

**DRAFT** Whatcom Council of Governments  
Board Minutes  
December 11, 2024

In Attendance (In person or via Zoom):

Members      *Voting:* **Bellingham:** Michael Lilliquist, Kim Lund, Skip Williams; **Blaine:** Richard May; **Everson:** John Perry; **Ferndale:** Greg Hansen (Secretary/Treasurer); **Lake Whatcom Water & Sewer District:** Jeff Knakal; **Lynden:** Scott Korthuis (Chair); **City of Nooksack:** Kevin Hester; **Whatcom County:** Kaylee Galloway, Satpal Sidhu.  
*Ex Officio:* **PUD #1:** Atul Deshmane.

Guests        **WSDOT:** Ron Pate, Justin Resnick, Chris Damitio, John Shambaugh, Kirsten Beale, Janice Schuch.

Staff           Hugh Conroy, Ron Cubellis, Melissa Fanucci, Michelle Grandy, Emily Moran.

A.      **Call to Order**

Mr. Conroy determined that a quorum was present, and Chairman Korthuis called the meeting to order at 3:30p.m.

B.      **Public Comment**

None

C.      **Agenda Additions / Changes**

Chair Korthuis explained a need to remove the Proposed 2025 meeting calendar from the Consent Agenda and add it as a new item because an Executive Committee meeting needs to be added in March 2025. **Motion:** Mr. Lilliquist moved, seconded by Mr. Sidhu. Motion passed with none opposed.

D.      **Consent Agenda**

The Consent Agenda included the minutes of the meeting of October 9, 2024, and September through November 2024 claims. **Motion:** Mr. Lilliquist moved, seconded by Mr. Sidhu, to approve. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

E.      **Approval of Proposed 2025 Meeting Calendar.**

Noting the addition of an Executive Committee meeting on March 12, 2025, Mr. Korthuis asked for a motion to approve the 2025 meeting calendar as presented. **Motion:** Mr. Lilliquist moved to approve, seconded by Mr. Sidhu. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

E.      **Budget Report**

Mr. Cubellis reported on budget report for the period ending October 31, 2024.

F.      **Old Business**

**1. Final Draft 2025 Budget.** Mr. Cubellis presented the draft 2025 budget. Mr. Korthuis asked for a motion to approve **Motion:** Mr. Sidhu, seconded by Mr. Hester, moved to approve the 2025 budget as presented. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

2. Washington's I-5 Master Planning Project – Ron Pate, WSDOT.

Mr. Pate gave an overview of the Cascadia High-Speed Rail & I-5 Program office that he oversees.

Mr. Lilliquist asked about initial thoughts on integrating I-5 planning with high-speed rail (HSR) planning. Mr. Pate noted that WSDOT has a new grant from the U.S. Federal Rail Administration (FRA) to complete a service development plan (SDP). That work will include discussion of how HSR will integrate into the I-5 corridor transportation system.

Mr. Sidhu noted that it has not been determined yet where the HSR stops will be – noting that if there is going to be a stop in Whatcom County, local governments here need to be planning land-uses, zoning, and transportation connections that will support HSR. Mr. Pate noted that the FRA gives four years to complete the SDP (which should include stop locations?).

Mr. Deshmane, noting that HSR will likely be powered by electricity, emphasized that impacts to and needs from the power grid and transmission will need to be figured out. Mr. Pate noted that FRA requires that SDPs focus on using existing technologies.

Ms. Lund, noting the WCOG Council Board's current discussion of proposing a study of I-5 through Bellingham/Whatcom County, asked Mr. Pate if WSDOT had the capacity to take on more studies given current commitments and recent drops in state-wide funding for transportation programs. Mr. Pate noted that the I-5 Master Planning work is getting underway and will look at all the ideas from regions up and down the corridor. A more localized study of I-5 is something that WSDOT will have to discuss as a proposal or planning project moves forward in the context of the overall Master Plan development.

Mr. Korthuis noted that the Whatcom County (Council's) Business and Commerce Committee (WCBCC) is very interested in more I-5 capacity. Mr. Korthuis asked, if a third lane is identified as the way to move forward, how long would it take to build? Mr. Pate noted that many variables determine the timelines of major projects like that (e.g. available revenue, environmental conditions, stakeholder/public process, etc.). Mr. Pate felt that WSDOT regional offices might have a better sense of project timelines in their respective locations and also noted that the master planning could shed some more light on that. Mr. Korthuis shared his conclusion that it would be more than five years.

Mr. Korthuis also asked Mr. Pate how long it would be before tracks for HSR could start being constructed. Mr. Pate estimated 15 to 20 years. Mr. Korthuis thanked Mr. Pate for making time for the meeting and helping the WCOG have a more informed discussion.

2. Draft WCOG 2025 Legislative Priority List.

Mr. Korthuis opened the discussion of WCOG's legislative priority project list.

Mr. Conroy introduced the current draft in the packet, reviewed the board's discussion at its October meeting – which included initiating development of a request for a Whatcom County/Bellingham I-5 study (which would include evaluation of adding a third lane), and referenced the current draft of a one-page I-5 study project description also in the meeting packet.

Mr. May expressed agreement that I-5 needs improvement but was concerned that this stretch of freeway would be difficult and expensive to widen given topography and other issues. He hoped there might be less infrastructure intensive ways to improve operations.

Mr. Lilliquist commented that while including evaluation of a third lane adds more work to the study scope, it would be good to facilitate a thorough discussion so that the community can better understand the alternatives and tradeoffs.

Mr. Sidhu commented that State Route 9 could also be studied as an alternative to I-5, especially for truck traffic that might have no need to stop in Whatcom County.

Mr. Hansen commented that the study would be important because it shows we listened to the WCBCC, to his constituents in Ferndale, and others.

Ms. Lund stated that the addition of a third lane seems unattainable for many reasons, some already mentioned. She explained that her primary concern is safety. Related to safety, Ms. Lund cited I-5's functionally deficient on and off-ramps in Bellingham.

Mr. Williams wanted to clarify that the I-5 study request could be updated to include some of the additional issues that the Council Board has identified today. Mr. Conroy said that he would review the notes and add those elements.

Mr. Conroy sought clarification on how the I-5 study request would be listed in the overall priority list. After brief discussion, the consensus was to list it as a WCOG priority rather than attributing the request to a specific local government or agency.

Mr. Korthuis requested a motion to approve the 2025 WCOG Legislative Priority Project List, inclusive of subsequent updating of project-specific funding needs, the addition of a Whatcom/Bellingham I-5 study, and additions to the I-5 study scope of issues discussed today.

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

F. **New Business**

**1. Consideration for Adoption, a revised WCOG Personnel Manual.**

Mr. Cubellis reviewed the introductory memo, highlighting the more significant updates that have been drafted. WCOG engaged a human-resources law firm to help identify necessary and other appropriate updates.

Mr. Lilliquist asked to clarify that WCOG had included a remote-work policy. Mr. Cubellis confirmed that this was covered in the newly-added Hybrid Work section.

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

**2. Consideration of a WCOG electronic funds transfer (EFT) policy**

Mr. Cubellis introduced the item – explaining that the adoption of an EFT policy is being emphasized by the state auditor’s office and that the proposed policy describes what WCOG has been doing with electric funds for many years.

**Motion:** Mr. Williams, seconded by Mr. Hester, moved to adopt the EFT policy as presented. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

3. Consideration of a resolution in support of increased, state-wide funding for Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs)

Mr. Conroy introduced the draft resolution, explaining that the resolution lists the same RTPO funding objectives that the WCOG Council Board has voted this year to support. The use of a resolution is requested by the RTPOs who are preparing supporting materials to share with legislators.

**Motion:** Ms. Galloway, seconded by Mr. Williams, moved to adopt WCOG Resolution 2024-02, Support for Increased Funding For Washington State’s Regional Transportation Planning Program. **Motion passed** with none opposed.

G. **Director’s report:**

Mr. Conroy noted that the January 2025 Council Board meeting would likely include a discussion of the duties that the WCOG bylaws assigns to the Executive Committee and the need to maintain an annual December advisory vote on the budget proposed for the following year.

Mr. Conroy also gave quick updates on:

- The imminently expected decision regarding WSDOT’s application to the US DOT SMART Program for the IMTC Advanced Border Information System (ABIS)
- WCOG’s recent submission of a regional Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) Plan to WSDOT.
- Continued support of member government’s GMA Comp Plan preparations.
- Next year’s undertaking of a household travel survey (HTS) for state vehicle miles traveled data collection requirements, and
- The recent, additional commitment of funds from BC Ministry of Transportation & Transit of an additional \$20,000 for the 2025 IMTC Personal Vehicle Survey.

H. **Adjourn**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

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Greg Hansen  
Secretary-Treasurer

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Hugh Conroy  
Director