



# Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG] Meeting

Thursday, February 25, 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)
Mark Sandal	Lynden (City of)
Elizabeth Sjostrom	Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Bob Wilson	Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)
Hugh Conroy	WCOG
Lethal Coe	WCOG
Jaymes McClain	WCOG
Ron Cubellis	WCOG
Matt Aamot	Whatcom County Planning
Jim Karcher	Whatcom County Public Works

### Member updates

**Chad Schulhauser:** The City of Bellingham’s Orchard St underpass project is breaking ground on Monday, March 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Chris Comeau:** The City of Bellingham’s Lincoln-Lakeway subarea study is ongoing. The public engagement phase ends March 1<sup>st</sup>.

**Jim Karcher:** Whatcom County’s Birch Bay berm project will be finishing up around early April – a 1-year plant establishment period will occur thereafter. The Swift Creek project is in active construction and will finish up in March. The Marine Dr improvements project will be ready to go to advertisement in the near future. County crews will be paving Birch Bay-Lynden Rd this summer. The E Smith Rd-Hannegan Rd roundabout may be constructed in 2022. The Gooseberry Point preservation project (painting) is out for advertisement. The Lummi Island breakwater project will occur this summer.

**Mark Sandal:** The City of Lynden just closed out its Transportation Improvement Board (TIB)-funded 7<sup>th</sup> St project. The City is also closing out an overlay project on E Grover St. They are working to finalize a design for the W Main St-Berthuson Rd roundabout improvement in the Lynden urban growth area (UGA).

**Rollin Harper:** The City of Everson is working on the SR 544 sidewalk project.

**Matt Aamot:** Whatcom County Council has approved a docket of comprehensive plan and zoning amendments, which includes approval for 300+ acres in northern Bellingham for future urban growth.

**Bob Wilson:** The Washington State legislature is reviewing three transportation funding packages. March 9<sup>th</sup> is the last day for the House to pass bills.

**Hugh Conroy:** The Securing America's Ports Act was signed into law on January 5, 2021. The Act requires border inspection agencies to develop a plan for non-intrusively scanning 100 percent of commercial trucks and passenger vehicles (and freight rail) through land border ports-of-entry in six years. The Act defines "scanning" as non-intrusive imaging or radiation detection. Traffic operation implications of increased scanning could be evaluated with simulation modeling, which the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) has pursued on behalf of the International Mobility and Trade Corridor program (IMTC). WCOG staff is monitoring how this might be implemented.

## **De-obligation of Whatcom County and City of Bellingham's joint project *West Horton Road Extension – Phase 2***

### **\$1 million STBG funds were obligated in September 2017 for preliminary engineering**

**Jim Karcher:** Whatcom County and the City of Bellingham had coordinated on a strategy for constructing an east-west connection between Cordata neighborhood and Northwest Dr. Bellingham's Phase I of the project (Horton Rd to Aldrich Rd) was recently completed. Whatcom County will not be pursuing Phase II (Aldrich Rd to Northwest Dr) due to a number of concerns. This has been discussed with and acknowledged by Chad Schulhauser, Assistant Director of Public Works at the City of Bellingham.

Whatcom County was awarded Surface Transportation Block Grant program (STBG) funding for the project in a 2015 call for projects. \$1M of obligated preliminary engineering (PE) money was returned to the region's pot of STBG funding.

**Chad Schulhauser:** The Horton Rd Phase II project would likely not occur until the area is annexed into the City, and construction would likely not start within the 10-year requirement attached to the funding.

### **Discuss re-obligation of STBG funds that will need to occur by July 31<sup>st</sup>**

**Jim Karcher:** Mr. Karcher's first choice as a destination for de-obligated funds is Whatcom County's Marine Dr improvement project. Another option is the Birch Bay berm project.

**Lethal Coe:** The region's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) can be modified monthly, and if funds were to be allocated to a project already programmed in the TIP, the transfer may qualify as a

TIP modification. If the funds are transferred to a project currently not programmed in the TIP, like the Birch Bay berm project, a TIP amendment and consequent board approval would be required.

This \$1M needs to go to a project that could obligate the funds by July 31<sup>st</sup>, the obligation target deadline.

**Rollin Harper:** Transferring funds to the Marine Dr project makes sense as it is still a Whatcom County project that improves a regional connection to Bellingham city limits.

*There was consensus among present TTAG members that Whatcom County's Marine Dr project is the best option to re-obligate funds from Whatcom County's Horton Rd Phase II project.*

## Obligations status – preparing for obligations delivery shortfall in 2021

### Update from MPO/WSDOT Coordination overseeing obligations policy

**Bob Wilson:** If a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) planning region misses its obligation target for the year, there is a warning notice and requirements that the region meet the target the next year with an added amount equal to how much the target was missed by previously. Failing that, sanctions may be put on the region's future STBG allocation by the State.

In 2020, the WCOG region missed its obligation target by \$110K (about 6 percent of the total target amount). All of the planned projects for 2020 were obligated, but some finalized project costs came in a little lower than were originally estimated, resulting in a close target miss. An obligation target shortfall in 2021 is grounds for sanctions with the 2020's shortfall viewed as the initial "warning."

**Lethal Coe:** About \$250k will also be de-obligated from WCOG from a data collection project. Even with the Horton Rd Phase II project funds being re-obligated in another project, the WCOG region is still slated to miss its 2021 obligation target by \$1-2M (as it stands now).

**Ron Cubellis:** Sanctions, if they occur, would not affect near-term project obligation statuses.

*There was discussion of spreading the rest of the obligation target shortfall across other open projects in the region. Members considered the option to develop jurisdictional paver projects that may be able to quickly obligate.*

*The TTAG consensus was to pursue backfilling currently active regional STBG projects first, then if those are unable to obligate look into the pavers project option.*

**Lethal Coe:** WCOG will put together a list of backfill-ready projects that could potentially receive allocated funds to meet the region's July 31<sup>st</sup> obligation target.

## Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) Program project proposal application form - review for Policy Board on March 10

Open call for projects	March 12
Applications due	May 13
<b>TTAG Presentations (virtual?)</b>	May 27
Jurisdiction scores due	June 17
TTAG review/recommend scores to Policy Board	June 24
Policy Board finalization of project selection	July 14

**Lethal Coe:** The Whatcom County Policy Board will review the STBG application form at their March 10 meeting. Once approved, the timeline in the table will take effect. WCOG will try to be obligating funds for 2025-2026 (as well as 2024) with the projects applying for funding in this call for projects.

**Chad Schulhauser:** Has there been discussion at the federal level regarding Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) funding becoming eligible to projects in a region like WCOG's where project applications and funding requirements have climate and environmental considerations explicitly laid out?

**Lethal Coe:** The WCOG region would need to be non-attainment area to be eligible for CMAQ funding. The region does not have the population density or fine particulate matter levels to be non-attainment.

## WCOG 2045 transportation plan – draft questionnaire for public outreach nearing launch

**Hugh Conroy:** WCOG has developed a draft public outreach survey with the goal of collecting public input on regional goals and strategies and their opinion on transportation topics and issues in their area ahead of the WCOG's regional transportation plan (RTP) update in 2022. The survey was developed using MetroQuest. Mr. Conroy will send out the draft survey to stakeholder partners soon and would appreciate any feedback.

The last page of the survey will collect demographic data about the respondents, which WCOG staff hope to link to human services transportation planning.

*Mr. Conroy reviewed the draft survey tool to the members present.*

WCOG will mail out information and a link to the survey to a random sample of addresses in Whatcom County, with oversampling in low income and minority areas.

## Next TTAG meeting is Thursday, March 25