

# WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

## Meeting Summary

Pasco, Washington

September 18, 2012

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, September 18, 2012, at Pasco City Hall, Council Chamber, 525 N Third, Pasco, Washington.

### **CHAIR WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS**

Commissioner O'Neal opened the meeting with the Commissioners introducing themselves.

*Commissioner Parker moved approval of summary of the July 17 & 18, 2012 Commission Meeting. Commissioner Haley seconded the motion and the meeting summary was approved.*

### **TRANSPORTATION 101**

Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst, WSTC provided an overview of transportation revenue and needs.

### **[Transportation 101](#)**

### **CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, NEEDS AND CHALLENGES**

#### **City of Pasco**

Gary Crutchfield, City Manager of Pasco, talked about the city's rapid growth and transportation challenges. The City invests \$800,000 annually in overlays. Pasco is turning to microsurfacing as a cheaper alternative to asphalt for maintenance.

The Lewis Street Overpass is Pasco's most important project. The road is so narrow that trucks and buses often lose mirrors navigating the key arterial connecting downtown and the eastside industrial area. Lewis Street is also a pinch point for rail operations. To address the problem, Pasco proposes a \$30 million overpass and a two-way downtown couplet to improve traffic flow and also provide additional room for rail operations. Design and environmental review is complete; the project is "shovel ready."

Pasco also has inherited maintenance responsibility for Oregon Avenue, SR 397. It is working with WSDOT to add a turn lane to the four lane road that services the industrial area. The City expects it can add the lane for \$2.5 million with city and port resources. Improvements also are needed in the Road 68 area, in northwest Pasco, due to the rapid growth there.

Commissioners asked whether the city has banked its levy capacity and/or used other local revenue sources. Pasco is banking the one percent. Crutchfield estimates that bonding against the banked levy could generate about \$5 million. The City also collects transportation impact fees.

### **[City of Pasco](#)**

## **City of Connell**

Connell is 35 miles north on US 395 and at 5150, it is the second largest city in Franklin County. Half of its population is incarcerated at the Coyote Ridge Corrections Center.

Larry Turner, Public Works Director, told the Commission that preservation is the top need in Connell. The City now budgets money every year for chip sealing. As a small city, it lacked the staff and expertise to maintain the roads. It had hired a contractor to do this but now relies on Franklin County to do that work. TIB funding is also critical.

*Action/Follow-Up: None.*

## **COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, NEEDS AND CHALLENGES**

Brad Peck, Chairman, Franklin County Board of County Commissioners, noted that Washington State infrastructure is pretty good compared to other states and countries where he has lived and worked. He emphasized that Franklin County – and its road system -- is at the bottom of the funnel for the multi-billion dollar Columbia Basin agriculture industry.

Franklin County Commissioners have shifted about \$265,000 of its road levy (about 8%) to public safety operations. Of the 990 miles of county roads, 85 miles are all-weather roads connecting to state highways. Hay moves all winter long. There are now 15-20 dairies and massive egg farms that rely on year-round mobility.

Guy Walters, Interim Public Works Director, briefed the Commission on three significant county projects constructed in the last three years:

- East Foster Wells Extension, aided in part by \$1 million TIGER II grant and other significant federal funds. It uses a bottomless culvert to provide a wildlife crossing.
- Road 100 Broadmoor Dent Road Extension, reducing congestion on Road 68 and providing additional access to western edge of county
- Reconstruct R-170 around Land Slide Area to improve farm-to-market mobility

Top needs moving forward are additional farm-to-market improvements, roadway safety, and paving gravel roads.

## **Franklin County Roads**

*Action/Follow-Up: None.*

## **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, NEEDS AND CHALLENGES**

Tim Frederickson, General Manager, Ben Franklin Transit, talked about the Public Transportation Benefit Area in Benton and Franklin Counties. In addition to serving Kennewick, Pasco and Richland, Ben Franklin Transit also serves Benton City, Prosser and Finley. The board requires a 15% farebox recovery; 20% fare increases are proposed. Although ridership declined from 2008 until 2011, ridership is up again. The three factors impacting transit ridership growth are:

- Employment
- Price of gas
- Fare increases

BFT is an innovator. It has successfully demonstrated a blended fuel of ethanol, bio-oil and diesel. It is beginning a demonstration of an all-electric, heavy duty, long range transit bus. It is looking at renewable natural gas for transit.

New transit vehicle costs average \$3.2 million/yr.

Over 340 vans in operation make BFT's vanpool service, the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest vanpool operation in the state; it is fifth largest by miles traveled in the nation. Increasing Park and Ride availability and adding equipment is critical to meeting vanpool demands. The vanpool service grew out of inability to take transit buses onto Hanford Reservation. Then, in the 1990s, it grew again U.S. DOE ceased its bus operation on the reservation.

The Tri-Cities has Amtrak service westbound to Portland at 5:35 am and eastbound service to Spokane at 8:57 pm. In addition, People for People operates Yakima to Prosser bus service three times a day. The Grape Line connects Walla Walla to Pasco by bus three times a day.

BFT knows there is unmet demand, especially Sunday service and meeting needs for swing-shift workers.

The farebox-cost ratio at BFT for paratransit is about 17:1.

### [Ben Franklin Transit](#)

*Action/Follow-Up: None.*

## **REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, NEEDS, AND CHALLENGES**

Mark Kushner, Benton-Franklin-Walla Walla, RTPO, described the diverse multi-modal nature of the BFWW transportation system. Population growth has been strong; the Tri-Cities grew by 34% in the last decade. As of July 18, 2012, the Kennewick-Pasco-Richland urbanized area is now designated as a TMA for transportation planning. By exceeding the 50,000 population threshold, the Walla Walla/Milton-Freewater region is now an MPO. It must develop an operating protocol, signed by the Governors of each state, by March 2012.

The Tri-Cities have twice been exempted from the requirement to form a Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) program and continue to implement voluntary CTR work. The RTPO has prioritized all-weather road projects in each county. The RTPO has identified three alternatives in the Tri-Cities for future bridge crossings of the Columbia River.

Mr. Kushner told the Commission the City of Kennewick's priority is connecting and extending Steptoe to Hildebrand, opening the south area of the city. He then introduced several other presenters from BFWW RTPO:

Donna Noski, City of West Richland, talked about the need for state assistance to growing communities with a small sales tax base.

Councilman Phil Lemley and Public Works Director Pete Rogalski reported that the City of Richland priority is the Duportail Bridge, to connect the Queensgate commercial area, North Richland and downtown Richland. It will reduce the need for local traffic to use I-182 to get across Richland. The City has committed \$12 million as a local match to construct this project.

Benton County Commissioner Leo Bowman talked about the transportation needs in rural Benton County. About 40 years ago, Benton County began building all-weather roads and earlier this year, it completed the grid of three N-S and two E-W roads. Now, it needs to improve that grid to modern standards.

Nabiel Shawa, City Manager of Walla Walla talked about the Transportation Benefit District established by the city. Historically, Walla Walla had been spending less than \$300,000/year on paving. With 62% support, voters approved a two-tenths sales tax for a 10-year period. The tax is now generating amount \$1.1 million annually, which helps Walla Walla meet its greatest challenge -- the backlog of unfunded road maintenance work and bridge maintenance. Mayor Jim Barrow added that the TBD demonstrates that citizens are doing their share, when provided information and opportunities.

Randy Hinchcliffe, City Administrator of Waitsburg, talked about the 1925 Main Street Bridge. It is not structurally deficient, but is functionally obsolete. Because the bridge rating is just above the threshold that state has established for replacement funding, it does not qualify for state funding.

### [Benton-Franklin Council of Governments](#)

*Action/Follow-Up: None.*

### **CHALLENGES OF REGIONAL AIRPORT OPERATIONS**

Ron Foraker, Manager of Tri-Cities Airport, talked about the history of the airport, from its beginnings as a naval air station. This Port of Pasco facility now has two 7700' runways for commercial jets.

There are 18 flights a day to Seattle, Portland, Denver, Salt Lake City, Minneapolis and San Francisco and additional weekly flights to Las Vegas and Phoenix by Allegiant. Boardings have grown from 225,000 in 2006 to an expected 340,000 this year.

Planning projections:

- Potential for 757 aircraft
- Boardings increasing 2.8% annually

Growth Impacts:

- Security area
- Boarding gates
- Ticketing
- Vehicle parking
- Airfield (terminal area and extend runway length by 1800')

Airport capital improvements are eligible for federal grants. Tri-Cities airport gets about \$2.4 million/year through the Airport Improvement program. The Passenger Facility Charge can be used for additional improvements. Other revenue sources: parking, rental cars, airline rates and charges, port cash, debt. The risks are project costs and downturn in boardings/economy.

Jim Kuntz, Executive Director of the Port of Walla Walla, talked about the future of air service in Walla Walla. Alaska Airlines is losing money in the Walla Walla market today. It is shifting to using the Q400 in all of its service territory and wants a 10% return on its investment. Alaska Airlines insists that each market must stand on its own. Alaska Airlines has not asked for cost reductions, but the Port of Walla Walla has reduced costs by \$60,000/year.

Congress, in the 2011 FAA Reauthorization, has eliminated the requirement for regional airlines to stay in small markets. The state may now have a role to assist small airports.

Alaska flies to and from Seattle twice daily to Walla Walla; however, it has eliminated one daily flight on Tuesday and Wednesday during the summer.

What are not issues:

- Ticket pricing is common rated with Tri-Cities Airport
- Reliability

What is not going to change:

- Reduced summer schedule
- Two-flight schedule from September-June
- Community business model must accept the realities

Must do:

- Increase passenger boardings
- Reduce Alaska Airlines operating costs

Progress:

- Walla Walla excursion alliance with Holland America
- Wine Flys Free program
- \$250,000 grant for marketing campaign

The US 12 improvements have been a factor in service reduction, as is the number of flights in the Tri-Cities. On the other hand, the vitality of the Tri-Cities Airport has helped Walla Walla recruit and retain new business.

### [Tri-Cities Airport](#) [Port of Walla Walla Commercial Air Service](#)

*Action/Follow-Up:* In Washington, Port Angeles and Moses Lake have lost air service. At some point, there needs to be a statewide conversation on the value of air service to rural communities. Staff will investigate how other states assist small airports.

## **TRANSPORTATION AND THE MID-COLUMBIA ENERGY INITIATIVE**

K.C. Kuykendall, Energy & Sustainability Business Area Manager, Vista Engineering Technologies, briefed the Commission on the alternative transportation work underway in the Tri-Cities. Compressed natural gas and electricity are key alternatives in the here and now.

Electric vehicles:

- Cheaper to operate
- Cheaper to maintain

- Cleaner to operate
- Industry emphasis in PNW
- Strong regional support

Barriers to Mainstream EV adoption are being addressed:

- Cost is still the main barrier, but we are getting close to the tipping point
- EV Technologies education (K-12 and Community College)
- Renewable Energy Storage and Transportation
- Pacific NW National Laboratory (PNNL) Grid Friendly Charger Controller
- EVSE corridor development (Prosser to Walla Walla). BPA, DOE and utilities are helping to fund about 56 Level 2 public access charging stations. The cost is about \$5,000 for each station.
- BFT E-Bus Pilot

Natural Gas Vehicles are the other alternative. Cost of natural gas is very attractive to fleet managers. Waste Management has begun 100% conversion of its fleet. Thirty percent of transit bus orders in 2011 were for NGVs.

Barriers to Mainstream NGV Adoption:

- Technology Barriers
  - Energy density
  - Filling station availability
  - Refill time
  - NGV OEM availability
- Cost Barriers
  - NGV first costs 40-60% higher
  - Revamping fleet maintenance bays
- Safety Barriers

NGV Local Initiatives:

- Valley Transit has operated NGVs for nearly 20 years
- DOE bio-methane purchase and fleet conversion
- Bio-CNG (Landfill gas to Compressed Natural Gas)

### **Transportation and the Mid-Columbia Energy Initiative**

*Action/Follow-Up: None.*

### **WSDOT ISSUES, NEEDS AND CHALLENGES**

Don Whitehouse, Regional Administrator, South Central Region, WSDOT, talked about the accomplishments and needed improvements in the Tri-Cities area. Aside from Snoqualmie Pass, there are few projects underway in the Southeast Region.

The funded portion of Snoqualmie Pass improvement, five miles at the pass, cost \$550 million from the 9.5 cent gas tax increase. The remaining 10 miles of Snoqualmie Pass improvements will require \$500 million.

Night cameras measure how wildlife are using tunnels constructed for passage under US 12.

WSDOT Southeast Region needs for the future:

- Complete 4-Laning US 12
- Red Mountain improvements

### Tri-Cities Area Project Update

*Action/Follow-Up: None.*

### PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul W. Locke said that return on cash savings is too low for people dependent on investment income.

**TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

\_\_\_\_\_  
DAN O'NEAL, Chairman

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TOM COWAN, Vice-Chairman

Not present

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DICK FORD, Member

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PHILIP PARKER, Member

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JERRY LITT, Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
ANNE HALEY, Member

Not present

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JOE TORTORELLI, Member

ATTEST:

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REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

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DATE OF APPROVAL