



Meeting Summary

Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG]

Thursday, February 27, 2020 10:00 – 12:00

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

Attendees:

Chris Comeau	Bellingham Public Works (City of)
Chad Schulhauser	Bellingham Public Works (City of)
Ravyn Whitewolf	Blaine (City of)
Rollin Harper	Everson, Nooksack, Sumas (Cities of)
John Schambaugh	Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)
Mike Donahue	Whatcom County Public Works
Joe Rutan	Whatcom County Public Works
Hugh Conroy	Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)
Lethal Coe	WCOG
Jaymes McClain	WCOG
Tim Wilder	Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)

Member updates

Chris Comeau: The City of Bellingham’s Lincoln-Lakeway multimodal study is starting. The project will look at the parallel Samish Way and Lincoln St corridors.

Joe Rutan: Whatcom County’s construction of the Birch Bay berm is under way. County crews will be chip sealing county roadways most of the summer.

John Shambaugh: Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) project teams are beginning design work on Slater Rd improvements. They are designing five roundabouts along Slater Rd from Northwest Dr to Rural Ave (all on the local system).

Mike Donahue: Whatcom County is working with Transpo Group on its Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) transition plan. They are looking to take the project to the County Council this spring or summer.

Rollin Harper: Recent flooding in the county caused damage to downtown Sumas.

Ravyn Whitewolf: The City of Blaine recruited a new civil engineer.

Chad Shulhauser: The City of Bellingham is working on the F St railroad crossing safety project, the N State St-Ellis St bridge project, and design and right-of-way for improvements to Telegraph Rd. The Horton Rd phase 2 project is proceeding.

The Washington State chapter of the American Public Works Association (APWA) awarded Bellingham its project of the year for the city's work on the waterfront redevelopment.

Tim Wilder: The Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) is moving ahead with its SmartBus integration. Buses will have real-time information in the next couple of months. WTA is also starting a Long Range planning process. There will be minor service changes in June.

Hugh Conroy: The Bellingham Herald reported that the WSDOT project funding freeze (caused by I-976) has been lifted.

WCOG is updating its Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) and will be meeting with stakeholders at the end of March to review updates. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has been emphasizing integrating performance measures into Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) UPWPs.

WCOG will be convening the regional Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP) steering committee in preparation for the next call for projects for the WSDOT Consolidated Grants program.

Mr. Conroy attended the WSDOT-MPO coordinating meeting last week. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is conducting a ferry study for all of Puget Sound and will be reaching out to stakeholders.

Lethal Coe: At the next TTAG meeting WCOG will unveil the update to the regional travel demand model. Paul Ricotta from Caliper (consultant and owner of the software) may be present to answer questions.

Obligations delivery status

Currently projecting to fail the July 31st obligations target deadline

Lethal Coe: The WCOG region was on target to meet its obligation target for the year until about \$710K was de-obligated from the City of Bellingham's Mahogany project. The region is now projected to be short of the target by \$735K. The current plan is to have the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board re-allocate \$750K to other projects to cover the shortfall.

Hugh Conroy: WCOG needs to document obligations by July. Being short of the obligation target could decrease future Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funding for the region.

Project(s) recommendation to policy board

Projects initially discussed as potential recipients of the re-allocation are the Whatcom County Birch Bay berm, the City of Everson's Lincoln St project phases I and II, and the City of Blaine's Hughes Ave project.

Lethal Coe: The Policy Board could split up \$750K between multiple projects.

Interested jurisdictions will get back to WCOG with the funding amounts they could use. A memo of TTAG's recommendation for re-allocation will then be sent to Policy Board for the board's March 11 meeting.

2020 amendment to the Whatcom Regional / Metropolitan Transportation Plan: Discussion of elements to propose to the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board for an interim amendment to the R/MTP

Addition of projects (e.g. SR 547 Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Trail, other requests)

Hugh Conroy: Daniel Probst has approached WCOG staff seeking help in facilitating discussion and advocacy for the Bellingham-Mt Baker non-motorized trail. Much of the proposed trail alignment crosses Department of Natural Resources (DNR)-owned land and DNR is requesting another agency/jurisdiction lead the planning process.

Mr. Conroy is looking at adding a recreation component to WCOG's transportation planning on the next UPWP. There are many proposed trails in the Whatcom region that are outlined in comprehensive plans that could also be documented in WCOG's regional planning.

Prioritization of existing regional transportation goals

Hugh Conroy: Washington State is putting more emphasis on Preservation and Climate Change mitigation as a policy goals for statewide transportation planning. In WCOG's regional plan, regional goals were developed and prioritized based on the accumulated documentation of goals from local jurisdictions' comprehensive plans. Based on those local goals, Preservation is a lower priority than other goals.

For regional planning purposes, Preservation as a policy goal could be bumped up in priority and Climate Change could be spelled out as part of the Environmental policy goal to better align the region with the State's goals.

Realigning and rewording the regional transportation goals is open for discussion as WCOG staff prepare for the next Regional Transportation Plan update.

Traffic counts archive and dashboard: Reminder to send WCOG all your traffic counts, including from consultants, that are captured on the regional system

Jaymes McClain: The [Traffic Counts page](#) on the WCOG website has been updated. There is now an interactive data dashboard that shows the locations of traffic counts in Whatcom County and gives quick, high-level analyses of each count. WCOG staff have accumulated traffic counts over the years from other jurisdictions and WCOG-contracted data collection projects. WCOG's full traffic count archive is available for download on the website.

Additional item: Nooksack River crossings study (access across the river in flood events)

Joe Rutan: Nooksack River flood events are a topic of interest in the county as they relate to east-west road access south of the I-5 Nooksack River bridge. The current river crossings are at Marine Dr, Slater Rd, and Main St in downtown Ferndale. Raising Slater Rd to fully mitigate against flood inundation (in the same vein as the Hwy 2 trestle between the Snohomish River and Ebey Slough) would be an expensive endeavor. Could there be a regional project for studying Nooksack River flood events and their effect on the east-west transportation connections across the river as well as looking at the possibility of a new east-west connection across the river?

Jaymes McClain: The Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG) recently conducted flood-based scenario modeling using their travel demand model. WCOG could investigate doing something similar with the Whatcom region model and estimate near-term and forecasted volume constraints caused by roadway flood inundation.

Hugh Conroy: Two projects could go into the regional project list – a transportation system flood inundation study and a placeholder project for mitigating flood-caused transportation constraints on Nooksack River crossings south of I-5.