



Meeting Summary

Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG]

Thursday, May 24, 2018 10:00 – 12:00

Whatcom Council of Governments
314 E Champion St, Bellingham, WA

Attendees:

Chris Comeau	City of Bellingham Public Works
Ravyn Whitewolf	City of Blaine
John Shambaugh	Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT]
Jaymes McClain	Whatcom Council of Governments [WCOG]
Hugh Conroy	WCOG
Lethal Coe	WCOG
Joe Rutan	Whatcom County Public Works
Jim Karcher	Whatcom County Public Works
Dave Hower	Whatcom County Public Works
Jason Ardt	Whatcom County Public Works

Member Updates

Hugh Conroy said he attended the quarterly Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT] and Metropolitan Planning Organization [MPO] coordinating meeting in Seattle last week. One of the topics was a road-rail study being done by the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board [FMSIB]. They have developed tiers for projects that involve rail crossings. The Bellingham railroad crossing at Cornwall Ave-Wharf St and the Blaine railroad crossing at Bell Rd-Peace Portal Drive are identified as Tier 3, meaning they are top ranked road-rail conflict locations in the region but no projects have yet been scoped out there. FMSIB is using MPOs as a conduit for feedback from local jurisdictions. Mr. Conroy also shared the State Facilities Action Plan Appendix from the Puget Sound Regional Council’s [PSRC] regional transportation plan. The document reviews WSDOT’s strategic planning efforts for highway facilities in the PSRC region. Mr. Conroy said this region-by-region review of WSDOT’s efforts could be adopted as a standard practice.

Hugh Conroy reviewed some updates from the International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program [IMTC]. The General Services Administration [GSA] is conducting an alternatives analysis for an inspection booth expansion at U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s [US CBP] Pacific Highway port-of-entry (POE). The Transportation Border Working Group [TBWG] met in Minneapolis, MN in late April. At the meeting, US CBP discussed the pre-arrival readiness evaluation [PARE] pilot program occurring at

the Peace Bridge border crossing in Buffalo-Fort Erie, which is aimed at reducing congestion by collecting information on commercial trucks in Canada in advance of U.S. inspection. US CBP is also looking at facial recognition software as a second phase of PARE.

Jaymes McClain reviewed the development of the 2018 IMTC Passenger Vehicle Intercept Survey. Student research assistants from Western Washington University [WWU] will ask border-crossing motorists at the four main POEs along the British Columbia-Whatcom County border about their cross-border travel habits and perceptions of the border. The project will also include a bus survey component at the Pacific Highway POE. Surveys will begin in late June and will run through July.

Jim Karcher gave updates on Whatcom County construction projects. Airport Dr is being improved near Canterbury Ln starting early June. The Hannegan Rd-Ten Mile Creek bridge replacement is beginning in August and will go into November. The Roberts Rd-Anderson Creek bridge work is starting in July. There will be a couple of ferry repair projects as well. The County is putting in a radar speed sign at Strawberry Point off of Lake Whatcom Blvd. The Everson Goshen Rd-Smith Rd roundabout will be getting new lighting to increase visibility. Joe Rutan added that the Welcome bridge improvement will be completed at the end of the week and that crews are starting culvert improvement work on Mosquito Lake Rd.

Jim Karcher reviewed some of Whatcom County's projects going through preliminary engineering (PE). The Birch Bay berm project is back on track after Lummi Nation rescinded their concerns about natural resources in the area. The E Smith Rd-Hannegan Rd intersection project, slated for construction in 2021, will be discussed with the County Council regarding improvement options (signal or different roundabout options). Guardrail improvements will occur in 2019 in 25 different sites around the county. The Samish Way bridge by Lake Padden Park is being planned for replacement.

Chris Comeau reviewed projects that the City of Bellingham is doing this year. The City will be resurfacing Roeder Ave and Texas St. Granary St and Laurel St on the waterfront are currently in construction. Mahogany Ave near Costco is under construction and will be completed by the end of fall. A single-lane roundabout is being constructed at Cordata Pkwy-Stewart Rd, which will be followed up with a lane reduction on Cordata Pkwy to allow for bike lanes. HAWK signals are being installed in the Lakeway Dr-Lincoln St area. Samish Way at Otis St will be getting new crosswalk flashers. They are improving the railroad crossing at Bayview Dr by Boulevard Park. Later in the year, the City will be doing Safe Routes to School improvements on Aldrich Rd.

Ravyn Whitewolf reported that the City of Blaine's Hughes Ave project is out to bid. They have also selected a consultant for their Boblett St project.

John Shambaugh of the Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT] reported that the Bakerview Rd-I-5 interchange improvement project is still in design. WSDOT is developing a Planning Corridor Project for I-5. The first phase of the project will be identifying what the needs are on the corridor. Solutions will be demand and operation-based with minimal-to-no capacity-related work. WSDOT is contracting with StreetLight Data to access vehicle probe data for specific projects. Mr. Shambaugh suggested discussing use of the probe data with the Whatcom Council of Governments [WCOG], who are also contracting with StreetLight Data.

Obligations update

Lethal Coe explained that the WCOG region has exceeded its obligation target for federal Surface Transportation Block Grant program [STBG] and Transportation Alternatives program [TA] funding for federal fiscal year (FFY) 2018, meeting 145 percent of the target. This is not including the City of Bellingham’s Orchard Dr Extension project, which will also be obligated later this year.

For FFY 2019 there will be an obligation target of about \$3MM. The projects currently planned to be obligated next year will be within \$100k of meeting that target.

Early discussion for 2019 call for projects

Lethal Coe explained that the two-year call for projects that would occur in 2019 is a lower amount than usual because of the current amount of funds being obligated. A three-year call for projects would offer significantly more funding.

2023-2024 Call for Projects (2 year)				
	Urban >5k	Rural <5k	Anywhere	Total
STBG	2,430,000	520,000	750,000	3,700,000
TA	200,000	80,000	220,000	500,000

2023-2025 Call for Projects (3 year)				
	Urban >5k	Rural <5k	Anywhere	Total
STBG	4,100,000	900,000	1,100,000	6,100,000
TA	300,000	125,000	325,000	750,000

Ravyn Whitewolf suggested that the group could think about delaying a call for projects and create a contingency plan regarding projects going over their initial cost estimates because of high bids from consultants.

Chris Comeau commented that the City of Bellingham has had many projects funded through these federal sources for Preliminary Engineering (PE) and Design in order to make the projects “construction ready” and thus more attractive for separate grant funding sources to contribute funding. Lately, however, getting the construction funding from these other sources has proved difficult, leaving the half-funded projects to sit. WSDOT has been vocal about the federal funding from projects not being constructed within a certain amount of time needing to be returned, yet the funding is already spent on PE/Design.

Hugh Conroy suggested the group consider looking at the STBG and TA applications again in the lead-up to the 2019 call for projects due to new requirements coming out the the MAP-21 federal authorization.

Human Services Transportation Plan update

Hugh Conroy updated the group on WCOG’s 2018 update of the regional Human Services Transportation Plan [HSTP]. The plan seeks to fill gaps in transportation for Whatcom County residents who do not

drive a car due to age, income, or disability. The plan includes a project list. Projects on the list need to conform with the plan in order to be considered for funding. Past projects that have been funded on this list include: Lummi Transit, the Mobility Management/WTA 7th Grade Bus Pass Program, and the WTA Route 65 North County Connector.

The next HSTP stakeholder meeting is May 31st. Projects are eligible to apply for funds in July with project applications due September 14th.

SR-9 Freight Issue

Jaymes McClain reviewed the External Station Survey project that WCOG is currently undertaking. WCOG recently contracted with IDAX Data Solutions to collect traffic counts at Whatcom County entry/exit points along the border with Skagit County and the border with Canada. Traffic counts were recorded for two weeks in April. The counts are broken out into classes according to the Federal Highway Administration's [FHWA] Vehicle Classification.

The traffic counter at the SR 9 external station along the Whatcom County-Skagit County border shows a large discrepancy in truck volumes (especially trucks with double-trailers) by direction, with the volume of double-trailer trucks traveling southbound being almost 10 times greater than those traveling northbound. This aligns with the concerns of some community members along SR 9 regarding the amount of perceived southbound truck traffic traveling on the small rural highway.

WCOG is also contracting with StreetLight Data to obtain location-based services [LBS] data, or probe data, of vehicles traveling within and through Whatcom County. The probe data allows for trip origins, destinations, and trip paths to be plotted on a map. When the data is available to WCOG for the April time period, Mr. McClain explained that they will further investigate this discrepancy in truck traffic by direction.