



Meeting Summary

Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG]

Thursday, October 25, 2018 10:00 – 12:00

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

Attendees:

Chris Comeau	Bellingham Public Works (City of)
Ravyn Whitewolf	Blaine (City of)
Rollin Harper	Everson, Nooksack, & Sumas (Cities of)
John Shambaugh	Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Jason Beloso	Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Paul Krueger	Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Hugh Conroy	Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)
Jaymes McClain	Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)
Lethal Coe	Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)
Rick Nicholson	Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)

Member Updates

Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA): Rick Nicholson reported that WTA is currently receiving public feedback for their proposed bus service changes slated for June 2019. The changes will mostly affect Bellingham, in particular Western Washington University (WWU), and the pilot northern county connector route, which will be discontinued due to low ridership. An eastern county route between Lynden and Maple Falls is being proposed to replace the northern county connector in an effort to address the growing food desert in eastern Whatcom County. WTA’s vanpool program, which started in 1995 and has had a maximum of over 30 buses in use, is proposed to be terminated as vanpooling in Whatcom County as well as across the nation has fallen off. The vanpool vehicles would be given to Skagit Transit if approved by WTA’s Board. There are three public hearings at the end of October regarding the proposed changes.

Everson: Rollin Harper reported that the City of Everson’s Lincoln Street project phases 1 and 2 are proceeding. Their funding from WSDOT was sent to the Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) as a funding match for a grant.

Blaine: Ravyn Whitewolf reported that there is growing interest for finding a solution to congestion at the at-grade rail crossing at the intersection of Peace Portal Dr-Bell Rd in Blaine. Trains routinely cut-off

access east-west through the city because of the Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System (VACIS) checkpoint for border-crossing trains being located immediately south of the intersection. At a practical solutions workshop earlier this year, participants discussed a high level concept of a \$30MM I-5 Exit 274 project that would include a road-rail grade separation option.

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT): Jason Beloso reported that WSDOT's Ultra High Speed Ground Transportation study is its 2nd phase. The study outlines alternatives for a minimal-stop +250mph train connecting destinations between Vancouver, BC and Portland, OR. Over 30 agencies are advising the project. They plan on wrapping up the study in June 2019.

Bellingham: Chris Comeau reported that the City of Bellingham is nearing completion of Granary Ave and Laurel St in the waterfront development, however the Granary Building's continued redevelopment will push back the opening of these streets to February 2019. Mahogany Ave will be open in the next couple of weeks. W Horton Rd is in design and construction will start in July 2019. The F St and Bayview Dr rail crossing improvements are in design and requests for qualifications (RFQ) are out. The N State St-Ellis St bridge project is at 60 percent design. The City is obligating funds for right of way acquisition for the Orchard Dr extension – construction will not likely occur until 2020. Roeder Ave improvements, including resurfacing and the addition of buffered bike lanes, are out to bid. The bike signal improvements on Lakeway Dr and Lincoln Rd will not go live until early 2019.

The City of Bellingham is revising their Transportation Impact Fee (TIF) System, moving on from a vehicle-based system to a multi-modal system where person trips are considered rather than just vehicle trips. This revision will be discussed with the public in meetings occurring Nov 6, 8, and a City Council Public Hearing November 19. The implementation goal for this new Multimodal TIF system is January 1, 2019.

WSDOT: John Shambaugh reported that WSDOT is still working on the Corridor Sketch Initiative. The upcoming multi-agency, multidisciplinary, multi-modal (M3) meeting is pushed out to December. They are on schedule to complete phase 2 of the project by June 2019.

Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG): Lethal Coe reported that the Whatcom Regional Transportation Study has reached max participation. There have been about 1,450 complete travel profiles submitted so far, with some more to come in the coming days. In recent analyses, 65 percent of participants live in Bellingham and 35 percent live elsewhere in Whatcom County. Mr. Coe said they are hoping to see more of a 60/40 split when all travel profiles are collected.

Chris Comeau suggested having a meeting detailing the results of the study.

Hugh Conroy reported that the WCOG's Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) was adopted by the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board. At the next board meeting, members will vote to further adopt MAP-21 performance measures. WCOG will be conducting a border traffic study for the International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program (IMTC). Staff will use traffic data and a discrete-event simulation model to develop alternative scenarios for inspection-capacity-related projects at the Pacific Highway border crossing.

2019 Washington State Rail System Plan

Paul Keuger reviewed WSDOT's 2019 Washington State Rail System Plan. The plan was last updated in 2014. The goals of the plan include identifying preferred growth for the Amtrak Cascades service, identifying performance objectives for the state-owned shortline rail system, and identifying strategies to improve connections between rail and other transportation modes. In Whatcom County specifically, WSDOT will be looking at road-rail at-grade crossings, moving truck-based freight to rail, and the possibility of adding a passenger rail stop in Blaine.

The key tasks for the 2019 Rail System Plan include:

- Inventory of existing conditions for both facilities and services
- System capacity analysis and growth strategy for both freight and passenger rail
- Modeling and forecasting freight volumes and intercity passenger ridership
- Developing a new Amtrak Cascades passenger ridership model that takes a "bottom-up," station-focused forecasting approach
- Multimodal connectivity analysis that takes into account passengers' whole trip profiles
- Identifying key influences on rail such as regulatory and technological changes, trends in supply-chains, and industry consolidation
- Integrating new information such as Connecting Washington, the PCC Strategic Plan, the FMSIB Road/Rail Study, and FRIB/FRAP projects
- Stakeholder outreach and surveys to identify issues

In discussing transit connections to Fairhaven Station in Bellingham, Rick Nicholson explained that missed arrival times of Amtrak trains is an issue for passengers wanting to connect with a WTA bus, especially on Sunday nights.

Jason Beloso explained that WSDOT is looking at passenger rail equipment needs for the future. Since the December 2017 Amtrak train derailment near DuPont, WA, WSDOT has had to loan equipment from another region. Modeling will help determine equipment needs as it relates to growth and other scenarios.

Hugh Conroy expressed interest in the Amtrak passenger survey, specifically trip purposes and how they differ between Seattle/Portland and Whatcom County.

IMTC Passenger Vehicle Survey

Jaymes McClain reviewed the summer component of the 2018 IMTC Passenger Vehicle Survey. The International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program (IMTC) is a coalition of public, private, and non-government entities interested in improving cross-border trade and transportation through Whatcom County and the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The passenger vehicle survey is managed by WCOG and the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) at Western Washington University (WWU).

Student research assistants from WWU interviewed cross-border motorists roadside at each of the four main land-border ports-of-entry (POE) in the Cascade Gateway, gathering data on cross-border traveler characteristics. Some of the collected data points include: trip origins and destinations, trip purposes,

frequency of cross-border travel, travel document types, border wait-time information sources, and GPS/navigation usage.

Mr. McClain reviewed some of the preliminary analysis. Of the motorists surveyed, 71 percent live in Canada and 29 percent live in the U.S. Canadian residents were most often crossing the border to go shopping, followed by purchasing gas as their primary purpose and recreating for the day. For American residents, they were most often crossing for a multi-day vacation, followed by visiting family and recreating for the day. Americans crossing through a Blaine POE were most often destined for Vancouver, followed by Surrey and locations outside of the Lower Mainland B.C. Canadians crossing through a Blaine POE were mostly destined for Blaine, followed by Bellingham and Seattle.

There will also be a winter component of data collection, which will begin in February. All data collected in the field will be organized in a database and will be available to interested agencies. A report will accompany the database.