

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Meeting Summary

November 14, 2011

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 8:30 a.m., on Monday, November 14, 2011, at the Port of Vancouver, Commission Room, 3103 NW Lower River Road, Vancouver, Washington.

MINUTES APPROVAL/ADOPTION

Commissioner Haley moved approval of the October 18-19, 2011 meeting minutes. Commissioner Litt seconded the motion, which was approved by unanimous vote.

TRANSPORTATION 101-A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF FUNDING AND PLANNING IN WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION

Reema Griffith, Executive Director, WSTC, provided an overview of transportation funding.

[Transportation 101](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

City Transportation issues, Challenges and Priorities

Mayor Pro-Term, Larry Smith and Thayer Rorabaugh, Director of Transportation Policy welcomed the Commissioners and encouraged the commission to visit the new City Library and the new City Hall. Many of the elections were centered on the CRC Bridge, proposition #1 passed and provided a new tax for public transit in the City.

In a letter from the Mayor, Tim Leavitt, he encouraged the continued work on the Columbia River Crossing Bridge as it is vital to the ongoing economic development along the Pacific Rim.

Thayer Rorabaugh wanted to share some of the budget challenges including the \$3.2-\$3.6 million project on the Columbia Crossing Bridge. A major benefit to the City utilizing cost containment involved the acquisition of a larger City Hall allowing the city to consolidate most of the city's employees and functions into a single location saving \$1 million a year in operations and also improving communication and efficiency in workflow. With the budget challenges they have decided to engage the public about how to reduce the budget which resulted in the elimination of 200 positions at the City. The City doesn't currently have any new construction funding for transportation as they are in a position of limited debt capacity and appetite.

The City is very proud of the economic development activity that has occurred including successfully obtaining private investment in transportation infrastructure of roughly \$150 million for the Mill Plain Blvd and 192nd Avenue Center streets.

The City will be investing \$44 million in the Waterfront Access Project in order to receive a number of benefits including reducing delays on the BNSF mainline by over 40%, making rail

improvements, encouraging and facilitating a \$1.3 billion reinvestment in the downtown water front from private business.

Commissioner O'Neal asked questions in regards to the community connector lid and who would be paying for it. Mr. Rorabaugh commented that it would be a partnership but a large portion of the cost would be born by the City.

How do the citizens feel about the light rail across the bridge? There is a group of citizens that have voiced their opinion with having the light rail run into the downtown. The mayor is moving forward with an advisory group to get explore and communicate with the appropriate stakeholders to facilitate a successful vote to raise the tax increase needed to fund the operations of light rail into the City. Supportive incumbents got re-elected and the City Council is in support of the Light Rail and bridge.

Commissioner Haley asked if the City is levying its full capacity. The City confirmed that it is banking the capacity. Additionally, Commissioner Haley asked what the City's plan is to deal with the noise issue from the trains as well as the military's planes and after burners near the water front property.

[City of Vancouver](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

City of Battle Ground

Scott Sawyer, Public Works Director, shared that the city is working on an economic development construction project which is considered a public private partnership. The project is to improve traffic flow with the construction of an East-West corridor improvement in the industrial park. Economic Development bonds will be issued with the responsibility of 25% of the interest expense to be shared by the developer and the City and the remainder covered by the Federal Government.

Commissioner Tortorelli asked whether or not the developers have committed to job creation to any specific job sector. The City believed that there was an element of job creation but unsure about the specifics.

Commissioners discussed the challenges of obtaining funding to maintain and preserve the streets.

Commissioner Haley asked whether or not the city is banking its levy?

Action/Follow-Up: None.

Clark County

Tom Mielke, Chair, Clark County Commission, expressed concerns about creating another board to evaluate transportation funding. To his knowledge the nickel package has not been leveraged nor any projects funded from it. The house and senate keep CRAB and TIB in place as they are vital to local government funding. Clark County has the largest boondoggles of transportation projects.

The Columbia River Crossing will not remove congestion problems. Clark County doesn't have congestion problems, Portland has congestion problems.

Pete Capell, Public Works Director for Clark County, shared that the County faces the same transportation challenges as the City of Vancouver. In particular, the 193rd interchange with I-5 and the congestion challenges in that area. It would be a \$140 million project to improve that interchange. The county is banking all its levy capacity. The county is levying \$1.75 of the \$2.50 maximum.

Secretary Paula Hammond received the servant leader award from the Public Works.

Secretary Hammond noted for the record that the nickel package was for 421 projects of which 357 are completed or under construction (309 are complete 44 are under construction).

Commissioner O'Neal asked about one of the projects which was held to a higher standard of storm water run-off retention. The county had to utilize some different material and creative solutions to address storm water run-off rather than just create another storm water pond.

Action/Follow-Up: None.

The Regional Transportation Council (RTC)

Dean Lookingbill, Transportation Director, SW RTC, provided a high level overview of the RTC and the Metropolitan Transit Plan. They acknowledge that their plan is in transition due to the changes in economic and demographic changes from the new reality of our economic environment.

Commissioner Ford commented on the Regions stepping up and developing plans to explore and address the changes in transportation.

Action/Follow-Up: None.

C-TRAN

Jeff Hamm, Executive Director/CEO explained that C-Tran was formed in 1981 and is the 5th largest transit operating in the State. C-Tran serves about 80,000 in Clark County which is not county wide service. A significant portion of the fixed trips are to downtown Portland. With the passage of I-695, C-Tran lost 40% of its revenues which has caused real cut backs in service. C-TRAN is delighted that its recent ballot measure passed and improved a tax increase for transit services. Of the \$43 million operating budget only 2% comes from state funding. Of the Operating Budget 20% is for special needs or for fixed pickup services. In closing he expressed, in his opinion, transit is critical to the State

Action/Follow-Up: None.

Port of Vancouver

Larry Paulson, Executive Director, Port of Vancouver, shared that the Port of Vancouver has 800 acres of maritime and industrial development property. The Port relies on river, road and rail for modes to transport freight. The Columbia River Crossing Bridge is one of the long term concerns for the Port as the value of freight that crosses the bridge is nearly \$30.6 billion per year. The Port is very supportive of the Columbia River Crossing Project and would like to see it constructed as soon as possible.

[Port of Vancouver](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

Clark County Economic Update

Scott Bailey, Regional Economist, Department of Employment Security, explained that Clark County is in an economic mess just like the rest of the nation.

The Columbia River Crossing needs good high quality transit and transportation needs to be a part of the project. What does a new bridge do for the 5 mile stretch for freight movement? The bridge will create a more free flowing interchange. The extra lanes on the bridge will free up more thru traffic.

The Columbia River Crossing Bridge is vital to the economic activity of Clark County as well as City of Portland. The region is dependent upon having an efficient and reliable infrastructure in place. Companies are looking at the transportation infrastructure as a key piece of information in determining whether to locate in the area.

Larry Paulson, Executive Director, Port of Vancouver, noted that each side of the river has shared benefits of an efficient infrastructure. Freight is a significant job generator to an economy. Generally, freight generators employed in Clark County make up about 50% of the county's employment. For the Port of Vancouver, transportation is the issue that determines whether or not private business will invest in this port.

Secretary Hammond added that the proposed funding for the Columbia River Crossing is 1/3 tolls, 1/3 state transportation funds, and 1/3 federal monies to construct and fund this bridge.

[Clark County Economic Update](#) [Getting Clark County Back to Work](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

Regional and Local System Priorities in a time of Shrinking Revenues

Mr. Lookingbill noted that times are changing. In the 90's Clark County was the fastest growing county in the state. The County experienced double digit residential growth rates through the 1990s which were very predictable and stable. As such, planning for transportation could rely upon stable growth trends. A lot of people depend on these systems yet more and more are unwilling to pay for them.

Commissioners expressed that there is no free lunch and everyone needs to pay.

Pete Capell, Public Works Director, Clark County, commented that there is a greater need to invest in preservation of the current assets we have and Clark County is investing significantly more dollars into preservation of their assets.

There were four things that the C-Tran had to do to address its financial challenges:

- 1) Cut Staff

- 2) Shrank boundaries
- 3) Charge Users More
- 4) Asked for more in taxes

Secretary Hammond commented that one cent of gas tax is 49% less valuable than it was 10 years ago which helps us understand that the gas tax is not the funding answer. We have declining fuel consumption and it's time to do something more bold.

The commission agreed that the person who should pay is the person who benefits. Part of the challenge is communicating who is benefiting.

[Regional and Local System Priorities](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

WSDOT REGIONAL UPDATE

Don Wagner, Region Administrator SW Region, WSDOT, discussed the following three topics:

- 1) I-5 corridor over the last 25 years in prep of the CRC bridge
- 2) Nickel package
- 3) 2005 partnership account

What is built in 2011 and what will be built in 2012 and 2013?

Oregon has come to the table to fund I-5 improvements. In 1997 Oregon added HOV lanes which went so well they decided to add more in 2003. In 2004 Oregon spent \$350 million bringing light rail to the door step of WA. In 2010 Oregon spent nearly \$410 in transportation improvements in the I5 corridor. In total the nickel and TPA brought 49 Highway projects totaling \$970 to Southwest Washington. To date 32 of the 49 projects or roughly 65% of the projects have been completed. This leaves 17 projects with an estimated cost of \$600 million left to be complete from the nickel and TPA funds. The last project will have the ribbon cut in 2015. Generally, the remainder of the projects will be complete by the end of 2012.

With the conclusion of these projects there will be major cut backs in staff with nearly 1/3 of the SW Region office staff being cut. The focus of the cuts will be in the engineering and technical department. Maintenance is a little more than half of the SW Region office staff which will not be impacted.

[WSDOT SW Regional Update](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sharon Nasset, Oregon

501-C3 Non-Profit to deal with transportation projects

Since the 2008 taskforce ended there has only been little or no opportunity for public comment.

Representative Harris

In his area I-1125 passed 70 to 30 in favor. He represents 20,000 voters who have no idea about what level a toll rate might be. He believes there is a lot of misunderstanding and communication about tolling and the CRC.

John Haugen

CRC is a mirage which keeps moving away for the local residents here in Washington. If elected will not allow bridge to be built.

Caroline Crane, local resident

There is a lot of misperception and miscommunication out there. There are constantly skewed facts represented in the newspaper. The traffic jam is not on the Washington side.

Scott Roberts, Evergreen Freedom Foundation

Scott has been discussing with Tiffany Couch digging through the records of the CRC. Scott has some serious concerns about the CRC project and is convinced this project is on the wrong track. He believes that the design is flawed and should be revisited.

Tiffany Couch, CPA and Certified in Fraud and Forensic Accounting

In the last 8 months she has found significant questionable transactions.

Commissioner Ford recommended that if she believes there is fraud she needs to meet with the Attorney General's Office or the Auditor's office.

Paul Greenlee

Shared his thoughts on preservation.

Gerald Fox, Retired Transportation Engineer

He believes this project is about the two DOT's desire to build a big new bridge. He is very concerned about the false claims and changed set of facts. Does not believe an alternative has been adequately considered.

Penny Ross

The traffic jams are on the Portland traffic. Oregon needs to move their traffic. We need more bridges not just a bigger one.

Margaret Tweed

There has been no vote for the CRC. C-TRAN has made several misstatements. C-TRAN has misrepresented facts. No cities have taken any motion on an alternative to the current CRC plan. She objects to how the decisions on the alternative decisions are being made. The public voice is being cut out. She would like to see this get opened up to the public for discussion and vote.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DICK FORD, Chairman

PHILIP PARKER, Vice-Chairman

TOM COWAN, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

JERRY LITT, Member

ANNE HALEY, Member

JOE TORTORELLI, Member

TERESA BERNTSEN, Ex-Officio Member
Governor's Office

PAULA HAMMOND, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL