



It matters how we get there

Meeting Summary
March 7, 2017

Attendees:

Mary Anderson	Whatcom Council of Governments [WCOG]
Vern Yadon	Kendall Chapel
Terry Terry	Lummi Island
Hugh Conroy	WCOG
Maureen McCarthy	Whatcom Transportation Authority [WTA]
Bob Wilson	WCOG
Jaymes McClain	WCOG
Isaac Post	Happy Valley Neighborhood
Stoney Bird	York Neighborhood / CAP
Rick Nicholson	WTA
Carole MacDonald	Mt Baker Chamber of Commerce
Chris Comeau	City of Bellingham Public Works
Jillian Trinkaus	WWU / Columbia Neighborhood
John McGarrity	Cornwall Park Neighborhood
Myron Wlaznak	Silver Beach Neighborhood
Gary Davis	Whatcom County Public Works
Terri Hansen	The Arc of Whatcom County
Beverly Porter	The Arc of Whatcom County
Bruce Prior	Blaine Public Works Advisory Committee
Mike Bozzo	WTA
Andy Rowlson	WTA

CTAG

Member Updates

Mary Anderson reminded the group that the Whatcom Council of Governments [WCOG] applied for a pedestrian safety grant through the Washington Traffic Safety Commission [WTSC]. She learned that unfortunately federal funds cannot be used for purchasing reflective gear or lights, but they could still be used for a pedestrian-safety workshop for planners and engineers and for pedestrian-specific law enforcement. Ms. Anderson also announced that the coalition of WCOG, the Arc of Whatcom County, Whatcom Transportation Authority [WTA], the Whatcom Community Foundation, and the Whatcom Coalition on Aging was awarded a grant from Easterseals. The grant funding will likely go towards a variety of open house events focused on current issues with accessible transportation.

Vern Yadon said that the Kendall-Columbia Valley Connectivity Plan Association [KCVCPA] was awarded a \$315,000 grant for preliminary engineering for the Kendall-Columbia Valley trail. Bob Wilson reported that Representative Luanne Van Werven is still pushing for the project's full funding in Olympia. Mr. Wilson said that the project would go through the capital budget to get funding. The consultant performing the preliminary engineering is currently developing an accurate cost estimate for construction.

Chris Comeau announced that the city of Bellingham's 2017 Transportation Report on Annual Mobility [TRAM] is now out. The document acts as a status report on how the city "provides mobility for people, goods, and services." Mr. Comeau handed out printed copies to meeting attendees. The report is also on the city of Bellingham's website.

Terri Hansen and Beverly Porter attended the meeting representing the Arc of Whatcom County. Ms. Porter said that she has been working with the Arc and with Terri for about 14 years. The Arc has been around since 1936, and one of their main goals is easy access to special needs care within Whatcom County. Accessibility to public transit for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities is a top issue, as well as safety.

Discussion: WCOG Regional Transportation Plan public outreach – *Mary Anderson*

Mary Anderson informed the group that WCOG staff are currently planning public outreach for WCOG's regional transportation plan [RTP] update, Whatcom Mobility 2040. Hugh Conroy explained that the plan addresses a planning horizon out to 2040. The plan reviews the regional transportation system as it exists today, includes the region's goals for the transportation system, provides an analysis of the forecasted transportation demand in the region over the next 20+ years, describes strategies for advancing the region's transportation goals, analyzes the financial forecast of the region's transportation system, and includes a fiscally constrained list of local jurisdictions' transportation projects out to 2040. Every jurisdiction in Whatcom County, including Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Tribe, is represented in the plan. Mr. Conroy said that draft sections of the plan are on the WCOG website. Whatcom Mobility 2040 will be mostly web-based, but there will be a hard-copy plan as well.

Several members suggested an eastern county location for one of the public outreach meetings, such as Kendall. Some pointed out that Ferndale-area residents can easily travel to Bellingham or Blaine for one of the meetings.

Ms. Anderson explained that the meeting announcements will be put into local papers and that partner jurisdictions can share meeting times and locations on their social media accounts since WCOG does not have any social media presence. Beverly Porter suggested contacting schools and senior centers and having the information shared through those avenues. Bruce Prior suggested the Blaine senior center as a venue.

Kendall, Bellingham, Blaine, and Everson were generally agreed upon to be good central locations for the outreach meetings. Ms. Anderson opened up discussion as to when the meetings should occur. Terri Hansen suggested they be during WTA service hours. There was consensus agreement that weekday evenings would probably work best. Gary Davis recommended one meeting be on a weekend, so that people who cannot make it on a weekday can go to that one. Some suggested meetings take place on a

Monday, however Vern Yadon pointed out that the 2nd Monday of every month is the KendallWatch meeting.

Beverly Porter suggested inviting Tom Boucher, the community liaison for Representative Rick Larsen, to provide a legislative perspective on the transportation issues covered in the regional plan.

Policy Board Update – *Hugh Conroy*

Hugh Conroy said that tomorrow the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board will be voting on the approval of the Surface Transportation Block Grant [STBG] application form. Every year, the Whatcom region is given around \$2.5MM in federal STBG money for transportation projects, which WCOG amasses and avails every 2 years for local jurisdictions to apply for. Technical staff from the local jurisdictions helped update the STBG application form, which now better incorporates regional goals into the scoring criteria.

Mr. Conroy also told the group that now that all jurisdictions have had their comprehensive plans approved, the board will move to certify that the transportation elements of each plan are aligned with the state and regional transportation plans.

Stoney Bird asked if greenhouse gas reduction strategies are outlined in the regional transportation plan. Hugh Conroy explained that environmental quality is a main goal of the region, and, from local comprehensive plan transportation elements, the second most recognized goal after safety. The scoring criteria in the updated STBG application form are now aligned with the region's goals and weighted based on which goals are most recognized. The scoring guidelines for the environmental quality scoring criterion explicitly mention greenhouse gas reduction, so if jurisdictions can show that their transportation projects will reduce greenhouse gases, those projects will score higher and be more likely to receive funding.

Mr. Conroy said that WCOG staff will present a review of the International Mobility and Trade Corridor program [IMTC], the border forum that WCOG manages. Funding for the IMTC is grant-based, and previous avenues for funding the program have dried up.

WCOG staff will also review draft sections of the RTP, Mr. Conroy said. There will also be a planning director's report and a review of the Washington State Transportation Commission's strategies to find an alternative to the gas tax to fund public roadways.

Other

Isaac Post expressed interest in driverless cars as a future meeting topic.

WTA – CAP

Maureen McCarthy reviewed some of the service changes coming to WTA bus routes starting March 19th. They include:

- Sunday service to Lynden, Ferndale, Kendall, Lummi Nation/Gooseberry and Sudden Valley
- Later evenings and Saturdays
- “Ride. Shuttle. Fly.” Service to the airport

- Increased service to Blaine/Birch Bay
- Return of the PLUM Line on Lakeway
- New service to several areas, including Silver Beach

Update on Whatcom Community College passes

Rick Nicholson informed the group that on January 1st WTA started a universal bus pass program at Whatcom Community College [WCC], where students can use their Orca cards to ride WTA buses for free. Since the start of the program, Mr. Nicholson said they have seen 25k boardings per month with the WCC Orca card. They do not have boarding data for WCC students before the program started, but he estimates there were about 18-20k WCC boardings per month.

Mr. Nicholson also said that he is unaware of any plans to increase parking at WCC.

Update on grants to fund County Connector service

Rick Nicholson said that the county connector bus service is made up of WTA, Skagit Transit, and Island Transit. While WTA is not expanding its contribution to the service, Skagit Transit has applied for a grant to increase the amount of trips between Mt. Vernon and Bellingham, including a Sunday trip, and daytime service between Mt. Vernon and Everett.

Discussion of CAP bylaws

Maureen McCarthy said she asked around for the bylaws of similar transportation agency advisory groups after the previous meeting's suggestion that the WTA Citizen's Advisory Panel discuss the idea of adopting bylaws. She reviewed some sample bylaws with the group.

Ms. McCarthy noted that members bring valuable insight to issues in the community. She explained that WTA is more focused on advocacy for the Gold Card (which allows seniors 75 years and older to ride WTA buses for free) after ongoing discussions at CTAG and CAP about seniors being unaware of the program. Terri Hansen pointed out that some people with personal care attendants [PCA] are unaware that they can get an endorsement on their bus card that allows their PCA to ride for free with them.

Stoney Bird shared some of his experiences attending a CAP-like group in Skagit County for 15 years. He gave examples of meeting procedures, such as the chairman setting the agenda (in consultation with staff) and members voting on writing a letter to the board, WSDOT, or even a legislator.

There was consensus to not create a strict set of rules, as the informal nature of the current setting is also valued.

Maureen McCarthy suggested that a charter would better outline a vision for the group rather than bylaws. She offered to draw up a draft charter to discuss at next meeting. CAP members can offer their input on what they would like to see in charter.

Stoney Bird proposed that the last item on a meeting's agenda could be suggestions for topics to add to next the agenda. He also requested that members be better kept in the loop on important dates in the transportation planning processes, such as the schedule for the Transportation Improvements Program [TIP].

Discussion of expanding Bellingham Station

Rick Nicholson explained that WTA's Bellingham Station has 10 gates, and twice an hour every gate is occupied. With future service expansion, station expansion may be needed to prevent service delays. There is no date for when it would be required, he said.

Mike Bozzo showcased early depictions of a station expansion at Bellingham Station. A new concourse could go along Railroad Ave, where buses would enter off of Magnolia St. A row of parking would be removed on Railroad Ave in this depiction. The new concourse height could potentially accommodate double-decker buses, but the old concourses would not.

Rick Nicholson said that the current scale of WTA's services prevents any need to rethink the spoke and wheel service strategy (where all routes are centered in Bellingham).

Mike Bozzo informed the group that WTA is currently researching electric buses. Right now, if they install a charging station at the current station they would lose a couple of gates. However, at the new expansion, a charging station wouldn't interfere with current services.

Terri Hansen said that there are new set-ups for securing wheelchairs on buses. Mike Bozzo confirmed that the new buses have slightly different wheelchair securement.

Rick Nicholson pointed out that the removal of street parking on Railroad Ave for a station expansion would be controversial. He opened up for discussion whether WTA should advocate for certain strategies, like less parking in favor of more transit. WTA is a publicly funded entity, so advocacy for certain strategies would create controversy.

Several members suggested that it is the role of the WCOG board and city mayors and councilmembers to provide advocacy for certain transportation issues.

Chris Comeau reminded the group that the city of Bellingham and WTA work hand in hand on many transit-related issues through comprehensive planning and strategic planning. There are options in these plans for certain transportation strategy outcomes.

Isaac Post noted that rapid transit in the Seattle area was made possible because of the advocacy of Sound Transit.

Meeting adjourned 5:30 PM