



# Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG] Meeting

Thursday, January 28, 2021 10:00 – 12:00

## Virtual\* Meeting Summary

*\*Due to social distancing recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held virtually.*

### Attendees:

Chad Schulhauser	Bellingham Public Works (City of)
Chris Comeau	Bellingham Public Works (City of)
Rollin Harper	Everson, Nooksack, Sumas (Cities of)
Kirk Vinish	Lummi Nation
Donovan Sather	Nooksack Tribe
John Schambaugh	Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Todd Carlson	WSDOT
Phil Thompson	Whatcom Climate Impact Advisory Committee (CIAC)
Bob Wilson	Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)
Hugh Conroy	WCOG
Lethal Coe	WCOG
Jaymes McClain	WCOG
Matt Aamot	Whatcom County Planning
Jim Karcher	Whatcom County Public Works
Doug Ranney	Whatcom County Public Works
Tim Wilder	Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)

### Whatcom Climate Impact Advisory Committee (CIAC), Transportation Work Group: seeking feedback on draft transportation strategies and actions to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions – Phil Thompson, retired WWU Professor Emeritus, Whatcom CIAC transportation work group

**Phil Thompson:** The Whatcom Climate Impact Advisory Committee (CIAC) is in the process of updating the Whatcom Climate Action Plan. The group wants to get a report to the Whatcom County Council by early spring. The CIAC is seeking input on the project from other experts in the region. Input can be sent to Mr. Thompson, Chris Elder, or Lethal Coe. The final report will include an appendix with more information on each action.

*Mr. Thompson shared a draft of the CIAC strategies and actions table with the group.*

**Matt Aamot:** Can the action regarding facilitating ride-share programs (Uber/Lyft) shifting to hybrid and electric vehicles be elaborated on?

**Phil Thompson:** The CIAC is aligning strategies with that of the Washington State Department of Commerce's State Energy Strategy in trying to nudge industry to use more hybrid and electric vehicles.

**Todd Carlson:** The goal of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 45 percent below 1990 levels by 2030 seems to come from Governor Jay Inslee's climate commitment. Is the purpose for this to be implemented into Whatcom County's comprehensive plan?

**Phil Thompson:** The hope is for some of these strategies to be officially adopted.

**Todd Carlson:** This climate action plan would be a good parallel to the strategies outlined in the Washington State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT) Washington Transportation Policy Plan and the WSDOT Active Transportation Plan. Whatcom County is usually leading the charge on these kinds of issues.

**Tim Wilder:** The Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) has embarked on a long range transit plan. There is opportunity to have some synergistic language between this climate action plan and the WTA plan. Land use is a big challenge for WTA as it pertains to transit – there could be more attention on this issue.

**Phil Thompson:** The CIAC has discussed a separate land use report that would incorporate transportation elements. There will also be more opportunity to see the continued revisions of this project before the final report goes to Whatcom County Council.

**Hugh Conroy:** There are several action items that align with the Whatcom Council of Governments' (WCOG) long range- and ongoing planning, such as expanding the regional trails network and supporting education and outreach (which WCOG does through its Smart Trips program). Regarding the action item to move freight from truck to rail, it would take private rail company investment and multiple states and provinces coordinating efforts. With regards to aligning regional performance targets with state targets, WCOG is incorporating this in its 2022 regional transportation plan update.

**Jim Karcher:** Whatcom County is looking to replace the aging Whatcom Chief ferry. There is not a lot of infrastructure at Gooseberry Point for charging an electric ferry, and it may be wise to outline that. Reliability of electric ferries is also a concern to the County.

**Phil Thompson:** Each action item will include potential drawbacks or impediments in its description. Washington State has a strategy to electrify its ferry fleet, but there is no mention of non-state entities like counties.

**Phil Thompson:** The CIAC would like to gather input and comments over the next couple of weeks for incorporation into the next draft. The goal is for the final report to be done by May or June at the latest.

## Member updates

**Tim Wilder:** WTA is operating at about 80 percent of its pre-pandemic service. Ridership is down about 83 percent. Western Washington University (WWU) not being in session until the fall makes route planning a little clearer going forward. WTA will not collect fares until June.

Some service changes will likely roll out in June, including increased service to Lynden from every 90 minutes to every 60 minutes and a new Cordata neighborhood route that transits the recently completed Horton Rd connection. WTA will soon be starting Lynden Hop, an on-demand smaller vehicle transit service for the Lynden area. Hop riders will be able to schedule service with an app or by phone.

WTA has been working on scenario planning as a part of its long-range planning efforts. There are three different funding levels they are looking at for each scenario. Look for two public surveys to be availed soon.

**Chris Comeau:** The City of Bellingham is engaged in its Lincoln-Lakeway corridor study with WCOG, WSDOT, and WTA.

**Chad Schulhauser:** The City of Bellingham completed the new Horton Rd connection, but crews are waiting on handrail materials before officially opening up, which is scheduled for the second week of February. They City is getting ready for pre-construction next week for the Orchard St underpass project – they hope to get the project done before the end of the year. Pre-construction for the N State St-Ellis St bridge project is slated for a mid-April start.

**Donovan Sather:** The Nooksack Tribe is looking at a property on Mt Baker Hwy to possibly develop. The tribe will also be hiring a new Transportation Planner.

**Todd Carlson:** WSDOT's Bakerview Interchange project went to advertisement and got a bidder. The project will add a northbound onramp from Bakerview Rd to I-5 on the east side of the Bakerview bridge. The goal is to remove the traffic from the bridge that is currently crossing westbound to enter the I-5 North onramp located on that side. The anticipated start date for the project is April with completion in August.

**Chris Comeau:** The project will allow for a reconfiguration of the lanes on the Bakerview bridge, in part helping the routing of WTA buses.

**John Shambaugh:** WSDOT's Active Transportation Plan is now out for review.

**Jim Karcher:** Whatcom County's Birch Bay berm project is being planned for completion in April/May. The County will also be working on projects with the Gooseberry Point dock and the Lummi Island ferry breakwater. Marine Dr will see improvements from Locust Ave to Alderwood Ave. The Whatcom County ADA Transition Plan will go to Whatcom County Council this spring.

**Matt Aamot:** Whatcom County is working on components of the Review and Evaluation Program ("Buildable Lands"), which will help inform Whatcom County's land use planning.

**Rollin Harper:** The City of Everson's SR 544 sidewalk project is ongoing. They have been successful in smaller development projects along that corridor. The City could potentially obligate preliminary

engineering money for its Blair Dr project (which is funded with Surface Transportation Block Grant program (STBG) money) if it would be needed to reach the regional obligation target.

**Hugh Conroy:** WCOG staff is moving along with developing a survey using MetroQuest for public input on regional goals and strategies. The goal is to avail the survey to the public in late March. Regional stakeholders should look for a draft in the next couple of weeks.

## **Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program project proposal form – review new draft for approval by Policy Board in March**

**Lethal Coe:** The new STBG project proposal form has updated timeline dates and incorporates the approved changes to goal prioritization and language from the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board.

*Lethal Coe presented the call-for-projects and obligations timeline and funding amounts for each sub-category of the STBG regional allocation.*

**Hugh Conroy:** The new form now aligns with the updated regional goals through a revision in the project scoring weights.

## **Beginning discussion for next phase of I-5 study area from Bakerview Rd to Grandview Rd**

**Todd Carlson:** The close-out report for the Bakerview-to-Grandview subarea study was done in 2015. The project completed several objectives: coordinate with local, regional, and state agencies to document existing conditions; provide documentation to support state, regional, and local transportation plans; bring completed work into the WSDOT Corridor Sketch Initiative.

Moving forward on this project is currently notional – there is no identified funding for a continued effort.

**John Shambaugh:** Because the transportation system crosses multiple owners and operators through the subarea, one of the main questions out of the project was how to form a transportation benefit district that multiple jurisdictions can be in on, and how to develop level of service metrics consistent across the whole system.