



# Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Group [TTAG] Meeting

Thursday, April 23, 2020 10:00 – 12:00

## Virtual\* Meeting Summary

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

### 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) |
| Mehrdad Moini    | WSDOT   |
| Bob Wilson       | Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)                 |
| Hugh Conroy      | WCOG  |
| Lethal Coe       | WCOG  |
| Jaymes McClain   | WCOG  |
| Jim Karcher      | Whatcom County Public Works                           |
| Mike Donahue     | Whatcom County Public Works                           |
| Tim Wilder       | Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)                |

### Current Event Updates

**Ravyn Whitewolf:** They City of Blaine has been working with WSDOT on additional appropriation for the Hughes Ave project. The location of the roundabout for the Boblett channelization project has been finalized. The city has a project that is a shovel-ready candidate any potential stimulus money. The Blaine Public Works Assistant Director has moved to Grant County, and Ravyn is taking on the role of Engineer Director in Blaine, so there will be an opening for Blaine Public Works Director.

**Rollin Harper:** The City of Sumas is doing some repair work with FEMA funds from recent storm damage. The City of Everson is still in design for their SR 544 sidewalk project. They also have additional money to obligate for the Lincoln St projects. Could projects in the works that have already gone to bid be eligible for stimulus money?

**Mehrdad Moini:** There will be a set of criteria outlining eligibility if stimulus money is indeed distributed.

**John Shambaugh:** Tom Stacey will be leaving the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) at the end of April. For the WSDOT I-5 project through Bellingham, the team is working with Bellingham staff on I-5 interchanges and ramps.

**Chris Comeau:** The City of Bellingham's Lincoln-Lakeway study is looking primarily at the local system and interchanges and looking at solutions that are financially feasible in the near-term.

The City is in the middle of preparing the 6 year Transportation Improvements Program (TIP). Staff will soon be working with the Transportation Commission and then Bellingham Council for a public hearing in May. Bellingham also submitted a stimulus request to WCOG. Staff is trying to get all of the City's construction projects in 2020 out to bid with special safety concerns in mind. The plan is to begin construction of the Orchard underpass in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2020.

**Mehrdad Moini:** Mehrdad recently met with Kathleen Davis and will try to learn what cuts and revenue downfalls caused by the pandemic will mean for WSDOT grants, employees, and contracts.

**Tim Wilder:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Western Washington University (WWU) being out of session, ridership on Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) buses is down. WTA it also actively trying to limit ridership due to social distancing guidelines. A reduced schedule is being implemented, and if necessary WTA can provide Sunday-level service but for the whole week.

Based on early estimates, WTA is seeing a 20 percent revenue loss in the short-term. The federal CARES Act is helping, and WTA has received \$8.8MM through it, but that it just for short-term. There will be long-term issues.

The rider-oriented portions of the SmartBus project are on hold. Bus fleet upgrades are also being delayed. The service changes scheduled for June are on hold. WTA is working on a capital improvement program right now. The Long Range transit plan is moving ahead, albeit more slowly.

**Jim Karcher:** Whatcom County is progressing with The Birch Bay Berm project. The County is requesting safety assurances from contractors in the bid process. Other County projects include a mitigating project at Terrell Creek, paving on Slater Rd/Northwest Dr/E Smith Rd, a crosswalk at Samish Way and Galbraith Ln, and various fish passages.

**Mehrdad Moini:** WSDOT office workers are staying at home for the foreseeable future during the pandemic.

**Jim Karcher:** Would it be good to warn county specialists about federal requirements that come with federal stimulus money?

**Mehrdad Moini:** For larger projects, it would be good to get things ready and in place for federal assistance money.

## WCOG Updates

**Hugh Conroy:** An update to the Whatcom Council of Governments' (WCOG) Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) will go to WCOG's board for approval at their May 13 meeting. The WSDOT-WTA-

WCOG agreement is expiring next month, so Hugh is updating relevant info and will try to get the agreement renewed at the May meeting.

Regarding the International Mobility and Trade Corridor Program (IMTC), WCOG staff has finished up a commercial traffic border simulation modeling effort funded by Transportation Canada. Hugh is tracking cross-border volumes – only essential travel is being allowed through the ports of entry in the region, so passenger volumes are down. He is working with Whatcom Unified Command and is on a subcommittee looking at the economic impacts to Whatcom County communities due to border restrictions.

**Ravyn Whitewolf:** The City of Blaine is also trying to assess the economic impact that restrictions are having and will have on the community due to package pick-ups decreasing, gas purchases going down, etc.

**Lethal Coe:** A redistributing of federal Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funds within the WCOG region should put the region over the required obligation target. Tweaks to Everson’s Lincoln St projects and Whatcom County’s Birch Bay project will hopefully be confirmed by the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board in May.

A redistribution of federal funds first nationally and then statewide would first apply to advanced construction projects and then to regions that have met their obligation targets. The WCOG obligation target has to be met by July 31, and then WCOG region projects that can absorb incoming “redistribution” funds can be submitted by August 10.

**Jaymes McClain:** WCOG staff is looking at options for conducting Citizens’ Transportation Advisory Group (CTAG) meetings during the pandemic. A WCOG intern is working on assembling a multi-modal transportation network in GIS to help with regional planning efforts.