Washington State Transportation Commission

2008 Annual Report

Ways to Go...

Issued January 2009

Commissioners

Chair:
Dan O'Neal

Vice-Chair:
Elmira Forner

Members:
Bob Distler

Richard Ford

Latisha Hill

Carol Moser

Philip Parker

Executive Director:
Reema Griffith

Acknowledgments:
The Commission appreciates the ideas and comments from those who have contributed to this Annual Report. The principal author is Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst with the Transportation Commission. Design work is by Cheri Huber Design.

www.wstc.wa.gov

Table of Contents

Foreword 3

Part 1: Priorities for the Statewide Transportation System 5

Revenue Shortfalls and Potential Solutions 5
- Maintenance and Preservation of the Transportation System 5
- Ferries 6
- Transit 7
- New State Revenue Sources Must be Explored 8

Responding to Energy and Environmental Challenges 9
- Climate Change 9
- Stormwater Pollution from Motor Vehicles 9

Connecting and Building Communities 10
- Safety 10
- Transportation and the Economy 10
- Connectivity 11
- Concurrency and Growth Management 12

Part 2: What We Have Heard 13
- Preservation 13
- Safety 14
- Economic Vitality 14
- Mobility 15
- Environmental Quality and Health 16
- Stewardship 16
- Views Heard at Local Meetings 17

Part 3: Overview of 2008 Work and Activities 19
- Ferry Customer Survey and Long-Term Ferry Funding Study 19
- Toll-Setting and Toll Policy 19
- Local Meetings and Outreach 20
- Aviation Planning Council 20
- Climate Action Team 20
- Working Toward the 2011 – 2030 WTP 20
- Facility Naming 20

Part 4: Looking Ahead 21
- Operational Safety of Highways 21
- Exploring Alternative Sources of Transportation Revenue 21
- Pricing 22
- Economic Vitality 22
- Puget Sound Partnership 22
- Emissions Reduction 22

Washington State Transportation Commission Roles and Responsibilities 23

Commissioners 24

Footnotes and Credits 25

Gasoline taxes paid into the highway trust fund fell by $3 billion in the 2008 fiscal year.

"Our current approach [nationally] has us encouraging Americans to change their driving habits and burn less fuel while secretly hoping they drive more so we can finance new bridges, repair interstates and expand transit systems," said Transportation Secretary Mary Peters. "We need a new approach that complements, instead of contradicts, our energy policies and infrastructure needs."

~ Wall Street Journal, November 24, 2008

Foreword

The Wenatchee on the Seattle-Bainbridge Island run.

The Washington State Transportation Commission presents this Annual Report to the Governor, the Legislature and the people of our state at a time of economic challenges and multiple policy changes facing transportation. This Annual Report begins with ***Priorities for the Statewide Transportation System****.*

The priorities of revenue needs, environmental concerns and community vitality intersect and impact each other. It has become apparent that too many people move about in fossil-fueled, single occupant vehicles. To change this fundamental premise of mobility in our society requires public investment – and no new resources are considered to be politically acceptable at this time. Even though six months ago everyone paid oil companies more than twice what a gallon of gas costs today, few are willing to invest even a portion of the relative savings in a tax dedicated to improving transportation infrastructure. As a result, lower than expected transportation revenue today – and continuing revenue decline over time – dominates the transportation discussion and extends to every mode, from ferries to highways and transit.

This Annual Report contains policy recommendations and information to fulfill the statutory duties of the Transportation Commission, as provided in RCW 47.01.071 and RCW 47.01.075.

Washington is at a crossroads. If we choose to avoid investing more in transportation and rely solely on existing revenue streams, ferry and transit service will be reduced, expected road improvements will be cancelled or at least delayed, and our natural environment and quality of life suffer. Only if our state generates new revenue and implements new transportation strategies, will its transportation infrastructure improve and our communities grow and develop in a long-term, sustainable way.

After addressing the priorities of revenue, environment, and community vitality, the Report highlights **What We Have Heard** over the past year, and provides an **Overview of 2008 Work and Activities**. The Report concludes by **Looking Ahead** at the Policy Platform the Commission will focus on during 2009.

Washington United Terminal uses ultra-low sulfur diesel for all terminal operations at the Port of Tacoma.

Northbound and southbound Sound Transit commuter trains at King Street Station, Seattle

Part 1:

Priority Issues in Transportation Policy

Revenue Shortfalls, Higher Costs and Potential Solutions

As a Transportation Commission, one of our tasks is to help the state create a vision of its transportation future and actively strategize how to make that future happen. The rapid rise (and even quicker decline) in oil prices during 2008 demonstrates that both personal and societal economics help to drive modal shifts; when gas prices rose toward $4 per gallon, some people got out of their cars and into transit, most of us planned our trips more carefully, and everyone benefitted from reduced congestion without building any new structures. Whether these changes will continue depends on various geographic and demographic factors.

The 2009-2011 state transportation revenue forecast declined by 2% from the February 2008 forecast to the November forecast. At the same time, prices for steel and concrete rocketed, and oil prices have been volatile. As a consequence, when demand and price for refined oil products rose, more crude oil was more intensively processed. Asphalt prices rose dramatically and supplies dropped.

January 10: SR 97 – Blewett Pass.

Although fuel prices have declined significantly since summer, many drivers continue to drive less. As the national economy has crumbled, families still need to conserve fuel and dollars, some drivers want to reduce their carbon footprint, and others have incorporated fewer trips as part of the daily routine. At this time, it is unknown whether a large increase in fuel consumption will follow lower gasoline prices. The challenge facing policymakers is how to optimize mobility in an environment of uncertain revenue, changing expectations and a hurting economy, while moving forward fiscal and policy decisions to create lasting solutions.

- **Maintenance and Preservation of the Transportation System**

All levels of government need to invest more in preserving and maintaining the existing highway and road system. The state's last two gas tax increases gained support by listing specific projects the new revenue would build. Although this strategy successfully raised money for new facilities, the cost to preserve and maintain the existing state highway system – including the ferries – has increased and investment has not kept pace.

Not only does the Governor's proposed biennial budget seek more than an additional $170 million to catch up on needed maintenance and preservation for the existing highway network, but investment is needed to preserve and maintain the system additions now being built. Increasingly at the local level, the county road fund does not provide adequate revenue to maintain existing roads. And cities lack any dedicated transportation funding source; some have attempted to establish street utility fees for on-going repair of streets.

Neither state nor federal grants to counties and cities fill the gap. Demand for Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) assistance for large corridor projects and small city hardship projects far outstrips available funding.[1] Due to stagnant and limited funding for counties and cities, TIB receives about $8 in requests for every $1 it can grant.

Unfortunately, many local funding options are not used. To cite one example, in 2007 the Legislature authorized counties and cities to generate transportation revenue by imposing an annual $20 license fee without public vote but few have done so.

Recommendation:
A steady and predictable flow of new transportation revenue should be dedicated to preservation and maintenance for highways and ferries, and should include a share for cities and counties to preserve and maintain their street and road networks – available as a state match to new locally raised revenue.

• Ferries

Washington State Ferries (WSF), as currently funded and operated, is not financially sustainable, neither today nor for the long-run. The funding crisis for WSF extends beyond the current dilemma of how to close the gap between fares and rapidly rising operating costs. More challenging is the large capital funding needed to perform necessary preventive maintenance and replace aging vessels.

Since the loss in 2000 of the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) as the major source of ferry capital funding, transfers of discretionary transportation funds and significant fare increases have closed the operating gap and met limited but essential short term capital needs. WSDOT has transferred $300 million into ferry operations and $350 million into ferry capital needs that would otherwise have been spent elsewhere in the state. Fares have increased between 37% and 122% since 2000, maintenance has been deferred, and planned capital preservation and expansion projects have been postponed as funds have been redirected to cover rising operating costs.

Although the fund transfers have kept the ferry system operating, maintenance, preservation and replacement needs now threaten the long-term viability of the system. Maintaining the existing level of WSF service, with no further increases in service hours or vessels to keep up with expected growth in demand over the next 22 years (the time frame of the recently-completed WSF Long Range Plan) will require $3.5 billion more than is available from currently-identified sources to replace aging ferries and maintain existing boats and terminals in good operating condition. Even after assuming 2.5% fare increases each year, estimated operating revenues will fall nearly $660 million short of operating costs over the same 22 year period. Simply put, ferry operations can be sustained at existing levels only if a very substantial source of revenue can be tapped to replace the previous MVET, even assuming future fare increases and growth in ridership.

The Transportation Commission's Long-Term Ferry Funding Study[2] evaluated numerous potential revenue sources including increased operating revenue, local assessment districts, and statewide taxes and fees. Given the magnitude of the capital funding needs, the study concluded that increased ferry fares and other sources of operating revenue such as concessions or advertising, cannot alone close the funding gap. Even locally-generated revenue, such as a local property tax or vehicle registration fee levied only in the ferry-served counties, would have to be levied at unreasonably large rates to fund a significant portion of future capital needs. Any funding plan that excludes a new source of state revenue is certain to result in a decline in ferry service frequency, reliability and quality throughout the network.

Recommendation:
The most financially and politically viable method for funding sustained long-term ferry service at a level comparable to today's is through a statewide tax or fee that can be used to fully fund long-term capital needs. Closing the remaining gap between ferry operating revenues and costs can be achieved through a combination of existing dedicated transportation sources, increased fares and concession revenues, and local funding mechanisms. Clearly, if additional resources are not employed for capital or operating costs, significant service reductions will be necessary in the very near future.

WSF has developed a variety of operational strategies to maintain service levels and quality in the face of growing demand and constrained resources, including a vehicle reservation system and enhanced connections with public transit. Numerous other operational and terminal facility changes will help to reduce ferry fuel costs and improve passenger loading. Other options that the legislature may want to consider include replacing some car ferry runs with passenger-only service, or eliminating routes with high costs where reasonable travel alternatives exist. These and other strategies for improving operations while managing costs are described in the WSF Long Range Plan.[3]

Building Sound Transit's Beacon Hill Link Light Rail tunnel

Pullman Transit works closely with WSU to serve students, faculty and staff.

C-Tran provides express service across the state line to job sites in downtown Portland

• Transit

With last summer's record fuel prices changing travel patterns and with increasing individual decisions to shift modes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, there is more demand for transit than at any time since World War II. Nationally, ridership increased by 5.2% in the second quarter of 2008 and continued to grow in the third quarter, despite falling gas prices. Ridership is up by 32% since 1995.

Some transit systems are burdened by demand they cannot meet and fuel they cannot afford. The long-term trends, however, point to more transit demand due to the following factors:

- Population growth
- Social and demographic change
- Energy and environmental concerns
- Economy

The new mission for public transportation – the key mobility resource for reducing greenhouse gases from the transportation sector – requires different approaches to funding, service, and pricing. The traditional state role in public transportation is limited; transit systems are designed and funded locally (or regionally), and receive significant capital contributions from the federal government.

Recommendation:
Although transit funding and operations should continue to be designed and funded locally (or regionally), an expanded state role can help to better identify unmet transit needs and provide matching funds for transit needs.

In addition, transit providers should consider how quality of service, such as comfortable seats, wi-fi availability and service frequency, may persuade more drivers to opt out of their cars, even if fares must rise. In any case, fares cannot be exempt from rising fuel costs or the need to grow transit systems to meet demand.

• New state revenue sources must be explored

Recommendation:
For sustainable, long-term transportation funding, it is time to consider alternatives beyond traditional approaches. A Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) system where drivers pay for the miles they drive appears to be technically feasible. VMT rates can vary according to location, time of day and day of week. Because it is unlikely that one state can implement such a system on its own, the Commission suggests the state consider advocating for a federally funded pilot VMT project on the West Coast – perhaps as an I-5 "Corridor of the Future". Exactly how to develop and implement VMT pricing will require very careful thought.

In the more near-term, once the tolling parameters are set for the SR 520 project, we expect the Legislature will turn to tolling as one of the funding sources for other large projects. Based in part on analysis done by the Commission,[4] the next projects that seem most pressing and ideal are:

- Columbia River Crossing (Vancouver)
- I-90/ Snoqualmie Pass
- I-405
- North/South Freeway (Spokane)

Other potential revenue sources to consider for funding everything from ferries to road maintenance include:

- An incremental increase or an inflation factor for the gas tax dedicated to maintaining and preserving the existing highway and road system;
- Increased vehicle registration fees;
- Some form of a tax based upon vehicle value and a reasonable depreciation schedule;
- A portion of sales and property tax generated from specific transportation improvements, such as interchanges and transit corridors;
- Ferry naming rights.

Drivers can now choose to buy into the HOV Lane on SR 167.

Looking south across the I-5 Columbia River Crossing in Vancouver. Northbound bridge constructed in 1917; southbound bridge in 1958.

Responding to Energy and Environmental Challenges

• Climate Change

The Climate Action Team has recommended aggressive implementation of enhanced transit service, transit-oriented development and transportation pricing to help the State to meet the greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals set by the Governor and Legislature in 2007. The legislature also has set a goal of reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT); Washington is the only state in the nation with a VMT reduction goal. To meet the first benchmark in 2020, drivers in our state must travel 12 billion fewer miles by 2020.

Bicycle riders at Colman Dock, Seattle, prepared for Bainbridge Island's Chilly Hilly, a 33-mile February bike tour just a ferry ride away.

Employees departing The Connector, a private transit system offered free to Microsoft employees providing service from numerous neighborhoods direct to the Redmond Campus.

The Commission agrees that VMT reduction is a useful strategy to assist in reducing transportation greenhouse gas emissions, but as a goal in itself, we have concerns that it will disproportionately impact rural areas and certain types of workers. It also is difficult to persuade Americans to drive less – unless driving is more expensive. The obvious lesson of the past year is that the easiest and most effective way to reduce VMT would be to increase the gas tax by $.50 to $1.00 per gallon. Because such a large gas tax increase is politically toxic, more affordable and more politically acceptable strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions should be prioritized. One promising strategy is adoption of a low-carbon fuel standard (LCFS).[5] The Climate Action Team estimated that a Washington LCFS could reduce GHG emissions by 3.6 million metric tons annually by 2020, providing 60% of the GHG reductions from all strategies.

The Commission also is encouraged by the efforts of companies like Better Place, which works with automakers, electric utilities, and governments to transform auto infrastructure to better accommodate all-electric vehicles. Cascade Sierra Solutions provides a market solution to reducing truck emissions by identifying, promoting and financing technology that saves fuel and reduces pollution from the legacy fleet of trucks.

Recommendation:
A major challenge is how to develop a funding scheme to reduce emissions without gouging critical transportation funding in the short-run. As much as possible, any new policies should be designed to promote behavior change.

Some initial ideas include:

- Increase the importance and priority of funding alternative modes of transportation including bicycle paths, sidewalks, and transit systems.
- Establish incentive/reward programs for those who drive vehicles that operate on alternative fuel sources and/or achieve relatively high MPG performance.
- Establish a carbon tax and/or a cap and trade scheme.

To succeed in this effort will require bold steps and new funding approaches that enable expanded transit service and capacity. To double bus ridership by 2020 will require a 50% service increase at a total $4.5 billion, capital and operating cost. It is difficult for any transit system to successfully grow so rapidly, facing such constraints as:

- Buy American requirements for capital equipment;
- Fuel economy standards;
- Training capacity for new drivers; and
- Physical space for operations.

• Stormwater Pollution from Motor Vehicles

Contaminated run off from highways and roads is a primary source of pollution for our state's streams, rivers and the Puget Sound. The interrelationship between transportation and environmental protection is apparent as public and private groups work to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; whether people drive vehicles that emit fewer GHG or drive less, both choices generate lower amounts of stormwater contaminants.[6]

Recommendation:
Given its direct role in developing goals to reduce vehicle miles traveled, the Department of Transportation should enhance its relationship with the Puget Sound Partnership and similar agencies to help develop a stronger joint approach to cleaning up Puget Sound and other state waterways.

For some of our existing transportation infrastructure, the drainage system needs to be completely rebuilt in order to improve the water quality in Puget Sound. Although this investment is happening in some transportation projects, it is costly and has not been a priority. Getting people to drive clean cars and to drive less by bicycling, walking and taking the bus, offers even greater benefits for our water and air resources. Other urban areas around the state that are exploring alternative travel modes include Spokane and the Tri-Cities. Both areas have excellent trail networks and increasing numbers of bicycle commuters.

Connecting and Building Communities

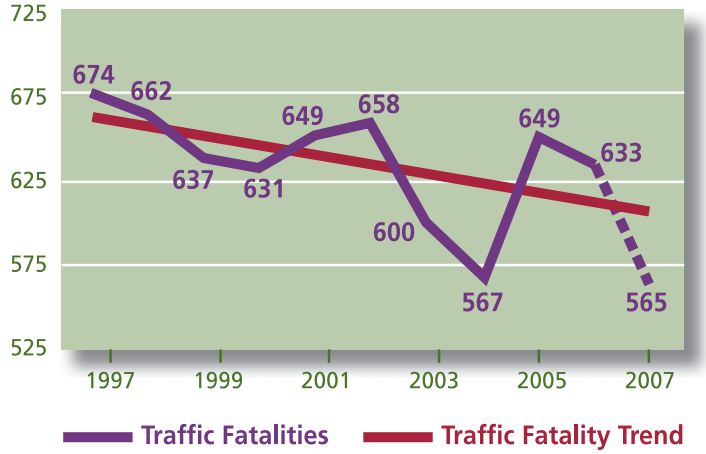
• Safety

Washington State has made great strides in improving safety on its roads and highways. In 2007, both deaths per thousand population and total number of deaths were lower than previous years. Still, there were 568 fatalities and 2,337 crashes resulting in serious injury.

Today, Washington is one of the safest places to drive in the United States.[7] Although many newly built or expanded facilities include road safety improvements, research shows that most fatal auto collisions are due to driver behavior, not due to the facility.

Washington Traffic Fatalities, 1997 - 2007

2007 figures based on preliminary data



In times of scarce resources, state and local governments can do many things that are less expensive than construction to improve safety. As one example, Dr. Brian Johnston, the Chief of Pediatrics at the Harborview Medical Center and a supporter of the Safe Routes to School Program, recommends that drivers simply slow down. The Washington Traffic Safety Commission agrees that lower speed would have the highest return on investment. It also stresses the need to raise awareness of traffic safety and increase the social conscience of the driving public.

Recommendation:

Rural, two lane roads need special attention. These roads, whether county or state, are the most dangerous highways in the state. Because insufficient funds must be spread to so many miles of rural roads, it may be useful to focus on effective, less costly operational fixes to enhance safety at known dangerous segments or locations:

- Increase use of electronic signage displaying the speed of passing cars and limiting speed to reduce congestion.
- Increase safety warning signage when approaching dangerous curves, intersections, etc.
- Decrease speed limits in general – particularly where development and changing life standards are causing rural roads to become more residential.
- On rural state highways with considerable residential development, WSDOT should moderate its priority of increasing traffic throughput and focus more on the safety of residents.
- Establish road standards more appropriate for the uses and traffic of rural roads.

• Transportation and the Economy

Washington State companies play a major role in the nation's transportation economy.[8] While one of our largest employers, Microsoft, is not a transportation company, it has successfully developed both a corporate campus transportation system and an employee commuter shuttle bus program. It also has created software to enhance rideshare opportunities. Drawing on our region's private sector transportation expertise could assist our state in acting to improve the critical linkage between transportation and the state's major economic players.

In addition, transportation budget and policy decisions must continue to meet the needs of the entire state and its transportation network. The Transportation Commission is concerned that dropping "economic vitality" as a specific transportation priority in 2007 signals fewer transportation resources for those areas of the state that rely on transportation for new economic development.

Recommendation:

We recommend that "economic vitality" be specifically restored by the legislature as a priority goal for planning and funding transportation investment. We also suggest that the State adopt an overall policy to connect investments in transportation, land use and economic development.

Busy, winding rural roads are the least safe.

Fruit growers depend on reliable roads and intermodal connections.

• Connectivity

Connectivity is about getting people and goods where they need to be in a timely and reliable way. For people, it is often thought of as the ability to get from one place to another without a car. Frequently, connectivity requires a partnership between two or more transportation providers.

Ferries and Transit

Ferry users consistently ask for improved transit connections at terminals to avoid having to drive a car onto the ferry. The greatest need is on the east side of Puget Sound. Kitsap Transit already designs its service around the ferry schedules and Island Transit connects Clinton to other parts of Island County.

WSF, transit providers, communities, and businesses such as Zipcar, can work together to weave better connections that will help people leave their cars behind. From the privately-owned transit services operating seasonally on San Juan and Orcas Islands to the Mukilteo Sounder station that opened at the end of May, connectivity options for ferry riders are slowly improving.

Recommendation: Improving connectivity from one mode to another and between communities merits continued attention and funding.

Connecting Communities

Mobility is different in rural Washington than in urban areas; many Washington communities lack non-automobile connections to each other. The challenge of simply getting from place to place is a different problem than being stuck in traffic.

WSDOT has been working with local transit systems and private carriers, which have begun to restore limited intercity bus service to some rural centers. The Apple Line connects Omak to Wenatchee and Ellensburg, the Dungeness Line connects Port Angeles, Sequim and Port Townsend to the Seattle area, and the Grape Line connects Walla Walla and the Tri-Cities.

Commercial Air Service to Small Communities

Airports are vital to the economic health of many small communities. With volatile fuel prices and the changing economics of the air industry, commercial air service faces reductions or elimination. Moses Lake (17,440 pop.) lost its commercial air service in 2006. Other Washington communities have lost flights and carriers.

As Horizon Air, the state's largest regional carrier, continues its transition from 37-seat planes to 74-seat planes, the bigger planes may actually reduce travel options. An example is the Bellingham route, in which the number of trips was significantly reduced when the larger Q400 airplanes were introduced. As carriers transition to more economically efficient (lower cost per seat-mile) airplanes, the consequence could be fewer flights to and from places like Pullman, Walla Walla and Wenatchee.

The Horizon Q-400 on the runway in Pullman.

• Concurrency and Growth Management

Our state's transportation system does not adequately support the population densities envisioned by the Growth Management Act (GMA) and the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. State law requires appropriate infrastructure to be provided at the time of new development – and that new development not degrade local service standards for current residents.[9] That requirement is called "concurrency." During 2008, the Commission began asking local officials specifically about concurrency during visits to communities in the state. Based on what we heard and on our observations in our own communities, the Commission remains concerned that infrastructure has not kept pace with development across the state, especially in urban areas. This is contrary to the GMA directive to counties and cities that infrastructure be provided concurrent with new growth.

Nearly 20 years into growth management, it is now apparent that land use patterns will seldom change – even over time – without high capacity transit. Transportation infrastructure must support planned density and vice versa. Although rail has high capital costs, to properly build the touted alternative of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) also requires capital investment.

If new light rail or commuter rail improvements are not built or dedicated bus lanes for BRT not constructed, we will need to look at converting general purpose lanes to improve transit. Rail is probably cheapest in the long run, given that one Sound Transit light rail car can carry up to 200 people.

In general, the State needs to develop both short-term and long-range strategies to enable transit-oriented development. To reduce the capital cost of right-of way acquisition, it has been suggested that future transit and rail corridors be designated in plans and preserved using deed restrictions until they are needed.

In addition, the statutory exemption from concurrency for Highways of Statewide Significance likens any connection between local planning and state highways to resemble a piece of swiss cheese. Since more than half the system miles are designated, one Commissioner characterized the decision thus: "We've removed not only the teeth of GMA, but the gums, too."

Recommendation:
The concurrency requirement and its implementation needs evaluation and reconsideration by the Legislature. Although concurrency based on road capacity standards may fulfill paper requirements, it often fails to improve the actual movement of people and goods. In many urban centers and/or transit oriented developments, road concurrency requirements are less relevant to mobility than walking, biking and transit standards. In like fashion, concurrency standards designed for personal mobility may have little meaning for efficient freight movement.

A bottleneck in Olympia and congestion on I-405 demonstrate that transportation infrastructure is often inadequate for actual development activity and travel patterns.

Part 2:
What we have heard

A key function of the Transportation Commission is to be the eyes and ears for transportation policy-makers in Olympia. The Commission met four times this year in different communities around the state to hear first-hand about the transportation challenges and solutions that are unique to each community and participated in over 24 meetings with ferry communities. These meetings highlight the diversity of the state and the importance of tying the state together through transportation.

During 2008, the Commission also had a joint meeting with all of the states' Regional Transportation Planning Organizations and Metropolitan Planning Organizations and held eight regular meetings in Olympia. Throughout the year, Commissioners attended over two dozen meetings of Ferry Advisory Committees, met with various statewide groups, spoke at several Conferences and met with service clubs. This section highlights by topic what we have heard about transportation during 2008.

A wheat train on the P&L line of the PCC Railroad. Hauling hay from the Yakima Valley to the Coast.

- **Preservation**

– Portions of the concrete and asphalt infrastructure of our highway, street and road system are at risk from lack of investment. Less recognized, but also at risk, our society is in danger of losing pieces of the existing transit system due to sales tax revenue loss and fluctuating fuel prices.

Last summer, when buses became full to overflowing and ridership clamored for more buses, a key flaw in how transit is funded in our state became apparent. Since transit relies heavily on public subsidy, as demand for transit increases, a higher subsidy is required. The available subsidy – almost always from a local sales tax – increases in good times and decreases when the economy is poor. And when fuel prices are high – transit demand increases, just when transit agencies themselves face higher fuel costs.

– Agricultural shippers produce large volume, low cost commodities and need a reliable, cost-effective, integrated transportation system including trucks, rail and barges to get products to and from the farm, to processors and to markets locally, within the US and overseas. Farmers, shippers, and small railroads are working together to keep some short line operations alive and possibly thriving.

"There's no single answer," Karen Bonaudi, Executive Director of Transco told the commission. The produce rail car pool, which is being used at capacity, is a helpful part of the puzzle. "It's not all about rail. It's not all about truck. It's how it all works together." In Central Washington, one example of multi-modal collaboration is a partnership between Zip Truck Line and the Columbia Basin Railroad, which serves both agricultural and manufacturing clients in Moses Lake's Wheeler Industrial Area.

Another short line, the Washington and Idaho Railway Company, operating the P&L Line in the Whitman County portion of the Palouse and Coulee City Railroad since June 2007, succeeds in part because its three employees run the engines, repair track, keep accounts and everything else. This short line railroad plays a key role in moving grain to markets and getting fertilizer to farms. The P&L line collaborated successfully with BNSF to run a unit train during wheat harvest.

"Slow Down" warning sign on a rural Kittitas County road.

• Safety

– The primary causes of accidents are excessive speed and impaired judgment. As radar detection devices become more prevalent and more sophisticated, greater social emphasis must be made of the dangers of speeding.

The Commission often has heard complaints from rural communities that posted limits are too high when state highways traverse residential areas. The Department of Transportation has responded that it sets speed limits at 80% of the prevailing average speed. While velocity is important to the mobility of people and goods, to improve the safety of bicyclists, pedestrians and oncoming-traffic, we suggest the Department consult with the Washington State Patrol, local communities and county sheriffs in setting rural speed limits.

Further progress on traffic safety is going to take all the "tools" in the traffic safety toolbox, plus some new thinking about approaches. Among the most significant challenges going forward will be how to change our culture of complacency as it relates to traffic safety. There is no single action or strategy that will bring about a cultural change.[11]

• Economic Vitality

In every corner of the state, the Commission hears that economic development and transportation needs do not always connect. This is the case with ferries and tourism, with agriculture and all-weather roads, and with investments necessary to keep freight and people moving. The state needs an overall policy to connect its decisions and investments in land use, transportation, and economic development.

Posted weight load restriction in Whitman County.

This policy should include programmatic funding for the unique transportation needs of the tourism[10], agriculture, and manufacturing sectors that traditional funding approaches may not address.

Examples might include:

- Supporting ferry service for the tourism-driven economy in the San Juan Islands;
- Ensuring accessible farm-to market routes;
- Improving the state highway that traverses the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area;
- The improvements needed for U.S. 2 and Snoqualmie Pass for connecting the eastern and western sides of our state;
- Meeting freight needs for critical industry clusters; and
- Improvements to county roads and city streets critically related to the categories above.

– Roads in many rural areas of the state were designed for farm trucks long ago – not for the heavy loads that travel them today. Freeze and thaw conditions create axle-loading restrictions and speed restrictions. Enforcement is difficult; sometimes Lincoln County recommends that heavy loads run at night, when roads and their bases tighten up. In some areas, a small investment in rural roads will have a tremendous impact on economic vitality.

A WSU Strategic Freight Transportation Analysis Report recognizes that funds for improvement are limited. It indicates county-by-county which roads are highest priority for an all-weather upgrade[12].

– The WSDOT freight systems office has taken a leadership role nationally in looking at the resiliency of the transportation network for freight. Business lost an estimated $74 million from delays in freight movement from the avalanche closures on Snoqualmie Pass during the 2007-08 winter. Washington is working with national experts to begin to examine other weaknesses in the system (flood closures or earthquake damage) and develop freight movement plans to address those weaknesses.

• Mobility

– Intelligent Transportation Systems are improving mobility without the expense and environmental impacts of building additional lane miles. WSDOT Traffic Operations is implementing signal synchronization and timing efforts, managed lanes, incident response, traffic management centers and traveler information strategies. In addition, through electronic tolling, on SR 167 between Auburn and Renton, drivers are able to purchase excess space in underutilized High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes and improve travel flow for themselves and (indirectly) for others on the road.

WSDOT Seattle Traffic Management Center.

–The strengths of Washington's public transportation systems are moving commuters to and from work and providing mobility for those who lack automobile access.

- Public transit ridership across the nation grew 5% for the second quarter of 2008. Washington did even better. In July 2008, Sound Transit averaged 61,000 riders each weekday, up 25 percent over July 2007, including a 38 percent increase on Sounder commuter trains, now carrying over 10,000 passengers daily.

The ridership increases continued in the third quarter. ST Express bus ridership was up 22 percent in the third quarter, compared with the same time a year earlier. Sounder commuter trains also showed big gains.

In Eastern Washington, transit use also continued to grow, with ridership increases of over 19% for the year for Spokane Transit and over 16% for Ben Franklin Transit in the first 10 months of 2008.

- In 2008, Sounder's convenience and reliability made it the fastest-growing commuter rail system in the nation. As gas prices peaked in the third quarter, Sounder ridership on the north line between Everett and Seattle was up 38 percent; on the south line between Tacoma and Seattle, ridership increased 24 percent.

  Sound Transit improved nearly every grade crossing in the Tacoma-Seattle corridor, added 9 new high-speed crossovers and a state-of-the-art Centralized Traffic Control system. These improvements on the BNSF tracks have allowed Sound Transit to add service, with eight daily roundtrips in that corridor now.

- SAFETEA-LU specifically set aside public transportation funds for service on Indian reservations. People for People, a non-profit organization, partnered with the Yakama Nation and WSDOT to improve mobility on tribal lands and was awarded the number one "new start" grant in the nation. With Federal Transit Administration (FTA) grants of nearly $900,0000, a fixed route bus has improved access for education and meeting health care needs.

Pierce Transit Park and Ride.

• Environmental Quality and Health

– Washington State was recently named the nation's number one "Bicycle Friendly State" by the League of American Bicyclists. Yet, much more can and ought to be done in Washington State. The state Bicycle Facilities and Pedestrian Walkways Plan completed in 2008 will help our state keep its bike-friendly status.

The goal of this statewide plan – the only statewide bike-ped plan in the country with project level detail – is to increase bicycling and walking while reducing injuries and deaths. The Plan aims to decrease collisions by five percent per year for the next 20 years, while doubling the amount of biking and walking.

This is an achievable and realistic goal. In the past 10 years, bicycle commuting has grown by 75%; in several urban areas of the state, one of every six trips is made on foot or by bicycle. More than half of all trips today are under three miles long and 80% of them are made by car.

– Vanpool and ride-share has been very successful. However, statewide demand for ride-share vans exceeds supply by 300%. As with transit, there are constraints to vanpool growth:

- Domestic manufacturers have cut production of 7-passenger vehicles and production of 12-15 passenger vehicles is being reviewed;
- Competition for limited transit funds; and
- Limited places in downtown Seattle to park vans.

– Biofuels have much promise as a way to reduce reliance on oil imports, but events of the past year have demonstrated that the current generation of biofuels also is susceptible to world economic forces. Despite a strong commitment to reducing fossil fuel use, King County Metro cancelled its contract for Washington-produced biodiesel last summer; with high feedstock costs and lower gasoline prices, the entire biofuel industry statewide teeters on the brink of extinction.

Collecting and Treating Transportation Stormwater in an Urban Environment.

Most of the contaminants entering the state's waterways come from stormwater and much of that is water flowing through or over highways and streets. This makes the collection and treatment of stormwater a critical link between transportation and healthy waterways.

An example of how to do this well is the expansion and retrofit of approximately 5 miles of northbound and southbound I-5 in Snohomish County. This innovative stormwater project, that became a 2007 WSDOT Excellence in Environmental Design Award candidate, collects and treats all stormwater at six new treatment facilities before discharge and enhances and creates wetlands along with improvements to an existing outfall to the Snohomish River.

Achieving this water quality improvement required an imaginative approach and collaboration with the City of Everett and its Lowell Neighborhood. Stormwater is now collected from the southerly 3 miles of the project and conveyed over the BNSF Railroad tracks in Lowell using a steel aqueduct bridge to a 13 acre water quality site adjacent to the Snohomish River. The City of Everett funded pedestrian enhancements to the aqueduct bridge, including a cascading waterfall tower along with a series of trails around the wetland and water quality site which connect to the city's Riverfront Trail system along the Snohomish River.

• Stewardship

– Our current transportation model is not sustainable. Current budget realities should help us shift attention from capital projects to capital ideas.

- The Legislature should return to funding programs, not projects. Dedicating a specific dollar amount to a project is inefficient because it precludes project designers and contractors from finding cheaper, better ways to accomplish the mission.
- As project costs continue to escalate and vehicle miles continue to drop, allow WSDOT to move the most timely projects forward to completion and allow others to be re-evaluated.
- Increase and streamline use of design-build contracting. Utilize other innovative construction and finance techniques, such as longer bond terms and decreased bonding requirements.

– Many counties have extensive road systems leading into the National Forests. When timber harvest levels were high, tax revenues in those communities allowed for adequate upkeep of those rural roads. Since logging restrictions in the 1990s, followed by a downturn in the forest products industry, Congress has provided critical funds for maintaining roads in these forest-dominated counties through the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self- Determination Act of 2000.

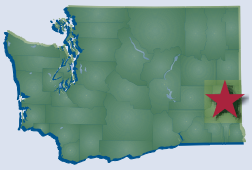
Scheduled to expire last year, it is most helpful that Congress continued funding for this critical portion of the road network, even though at reduced funding levels. In county FY 2009, recipient counties will be funded at 90% of current levels; in FY 2010, at 81% of current levels and in FY 2011, at 73% of current levels. This translates into about $18 million for county road funds in Washington counties with impacted national forest land.[13]

Intercity Transit vanpool heading south on I-5.

• Views Heard at Local Meetings

Each city and county that the Commission visits has transportation successes and needs. Here, we list – in no priority order – ten of the top items that we heard in each locality.

Pullman, April 2008



- Whitman County and its cities seek simpler funding mechanisms, more programmatic funding and multi-year funding.
- Roughly 60 percent of Washington State University (WSU) students live west of the Cascades – a nearly 300 mile trip from Seattle or Tacoma, with half of that mileage on two-lane roads. And faculty travel frequently to work around the state, the nation and the world.
- Pullman Transit, one of only three municipal transit systems in the state, is funded by a utility tax. Student fee support for transit is strong and long-standing.
- The challenges posed by distance and weather make it important that local air service remains a travel alternative. To do so, Pullman partners with Moscow, with WSU and the University of Idaho.

- Small towns and counties need and appreciate the technical help and grant assistance they receive from TIB and CRAB.
- The extreme snow and ice conditions last winter caused a budget overrun of $2.2 million for the WSDOT Eastern Region alone – counties and cities were hit even harder.
- The City of Pullman, Whitman County and Washington State University work closely on transportation priorities in their area.
- The completed improvements to SR 270 between Moscow, Idaho and Pullman make the route safer and open economic opportunities.
- A major new WSU research program, including the WSU Tri-Cities' $24.8 million Bioproducts, Sciences and Engineering Laboratory, is focused on clean technology, including biofuels and biofuel by-products grown and formulated in Washington, such as glycerol.
- The greatest potential for biofuel production is perfection of cellulosic biofuel from municipal solid waste, forest and agricultural residues, and intentionally grown cellulosic resources such as poplar and highly productive grasses.

Moses Lake, June 2008

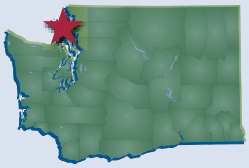
- Mobility, safety, and economic vitality are the biggest transportation challenges in the wide-open spaces of Grant, Adams, Lincoln and Kittitas Counties and their cities.
- With its population spreading to the west, a second crossing of Moses Lake (and a connecting road to I-90) is the transportation priority for the City of Moses Lake.
- A greater emphasis on safety, especially the safety of two-lane roads, is the highest priority for Grant County and its neighboring counties.
- Transportation is critical to the future of farming in Washington, with 75% of the state's agricultural output leaving as exports.
- Wheat, potato, and apple producers explained the benefits and costs of sending freight via rail and pointed to the creation of rail car pools and other companies as positive movements in the region.
- The City of Othello, the largest city in Adams County, reported major wrecks occur almost twice weekly where city streets intersect with State Route 26.
- The Potato Commission specifically suggested that the State produce an annual report card on rail service, create incentives for expanded rail capacity, including private investment, and continue support for the produce rail car pool, which is at capacity.
- Economic diversification has brought manufacturing jobs and power-dependent computer businesses to Moses Lake and Grant County that rely on the rail and air transportation in the area.
- A growing tourism industry touts 35 miles of activity trails in the City of Moses Lake. City leaders are hopeful that a proposed realignment of the Columbia Basin Railroad line will create another in-town trail.
- Big Bend Community College owns over 23 aircraft and offers aviation training for commercial pilots and aircraft mechanics at the Grant County International Airport facilities.

Bremerton, September 2008.

- Surrounded by water and with an economy built on Naval Base Kitsap – the third largest in the nation – and recreational travel to the Olympic Peninsula, Bremerton and Kitsap County have unique economic, demographic and transportation challenges.
- Bremerton Mayor Cary Bozeman blames the state's tax system and weak GMA for promoting sprawl and commercial relocation that has added to Bremerton's decline.[14]
- With the lowest per capita income of the largest 25 cities in Central Puget Sound and no revenue sharing mechanism, Bremerton now repairs streets on a 75-year cycle. Thirty-eight percent of its street segments are rated zero.
- New development and infrastructure investments including a multi-modal Bremerton Transportation Center and a tunnel to divert out-going ferry traffic from the foot-friendly atmosphere downtown provide Bremerton hope for a new future. But continued success – for Bremerton and much of Kitsap County – depends on good ferry connections.
- The community message on ferries:
  - maintain current service levels
  - equitable tolling and fare recovery
  - need to understand WSF efficiency efforts
  - willing to be partners in creative problem-solving
- Kitsap Transit is moving ahead on its own to develop a passenger-only ferry. A new hull, designed to make the trip in 32 minutes, may be tested in 2009.
- "You live your life in our area knowing that you will sometimes be an hour late due to transportation beyond your control." – Ron Charles, Chairman of the Port-Gamble-S'Klallam Tribe

- Four ferry routes link the Kitsap Peninsula to the east side of Puget Sound. Ferries provide the rhythm of Kitsap County.
- Ferries are, in the words of Leonard Forsman, Chairman of the Suquamish Tribe, "floating visitor centers."
- Kitsap County, with a large concentration of knowledge workers, is looking hard at telework as a way to reduce peak-load travel by 10%.

Friday Harbor, September 2008



- San Juan County is almost totally dependent on Washington State Ferries for access to and from the world. For almost all the residents, almost all the time, transportation = ferries.
- The $127 million tourism business is the economic engine of the San Juan Islands. Between a quarter to a third of the local economy is visitor spending, with 70% of that occurring in four months.
- The seasonal flow of the islands makes the official county population of 16,000 a deceptive figure. Many residents leave for winter; in July and August the population triples with summer residents and visitors
- The San Juan Visitors Bureau said that there is a huge disconnect between WSF and tourism. Boats are old, rusty and dirty and the ferry system doesn't know who its riders are. It asked that the state promote the Sidney route between the mainland, Friday Harbor and Vancouver Island – especially with the upcoming 2010 Olympics.
- Friday Harbor wants to reduce the 300,000 vehicles that annually move through the streets in its historic center to get on and off a ferry. Town leaders are working with bus operators, WSF and the county to enable more people to leave cars behind. Issues to address include pets, baggage, parking, and seasonal demand.
- Inter-island business is very difficult; travel from one island to another, doing business, and the return trip can be a day-long adventure.
- Cost – and time – is leading some freight haulers to talk about pulling out of island service. Grocery deliveries have been reduced and delivery charges increased.
- Due to limited opportunities and a high cost of living, the younger population is declining and it is becoming increasingly difficult to hire management, service and technical employees. Some employers are exploring the Nantucket labor solution – workers coming across from the mainland for 4-day work weeks. Nurses at the Convalescent Center already fly in to work.

- Given the importance of the ferry system to its residents, San Juan County is willing to be a trial run for a ferry reservation system, to help understand if and how it can work.
- Sports at Friday Harbor High School requires about 80 bus trips a year across the water. While mainland schools will play games on the islands, most won't send buses across due to cost. Island schools pick up visiting teams at the ferry dock and island families host them overnight.

Tacoma Narrows Bridge

Part 3: Overview of 2008 Work and Activities

• Ferry Customer Survey and Long-Term Ferry Funding Study

At the direction of the 2007 legislature, the Transportation Commission has conducted a survey to gather data on ferry users to help inform level of service, operational, pricing, planning, and investment decisions. The multi-phase Ferry Customer Survey includes:

- qualitative research using focus groups of ferry riders;
- survey research including on-board surveys, a general market area survey, and a freight customer survey; and
- research on pricing strategies and fare sensitivity.

Survey analysis produced a profile of ferry users, an estimate of demand systemwide and for each route, and price elasticities for different types of travelers, including regular users, recreational users, and freight users. The survey also carefully examined walk-on customer use and vehicle customer use. There also was a general market survey of non-users in the Puget Sound catchment area.

A key finding of the survey work reveals that those who no longer use the WSF system, by a large margin, have done so by reacting to changes in their life situations – their work or retirement status and the location of their primary residences. The full survey results appear on the Commission website, **www.wstc.wa.gov**.

Concurrently, the Commission engaged in identifying and evaluating long-term funding alternatives for Washington State Ferries (WSF). The study incorporates the findings of the ferry customer survey to identify the long-term capital and operating needs of WSF, and will examine options for sustainable operations, including service changes, route revisions, fare increases, and the potential for state, regional, or local funding options.

• Toll-Setting and Toll Policy

Tacoma Narrows Bridge. Traffic volume on the Tacoma Narrows Bridge (TNB) continues to be close to projections. As anticipated by the original finance plan, the Commission increased tolls to cover increased bond payments, and continued a lower toll rate for transponder-equipped vehicles as recommended by the TNB Citizen's Advisory Committee. As of July 1, 2008, the basic car toll is $4.00, with each additional axle charged $2.00. Reflecting the lower cost of electronic toll collection (ETC), transponder-equipped vehicles pay $2.75 per car, and higher charges for each additional axle.

SR 167. Single-occupant vehicles equipped with a transponder now have the opportunity to buy a faster trip when the SR 167 HOV Lanes have available capacity. Over nine miles long, the High Occupancy/Toll (HOT) pilot project uses the same ETC technology as the Tacoma Narrows Bridge

and has a variable toll rate to ensure that travel speeds in the lane do not go below 45 MPH. The Commission set a minimum toll of 50¢ and a maximum toll of $9.00.

About 1500 drivers each weekday are now buying into the HOT Lanes paying an average toll of $0.75 - $1.50 and saving up to 10 minutes during peak travel times. The toll revenue pays for operations, maintenance, added enforcement, and added incident response.

Other Tolling Research. An outreach team convened by the Governor and Legislature comprised of Transportation Commissioner Dick Ford, Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond, and Puget Sound Regional Council Executive Director Bob Drewel held 10 public open houses and several meetings with city councils to discuss tolling options for the SR 520 replacement bridge linking Seattle and Bellevue. The team will report what it has learned about when tolling should begin, whether tolling should include both bridges crossing Lake Washington, and the collateral traffic impacts of tolling, to the Governor and Legislature.

The Commission also participated in a Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) evaluation of pricing strategies. Building on the Traffic Choices Study – an experiment involving over 275 households and over 400 vehicles using road use fees that differentiated between time of day and location using a GPS-based tolling system – PSRC is developing scenarios and using modeling to determine whether and how pricing can reduce traffic congestion and raise revenue for new investment.

Toll revenue is essential to rebuilding and expanding SR 520.

• Local Meetings and Outreach

In 2008, the Commission held day-long meetings in Bremerton, Friday Harbor, Moses Lake and Pullman to learn about specific transportation issues in those areas. A common concern across the state is basic preservation and maintenance of local streets and roads. And, the technical help and grant assistance that small towns and counties receive from TIB and CRAB is needed and appreciated more than ever.

Several Commissioners meet regularly with the Regional Transportation Planning Organizations and Metropolitan Planning Organizations in their regions. For part of its public outreach and participation in transportation forums and activities, and before local meetings of the Transportation Commission, the Commission has developed Transportation 101 and other presentations to provide an overview of transportation planning and funding.

• Aviation Planning Council

Commissioner Carol Moser was appointed by Governor Gregoire to chair a 10-member aviation planning council established by the legislature as part of the Long-Term Air Transportation Study. The Council will make recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and Transportation Commission in July 2009 on how to best meet statewide commercial and general aviation capacity needs today and in the future.

• Climate Action Team

The Commission participated throughout 2008 as a member of the Governor's Climate Action Team in developing recommendations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Washington State. Many of the Climate Team's recommendations – such as a greater reliance on pricing, additional investment in transit, active traffic management, and cleaner vehicles – also are found in this Report and the Commission's Annual Report of past years.

• Working Toward the 2011 – 2030 WTP

The Commission began groundwork to develop the state's next 20-year transportation plan – due to the Governor and legislature in December 2010. Regional Transportation Planning Organizations, counties and cities, ports, and transit agencies, all urged the Commission to avoid duplication of effort and continue to coordinate the WTP with WSDOT's multi-modal planning effort. After assessing the current statewide transportation system and evaluating the progress made in accomplishing the goals and recommendations in the 2007-2026 WTP, the Commission will collaborate with WSDOT, local transportation providers, private sector transportation providers and users and the public to establish a vision and policy priorities for the next 20 years.

• Facility Naming

In response to Senate Joint Memorial 8024, the Commission in May designated a portion of SR 112 in Clallam County the Vietnam War Veteran's Memorial Highway.

In July, at the request of area legislators and the City of Arlington, the Transportation Commission named the I-5 172nd Street overpass for Oliver "Punks" Smith, a longtime Arlington City Council member and transportation advocate.

Roads through the mountains stretch maintenance budgets. -- SR 542, Mt. Baker Hwy

Looking Ahead

In addition to meeting its statutory obligations, the Commission adopted the following policy platform to emphasize pressing issues in its 2009 work program.

Operational Safety of Highways

The Commission, in speaking with regional representatives throughout the state, has found that rural two-lane roads need greater focus regarding their capacity and condition. WSDOT data continues to confirm that such roadways, both county and state, are the most dangerous in the state. Capital improvement options are limited for many reasons, not the least of which is the unavailability of sufficient funds. The Commission will continue to coordinate efforts with the WSP and the Washington Traffic Safety Commission for cost-effective ways to finance and address rural safety needs.

There are effective, less costly operational fixes that can enhance the level of safety on two-lane roads with known dangerous locations and segments and we suggest these approaches be taken as possible:

- Increase use of electronic signage displaying the speed of passing cars;
- Add safety warning signs and reduce speed limits;
- Improve traffic throughput in populated areas and give more focus to safety of residents;
- On rural roads with considerable residential development, WSDOT should moderate its priority of increasing traffic throughput and give more focus to residents' safety; and
- Work to improve adequate shoulder space on county roads.

Exploring Alternative Sources of Transportation Revenue

Today's reality involves relatively high gasoline prices, less revenue for transportation, continuing demand for safer and improved transportation facilities, growing maintenance and preservation demands, the associated issue of climate change, and a greater effort to be more responsible in cleaning up and managing pollutants in run-off from our highways and roads. We must intensify efforts to meet these challenges and suggest the following:

- If transportation funding is to be sustainable long-term, we must consider alternatives beyond traditional approaches. A Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) based system in which drivers pay for the miles they drive with per-mile rates varying according to location, time of day, and day of week is a technically feasible approach. However, it appears doubtful that one state can implement such a system on its own. While there are serious political challenges with such a concept in the short term, the topic is gaining interest nationwide and is actively being discussed in Washington, D.C. One possible approach that would allow time for development while keeping the idea moving forward would be to implement a federally funded pilot VMT-based project on the West Coast – perhaps an I-5 "Corridor of the Future" project. This idea is advocated by the West Coast Transportation Commissions.
- Consider imposing a state carbon tax structure based upon vehicle type. Ordinarily this concept would be a long term notion in this country and in Washington State. However, such taxes are being implemented in other parts of the world and should be acted upon in the near future in this state and nation.

- Other alternative funding sources that should be reviewed for application to everything from ferries to road maintenance:
  - Increase vehicle registration fees;
  - Reinstitute some form of a value-based vehicle "excise tax" with a reasonable depreciation schedule;
  - Increase the use of tolling in urban and suitable rural areas; and
  - Explore, using cost-benefit analysis, public/private partnership investments in delivering capital construction projects and how such investments can be employed to help shape our economic and environmental future around sustainable mobility.

Pricing

Tolling and congestion pricing should be applied over time where appropriate, to transportation facilities as identified in the Commission's 2006 Tolling Study. Pricing has been proven to be an effective means to manage congestion, maximize the efficient use of scarce transportation resources, and reducing VMT which carries climate change benefits. Tolling has these effects in virtually all cases in which demand outpaces capacity, including both roads and ferries. Indeed, the recent experience in the United States with relatively high gas prices began to demonstrate the impact of pricing on personal transportation decisions. We must act now to move critical tolling projects forward.

Port of Seattle intermodal operations are critical for international trade.

Economic Vitality

Transportation budget and policy decisions must continue to meet the needs of the entire state and its transportation network. Economic vitality and transportation are directly tied to one another, and therefore must remain a high priority in all transportation policy and funding deliberations and decisions. Economic vitality should be included in statute as a priority goal for planning and funding transportation investments statewide.

Vanpool opportunities are in demand in the Tri-Cities and across the state

Puget Sound Partnership

Untreated stormwater and other run off from paved surfaces has been identified as a primary source of pollution for our streams, rivers and the Puget Sound. Given its direct role, WSDOT should enhance its relationship with the Puget Sound Partnership and other relevant agencies to help develop a stronger joint approach to cleaning up Puget Sound and surrounding watersheds, streams and rivers. The interrelationship between transportation and environmental protection is becoming more apparent and must become a joint venture.

Emissions Reduction

A policy framework should be established that pushes our state and nation to find ways to reduce emissions. Some old ideas need new emphasis and action:

- Enhancements to alternative modes of transportation including bicycle paths, sidewalks, and transit systems;
- Incentive programs aimed at getting private vehicle owners and public transportation agencies to drive vehicles that use pollution free alternative fuel sources;
- Establishment of a national carbon tax and/or a cap and trade program;
- Encourage and support a revenue system based on vehicle miles traveled;
- Provide better connectivity between modes of travel that encourage use of existing public transportation; and
- Provide more passenger rail / public transportation on corridors that demonstrate high ADT by single occupant vehicles, or the potential of high demand given the travel characteristics of those corridors.

Washington State Transportation Commission Roles and Responsibilities

Key Facts

The Commission is a seven member body of citizens appointed by the Governor for six-year terms. The Secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation and a representative from the Governor's Office are ex officio members of the Commission.

The Commission provides a public forum for transportation policy development. It reviews and evaluates how the entire transportation system works across the state and issues the state's 20-year Transportation Plan. As the State Tolling Authority, the Commission sets tolls for state highways and bridges and fares for Washington State Ferries.

- Transportation finance and funding;
- Preserving, maintaining, and operating the statewide transportation system;
- Transportation infrastructure needs;
- Transportation efficiencies that will improve service delivery and intermodal coordination and connectivity;
- Improved planning and coordination among transportation agencies and providers;
- Use of intelligent transportation systems and other technology based solutions; and
- Climate change initiatives and challenges facing transportation.

Current Responsibilities

Washington Transportation Plan

Every four years, the Commission recommends to the Legislature a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan. The plan must be consistent with the state's growth management goals and be based upon transportation policy goals adopted by the Legislature. The plan is required to reflect the priorities of government and address local, regional and statewide needs, including multimodal transportation planning. The next updated plan is due December 2010.

State Ferry Fare Setting & State Highway Toll Responsibilities

- The Commission is the state's tolling authority, setting tolls for the Tacoma Narrows Bridge, the SR 167 HOT Lanes pilot project, and any future toll facilities authorized on state owned facilities.
- The Commission reviews and adjusts the state ferry system fare schedule and adopts fare and pricing policies.
- The Commission reviews the long-range ferry system capital plan and operational strategies.

Ferry Customer Survey

The Commission is required to conduct a survey of ferry customers every two years. Data gathered is used to help inform level of service, operational, pricing, planning, and investment decisions for the state ferry system.

Policy Guidance

The Commission offers policy guidance and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature in key issue areas including but not limited to:

Public Involvement & Outreach

The Commission conducts its public outreach program primarily through meetings held in both Olympia and localities throughout the state each year. Meetings held outside of Olympia focus on local and regional transportation issues and challenges, receiving information from local officials, public agencies, and other entities. In addition to regular meetings, the Commission convenes periodic regional forums to gather citizen input on various transportation issues.

Transportation Innovative Partnerships (TIP) Program

The Commission may solicit concepts or proposals for eligible public-private partnership projects. In consultation with the Governor, the Commission may execute, reject or continue negotiations on proposed public-private partnership projects.

Accountability

Consistent with developing a comprehensive and balanced statewide transportation plan, the Commission reviews and evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of state and local transportation systems. Determinations are reported to the Governor and Legislature each year.

Studies & Projects Completed in the 2007-09 Biennium

- Conducted a comprehensive system-wide ferry customer survey.
- Conducted a detailed analysis of tolling options for specific routes and structures, as a follow-up to the Commission's Comprehensive Tolling Study completed in 2006.
- Held a Regional Transportation Summit to address governance and funding for regional transportation needs in the Spokane area.

Commissioners

Dan O'Neal, Chair

Dan O'Neal, a member since 2003. He is on the Board of Directors of The Greenbrier Companies (GBX), a publicly traded railroad car leasing and manufacturing company. He has owned and operated transportation and software businesses. Dan has actively participated in efforts to gain private and public sector support for improved freight transportation infrastructure. He is a member of the Puget Sound Partnership Leadership Council and the Cascade Land Conservancy. Prior to joining a law firm in 1980 he was Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission. He had been Transportation Counsel to the Senate Commerce Committee chaired by Senator Warren Magnuson.

Elmira Forner, Vice-Chair

Elmira contributes experience in both local and state government having served as a Planning Commissioner for the City of Kent, as well as serving as State Representative from the 47th District. While in the legislature she served five years on the Transportation Committee. Elmira was appointed to the Commission by Governor Locke in 2000 and re-appointed by Governor Gregoire in 2006. During her time on commission she served five years on the Transportation Permitting and Accountability Committee and two years on the Transportation Performance Audit Board. She is presently active in transportation issues in North Central Washington.

Bob Distler, member

Bob came to the Commission with an economics background and a career in transportation management, having worked in marketing, planning, operations and government and industry affairs. He has consulted for clients worldwide, including airlines, railroads and cruise lines. Since moving to Orcas Island in 1992, Bob has been involved with Washington State Ferries and San Juan County government, focusing on transportation and growth management issues. Bob was appointed to the Commission in 2005.

Richard Ford, member

Richard contributes port and legal experience to the Commission. He is senior counsel of the international law firm K&L Gates LLP, and spent more than 30 years in public service, retiring in 1985 as Executive Director of the Port of Seattle. Richard has also served on a number of key boards and commissions, including Premera (Blue Cross), Casey Family Programs, the Climate Change Transportation Work Group - a sub-committee to the Governor's Climate Advisory Team, Governor's Growth Strategies Commission, Washington State Marine Oversight Board, Citizen Advisory Panel on Council Elections, and the RTA Regional Outreach Committee. Richard was appointed to the Commission in 2004 and was reappointed in 2007.

Latisha Hill, member

Latisha is employed by Avista Utilities and brings to the Commission experience in urban and regional planning, community development, public affairs, and economic development. She currently serves on the City of Spokane Mayor's Sustainability initiative as the Transportation and Mobility co-chair. Latisha is vice-president of the Inland Empire Chapter of the American Planning Association and serves on various business and community boards. She has a Masters degree in Urban & Regional Planning and a B.A. in Communications. Latisha is actively involved in transportation and economic development efforts in Eastern Washington and was appointed to the Commission in 2008.

Carol Moser, member

Carol's background as a City Councilwoman brings a local government perspective to the Commission. In addition to serving ten years on the Richland City Council, Carol was appointed to the Association of Washington Cities Board of Directors in 2002, and was a Board Member on the Municipal Research Services Center until accepting the appointment on the Commission. Her primary focus for the Council, however, was transportation. She served on the Regional Transportation Planning Organization for the Benton-Franklin-Walla Walla Policy Advisory Council, the Ben-Franklin Transit board, and served four years on the State's Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board. Carol also chaired the Three Rivers Community Roundtable Transportation Focus Group, and the Smart Growth/Livable Communities Committee.

Philip Parker, member

Philip brings a varied background to the Commission. He recently retired as a Journeyman Electrician and has taught in the electrical apprenticeship program. Philip has represented the Vancouver community on many boards with a recent focus on workforce development and transportation issues. Philip was appointed to the Commission in 2007.

Footnotes

[1] Repair and reconstruction of bridges less than 20 feet pose a special problem for counties and cities – they are ineligible for ANY state or federal money. Although Lincoln County, for instance, has 134 bridges longer than 20', it is also responsible for 80 structures under 20' long bridging drainages.

[2] The final conclusions and recommendations of the Long-Term Ferry Funding Study will appear on the Commission website, www.wstc.wa.gov., in late February.

[3] http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/ABBFA377-46DC-4011-8B8E-A6FEFC982E5F/0/FullDraftPlan.pdf

[4] http://www.wstc.wa.gov/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2008/Feb19/Feb19_BP8a_TollingStudyPhase2.pdf

[5] Leading the Way: Implementing Practical Solutions to the Climate Change Challenge, pp. 52-54 (2008).

[6] Vehicles leak or spill heavy metals such as zinc and cadmium from vehicle wear, catalytic converters and brake linings. Ordinary tire wear and tear generates tons of tire dust annually. Forman, R. & Sperling, D., et al., Road Ecology 204-206 (Island Press 2003). www.wstc.wa.gov/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2008/Feb19/Feb19_BP8a_TollingStudyPhase2.pdf

[7] Remarks of Dan Mathis, Regional Administrator, Federal Highways Administration, at 2008 Tribal/State Transportation Conference (October 28, 2008).

[8] Boeing, Paccar, and Alaska Air Group are some of the most prominent. Our shipyards, though not as numerous as in the past, also play a large role. A University of Washington study reveals that the Seattle maritime industry supports 4,500 boat building, repair, and waterborne transportation jobs – twice as many as Los Angeles and Oakland combined. Seattle's Maritime Cluster: Characteristics, Trends, and Policy Issues. (April 28, 2004).

[9] RCW36.70A.020(12) Public facilities and services. Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.

[10] Tourism is the state's 3rd largest export industry after aerospace and software, bringing in $14.8 billion in 2007.

[11] Crashes v. Congestion—What's the Cost to Society? Cambridge Systematics (March 2008), page 5-1.

[12] Jessup, Eric L., Cullen, Kelley L., Lenzi, Jerry, and Casavant, Ken. All Weather Road projects for the State of Washington: A GIS Application/Analysis, Strategic Freight Transportation Analysis Report #23, Washington State University (September 2007).

[13] Counties continuing to receive $1 million or more in federal funds to maintain and preserve rural roads are, in descending order: Skamania County, Lewis County, Yakima County, Jefferson County, Chelan County, Clallam County, Snohomish County, King County, Okanogan County, Whatcom County, and Skagit County.

[14] In Bremerton schools, 75% of the children qualify for the school lunch program. Of the City budget, 69% is dedicated to public safety.

Photo Credits

Thanks to Alaska Air Group, page 11; Ben Franklin Transit, page 22; City of Pullman, pages 7 and 17; Doug D'Hondt, page 14; Eralee Sawtell, page 18; Microsoft, page 9; P&L Railroad, page 13; Paul Parker: pages 10, 12, 13, and 23; Port of Tacoma, page 4; Sound Transit, page 7; Mark Story, page 14; Washington State Legislature, pages 13 and 23; WSDOT Photo library: inside front cover, pages 2, 3, 5, 7 (C-Tran bus), 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, and inside back cover; Don Wilson, page 22 .

Washington State
Transportation Commission

P.O. Box 47308
Olympia, WA 98504-7308
360.705.7070
www.wstc.wa.gov