



Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG] Meeting

Thursday, December 3, 2020 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)
Bob Hammond	Blaine Public Works (City of), consultant (Prothman Group)
Rollin Harper	Everson, Nooksack, Sumas (Cities of)
Kevin Rentz	Ferndale Public Works (City of)
Kirk Vinish	Lummi Nation
John Schambaugh	Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Mike Davis	WSDOT
Mehrdad Moini	WSDOT
Marianna Hanefeld	WSDOT
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)

Introductions and updates

Mike Davis: Tarik Al-Zeer at the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) will soon be retiring.

John Shambaugh: WSDOT should have its 2021 project list out by the end of the year, which will be distributed to everyone.

Chris Comeau: Bellingham voters approved the Transportation Fund by about 82 percent.

Chad Shulhauser: The City of Bellingham's Horton Rd project is nearing completion and the road should be open after Christmas. The City also received bids for the Orchard Dr underpass project. The N State St-Ellis St Bridge project is out for ad.

Tim Wilder: The Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) is continuing with its reduced service. They are at 80 percent of normal service level and 25 percent of normal ridership. Capacity is limited to 12 passengers per (fixed route) bus. This may continue for at least half of 2021.

WTA is working on service changes for June, such as adding service to the Cordata neighborhood with a bus route that transits the new Horton Rd and adding additional service to Lynden. WTA and its consultant are in the scenario development phase for the WTA Long Range Plan.

Pete Stark is retiring and there is a new General Manager incoming, Les Reardanz.

Bob Hammond: Mr. Hammond works for Prothman Group and was recently the interim Blaine Public Works Director. A New Public Works director for Blaine has been hired, Bernie Ziemianek.

The City of Blaine repurposed the Bell Rd grade separation project into a signalized intersection project. The design is complete and the project is going to construction.

Kevin Renz: The City of Ferndale's Thornton St overpass project is progressing. The dirt that will support the overpass will be settling over the next 18 months. ADA improvements have been made on intersections in the south end of downtown.

Mehrdad Moini: Last week WSDOT had a call for projects for 3 categories. An email was sent out with specific details.

The National Highway System (NHS) Asset Management Program has \$50-\$75MM available for Washington State, with an application deadline of February 8, 2021. Construction for those projects must be obligated by August 2023.

The County Safety Program has \$30MM available and an application deadline of April 30, 2021. The program's purpose is to reduce fatal and serious crashes on county roads.

The Local Bridge Program has \$85MM available with an application deadline of February 19, 2021. The West Seattle Bridge is supposedly a big contender for much of this funding.

Matt Amot: In November the Whatcom County Council Planning Development team discussed having impact fees for projects, but no action was taken.

Jim Karcher: The paving on Smith Rd, Northwest Dr, and Slater Rd is completed. Whatcom County crews also repaved the approaches to 17 small bridges in the County. The Swift Creek project is underway. The Birch Bay Berm project is targeted to be completed by April or May. Phase 1 of the Marine Dr reconstruction project is on track. The County is pushing for construction of the 2-lane roundabout at the intersection of E Smith Rd-Hannegan Rd to occur in 2021.

Snow plowing will be limited this year due to lack of personnel the County can put out due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They have been doing outreach to prepare the Whatcom County Council and the public. Whatcom County has a news outreach program called “Get in the Know.”

Mariana Hanefeld: Stacey Clausen now works for the City of Blaine. Ms. Hanefeld has taken over Ms. Clausen’s duties at WSDOT.

Rollin Harper: In Nooksack a new development will be coming in on Gillies Rd. The City of Everson is working on the design for the SR 544 sidewalk project. A Transportation Improvement Board (TIB)-funded project on Reeds Ln is complete. The City of Sumas was successful in getting a small TIB grant for a project that will reconstruct local roadways connecting to Sumas Elementary School – the project is a partnership between the City and the school district.

Hugh Conroy: Yesterday the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) hosted the kickoff review committee meeting for this region’s WSDOT consolidate grants call for projects. WSDOT received 5 grant applications from the region: 3 from WTA, 1 from Birch Bay Parks and Recreation, and 1 from Lummi Nation Transit. The committee will review the projects and apply regional rankings before WSDOT’s due date of February 31.

British Columbia and the City of Abbotsford have finished an extension of the NEXUS lane that leads to the Sumas border crossing. The lane will be ready to go when regular border operations return.

Bob Wilson: The WCOG Council Board adopted 4 unfunded regional priority projects for the 2021 legislative session: WTA’s bus electrification project, Whatcom County’s Marine Dr project, Bellingham’s roundabout at Meridian St and Birchwood Ave, and Blaine’s intersection improvements at Bell Rd and Peace Portal Dr.

Obligations

Final 2020 projects delivered – short of target by \$110k

Lethal Coe: The WCOG region is short of its 2020 Surface Transportation Block Grant program (STBG) obligations target by \$110K. There was a major de-obligated of \$700K in the region, and had that not happened the region would have been well over the target.

Lethal Coe reviewed obligation timelines for STBG funded projects for 2021 and beyond.

Weighting adjustments to the WCOG 2021 Call for Projects scoring based on the Policy Board’s amended *Whatcom Mobility 2040* goals

Hugh Conroy: The Whatcom Transportation Policy Board approved a modification to the regional goals that will be reflected in the WCOG regional transportation plan. The goal “Preservation” has been given a higher priority, and “Climate” has been added to “Environmental Quality” to better align with the language of Washington State’s transportation goals. These weightings will accordingly change in the STBG project scoring sheets.

Lethal Coe: As an exercise, WCOG staff recalculated project scores from the previous STBG call for projects with new weighting and there was little change to project rankings.

Chris Comeau: When would there potentially be a discussion on project goal definitions and when would project applications go out in 2021?

Hugh Conroy: Project application sheets will be sent out around May.

Whatcom Mobility 2045 - long-range transportation plan update

Transportation finance working group

Hugh Conroy: WCOG's regional transportation plan update is due in June 2022. WCOG is looking at convening a financial working group to examine beyond the minimum requirements of financial forecasting in the region. The group would provide input on regional priorities, aligning strategies with state funding streams, etc.

Plan questionnaire using MetroQuest platform

Hugh Conroy: Mr. Conroy investigated several survey companies for developing a public input survey tool for the regional transportation plan update. MetroQuest has an attractive survey application for the type of tool needed. WCOG purchased a 1 year subscription to MetroQuest.