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Whatcom Council of Governments
Board Minutes
May 13, 2026

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In Attendance (In person or via Zoom):

Members	*Voting:* **Bellingham:** Michael Lilliquist, Kim Lund; **Everson**: John Perry; **Ferndale:** Greg Hansen (Secretary/Treasurer); **Lake Whatcom Water & Sewer District:** Jeff Knakal; Lynden: Scott Korthuis (Chair) **Nooksack:** Kevin Hester; **Sumas:** Bruce Bosch; **Whatcom County**: Jon Scanlon, Satpal Sidhu; *Ex-officio*: **Public Utilities District No. 1:** Atul Deshmane.
Staff	Lethal Coe, Hugh Conroy, Ron Cubellis, Melissa Fanucci
Guests	Intisar Benge, McBride & Benge Public Affairs; River Martinez, WWU *Western Front* photographer)

A. **Call to Order**
Mr. Conroy determined that a quorum was present and Chair Korthuis called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

B. **Public Comment**
None

C. **Agenda Additions**
None

D. **Consent Agenda**
The Consent Agenda included the minutes of the meeting of January 21, 2026 and January - March expenditures.
Motion: Mr. Korthuis moved, seconded by Mr. Lilliquist, to approve. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

E. **Budget Report**
Mr. Cubellis reviewed his budget report for the period ending March 31, 2025. Mr. Korthuis commented on the healthy amount of cash on hand and Mr. Cubellis noted that that was typical this time of the year but is expected to return to targeted amounts.
Mr. Korthuis noted that dues are currently at 98 percent and asked about the shortfall. Mr. Cubellis noted that two members have not yet submitted their dues: Sudden Valley Association and Lummi Nation.

F. **Business**

1. **Considering adoption of a different cost-of-living index.**
Mr. Cubellis reviewed the memo which described the issues with WCOG's current practice at setting a COLA based on the average COLAs adopted annually by WCOG members and the staff request to switch to using a regional index – specifically the June CPI-U of West Cities. Mr. Scanlon asked if other local governments use similar indices or use COLAs adopted by comparable cities. Mr. Sidhu responded that Whatcom County has used Seattle's COLA for certain things in the past.

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Mr. Scanlon asked if this would have an impact on WCOG's labor costs. Mr. Cubellis responded that the proposed index was selected because it has historically matched the closest with the regional average COLA that WCOG has used for many years. So, the impact on labor costs should be relatively neutral – small differences positive or negative.
Mr. Lilliquist asked if any of the indices reviewed were more or less variable than the existing method. Mr. Cubellis showed a comparative chart of all the methods which illustrated some variability and also that the proposed indices tracked the closest historically.
Motion: Mr. Hester moved, seconded by Mr. Sidhu, to direct staff to use the June CPI-U of West Cities when preparing the draft budget. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

G. **Director's report:**

Mr. Conroy noted his recent email to the board asking for input on what questions members have regarding WSDOT's I-5 Master Plan and Cascadia High Speed Rail (HSR) projects. This is in response to questions from WSDOT about what I-5 corridor MPOs want to discuss as WSDOT starts their stakeholder outreach for these initiatives. Good feedback was received and shared with WSDOT's I-5 & HSR program office in a meeting earlier in the day.
Part of the feedback from the initial email was Mr. Scanlon and Mr. Korthuis's interest in our region more formally documenting support for siting of a HSR stop in Whatcom County. Mr. Scanlon expanded a bit, noting the benefits of declaring interest earlier in the process. Mr. Scanlon also noted the possibility that primary HSR trains might only stop in Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver, BC but that other trains on the future rail alignment might also stop at other stations along the route.
Mr. Sidhu was supportive of the concept of slower trains on the same route serving more communities. Mr. Sidhu also commented that a future HSR system should also carry freight – analogous to how commercial airlines transport freight in specialized containers. Mr. Sidhu added that, if we do not include more services on the route (in addition to pure HSR passenger service to only a few stops) he has concerns about underutilization – especially with slowing population growth.
Discussion indicated support for documenting interest in a Whatcom County HSR stop. Mr. Conroy asked the board how they would like to proceed, noting options: WCOG could pass declaration or resolution; individual local government councils could issue support in their chosen format, etc.
Discussion turned to a motion to direct staff to draft a letter of support for a Whatcom County HSR stop to be signed by the WCOG Chair.
Motion: Mr. Lilliquist, seconded by Mr. Scanlon, moved to direct staff to draft a letter in support of a Whatcom HSR stop. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

I. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, Mr. Lilliquist adjourned the meeting at 3:29 p.m.

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Greg Hansen
Secretary-Treasurer

Signed by:
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Hugh Conroy
Director

Approved October 14, 2026