bus travel training for our community's seniors. Mr. Cubellis reminded all that the Smart Trips Program was a regional initiative to expand WCOG's administration of the region's compliance with the state's Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) law (which is still part of the Smart Trips program) and avail resources and TDM strategies to all regional employers rather than the relatively small number of 100+ employee worksites.

Motion: Mr. Williams, seconded by Mr. Scanlon, moved to approve adoption of the legislative priority project list inclusive of submitted changes and the addition of the request for preservation of RMG funding as presented in the memo and attachment. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

3. Updating the WCOG Bylaws: Mr. Conroy reviewed the memo on this topic, noting the two primary proposed changes: 1) removal of the requirement that the Executive Committee issue a recommendation to the full Council Board on budget adoption and 2) clarification that members are "not in good standing," and thus are not able to vote, if their dues are unpaid by February 28. The draft amended bylaws also included other less significant changes shown in track-changes. The draft update had been sent to the board separately in early November to comply with the bylaws-required 15-day review period. There was no further discussion requested of the changes.

Motion: Mr. Scanlon, seconded by Mr. Williams, moved to approve the updated WCOG Bylaws as presented. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

G. **Director's report:**

Mr. Conroy noted that most of his updates would pertain to transportation issues which could wait until the January Transportation Policy Board meeting. Two current issues to mention though were:

- WCOG's household travel survey (HTS) had just reached its target response rate, slightly surpassing the goal of 1,200 travel diary respondents and

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- The Advanced Border Information System (ABIS) project (funded by a \$6.4 million USDOT grant to WSDOT) will need to be reviewed for compliance with WA's complete-streets rules. The current hope is to obtain a "deferral" since the grant is 100 percent USDOT funding for "infrastructureless" cross-border traveler information systems and, any concurrent on-road complete streets improvements would need to be paid for with added state funding which is not available in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Cubellis noted that WCOG (in its current role as clerk to Whatcom County's Boundary Review Board) just received Blaine's submission for boundary changes related to its recent, voter-approved de-annexation.

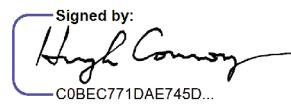
I. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:26 p.m.

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Greg Hansen
Secretary-Treasurer

Signed by:

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Hugh Conroy
Director

Approved January 21, 2026