

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Meeting Summary

Seattle, Washington

May 23, 2012

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, May 23, 2012, at Puget Sound Regional Council, 1011 Western Avenue, Suite 500, Seattle, Washington.

CHAIR WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman Ford opened the meeting at 9:00 am.

Commission Business

Meeting Summary Approval/Adoption

Commissioner Haley motioned, seconded by Commissioner Parker, the Commission approved the meeting summary of the Mt. Vernon meeting with two corrections.

Appoint Officer Nominating Committee

The Commission created an officer nominating committee of the Chairman, Commissioner Parker and Commissioner Tortorelli for 2012-2013 officer selection.

Release of Road User Fee RFP

The Commission approved release of the Road User Charge RFP.

The Commission discussed the possibility of the Commission writing a letter about the impacts to freight transportation of a new sports arena south of downtown Seattle. Commissioner Parker asked that staff draft a letter and email it for review by the Commission and decision at the June Commission meeting.

Commissioner Cowan expressed his appreciation for the briefings and tour yesterday by the port, and asked that any letter limit its scope to freight mobility concerns

Action/Follow-up: Draft letter and email for review.

CITY PROJECTS SUPPORTING AND RELATED TO THE SR 99 TUNNEL PROJECT

Councilman Tom Rasmussen welcomed the Commission to Seattle and offered City Hall for future meetings. Councilman Rasmussen told the Commission he met recently with the Ferry Community Partnership and suggested the state needs to do more for people who rely on ferry service. He also emphasized the need for more funding support for transit to help people move in the city.

Councilman Rasmussen also agreed that it is appropriate for the Commission to weigh in on the statewide impacts of the proposed arena.

He told the Commission that many city-managed projects tie in with the viaduct replacement: Spokane Street, Alaskan Way, and Mercer Street. In addition, Elliott Bay seawall replacement will

cost \$300-325 million. The Council will ask voters this fall to approve a \$250-\$280 million levy for seawall replacement.

Bob Chandler, Assistant Director of Strategic Projects, City of Seattle Department of Transportation, provided an overview of the:

- Seawall replacement, Phase I from Washington to Virginia; Phase II, Virginia to Broad
- Airport Way South viaduct replacement
- Spokane Street viaduct widening
- East Marginal way grade separation project
- Mercer Street redesign and rebuild (50,000 – 70,000 vehicle/day). Waiting to hear on a TIGER grant to fill \$14-\$16 million funding gap.

The Mercer Street project will help the City will meet the transportation needs for the projected 20-year growth of the South Lake Union area – which is now expected to happen in only five years.

Plan is to have the seawall complete by 2016, in time to begin removal of the viaduct. There will be no work on the seawall during the summer due to tourist season. Fisheries issues limits work in the water between September to January. After the seawall is rebuilt, in late 2017-2018, construction will begin on the new Alaskan Way. Alaskan Way is the hazardous materials route and overweight route for vehicles that cannot travel through the tunnel or downtown streets. Higher volumes projected for Alaskan Way in 2030 than today.

[City Projects Supporting and related to SR 99 Tunnel](#)

Action/Follow-up: Revisit Seattle waterfront projects later in the year.

SR 99 ALASKAN WAY VIADUCT (AWV) REPLACEMENT TUNNEL

Charley Royer, Co-Chair, ACTT briefed the Commission on the role of the ACTT. The ACTT will make its first set of tolling and traffic management recommendations in late 2012 - early 2013. Starting on June 27, there will be six meetings leading to Final Draft Recommendations. Beginning in June - July, there will be a lot more to see about the whole waterfront plan, including transportation.

Josh Posthuma, AWV Finance Manager, WSDOT, briefed the Commission on the initial scenarios being tested currently.

Mr. Royer suggested that the ACTT should be looking at “anti-diversion” options and alternatives. There is concern about traffic increasing in Pioneer Square. There is reason to look at the SR 99 corridor as an alternative to I-5. Commissioner Ford suggests the tolling area is too small to maximize the value of time saved.

Commissioners reminded the ACTT that they need to keep in mind that other projects are paying tolls and that they should keep in mind the proportion of state money and local money.

[Advisory Committee on Tolling and Traffic Management](#)

Action/Follow-up: Follow-up sessions with WSDOT Staff and ACTT Staff at July, October and December Commission meetings.

I-405 EXPRESS TOLL LANES – PROJECT UPDATE

Craig Stone, Director, Tolling Division, WSDOT and Denise Cieri, Deputy Director, I-405 Project, WSDOT briefed the Commission on the I-405 improvement projects. The I-405 Master Plan was finalized in 2002, with the EIS Record of Decision. The next phase -- construction of express toll lanes from SR 522 to I-5 and a two-lane express toll lane system from NE 6th Street in Bellevue to SR 522 – is underway.

There need to be meetings scheduled with the Executive Advisory Group. WSDOT anticipates three meetings between July and December.

[I-405 Express Toll Lanes Project Update](#)

Action/Follow-up: Schedule meetings with WSDOT and Executive Advisory Group.

LAKE WASHINGTON CORRIDOR UPDATE

Mr. Stone shared that there are over 225,000 new *Good to Go!* Account's opened between February 2011 and February 2012. So far, 79% of SR 520 trips are using *Good to Go!* (72% transponder, 7% pay-by-plate).

Traffic:

- On SR 520, traffic is at or above projected levels.
- I-90, traffic is up 5-10%.
- SR 522 traffic is up 5%.
- I-5 traffic is within 2 percent of pre-tolling levels. Travel times between Seattle and Northgate a 2-3 minutes slower.
- I-405 traffic is within 2 percent of pre-tolling levels and travel times are 2-3 minutes slower.

Overall, revenue is lower than forecasted. WSDOT thinks that the traffic/revenue discrepancy can be explained by:

- Higher percentage of *Good to Go!* users than projected;
- Timing of bills sent and payments received.

Ron Posthuma, Assistant Director, King County, Department of Transportation said Metro and ST added 130 trips per day to a base of 650. Most trips were added to peak hours. The service enhancement began prior to tolling in Fall 2011. That generated a 15% ridership increase; after tolling began, ridership increased another 10%. Transit travel times have decreased, especially in the westbound PM peak. Service is more reliable.

Park-and-ride usage is similar. Most were full previously and remain full. South Kirkland is adding 250 stalls. Vanpools have increased by 18%. Microsoft Connector ridership has increased by 20% on routes serving SR 520.

WSDOT also is beginning an I-90 Comprehensive Tolling Study and Environmental Review with a \$1.5 million appropriation. The study will look at tolling from I-5 to I-405 for the purpose of traffic management and raising revenue to complete SR 520. The study also may look at traffic management options as far east as Issaquah.

[SR 520 Traffic and Revenue
Transit Update
I-90 Tolling Study](#)

Action/Follow-up: Continue to monitor.

PSRC T-2040 – THE LONG-RANGE VISION FOR TRANSPORTATION IN PUGET SOUND

Mike Cummings, Program Manager and Aubrey Davis, Chair, T-2040 Finance Working Group, shared four strategies that support T-2040's three key programs: Congestion and Mobility, Environmental, and Financial:

- Land use
- Efficiency
- Strategic Investments
- Pricing

Financial Program -- \$190 billion

- Requires about \$64 billion of new revenue, about half from tolls or user fees
- \$98 billion: Preservation/maintenance/operations
- \$28 billion: Non-MTS Expansion
- \$56 billion: Regional Expansion
- \$7 billion: Other Regional Investments

Since 2006, things have changed.

- Backfilling lost revenue with new sources
- Revenue reductions mean service cutbacks, project delays. ST2 is \$4 billion short.
- Tolling on SR 520.

PSRC is beginning a T2040 Update: Topics are finance, growth and economy, congestion and mobility, environment.

[PSRC T-2040 Long-Range Vision](#)

Action/Follow-up: None

SOUND TRANSIT AND THE LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION FUTURE

Ric Ilgenfritz, Executive Director, Planning, Environmental and Project Development, Sound Transit reported a 12% ridership increase 1st Qtr 2012 over 1st Qtr 2011.

- University Link is six months ahead of schedule and under budget.
- North Link construction begins July or August 2012.
- Lynnwood Link groundbreaking is scheduled for 2018; service opens 2023.
- East Link construction begins 2015; service begins 2023 (delayed from 2020).
- South Link (S. 200th Street) groundbreaking in 2013. Opens in 2016.

Groundbreaking to extend further south, to Kent/Des Moines (Highline Community College) is planned for 2018.

ST is developing new Transit Oriented Development (TOD) policies and strategies

- Process for assessing and implementing TOD
- Encourage TOD in corridors and approaching station areas
- Sounder Access and demand policy

ST TOD Examples:

- Korean Women's Association
- Bel-Red Corridor
- Artspace USA – Mt. Baker Lofts
- Catholic Housing Services/Centioli – Columbia City/Othello
- Capitol Hill Station – a bigger opportunity. ST plans to ink a development agreement this summer with the City of Seattle for a 500-unit TOD development

Commissioners commented that ST community engagement appears to be better on housing than on manufacturing concerns.

When ST was begun, the regional buses were considered a stopgap until the rail system was operational. Now, ST is starting discussions internally about the future of the bus system.

Action/Follow-up: None

BULK COMMODITY EXPORTS

Terry Finn, BNSF, told the Commission that nationally BNSF hauled about 200 million tons of coal last year, most from the Powder River basin to the Midwest and east. It powers about 10% of electric generation in US.

China is major coal user globally. India still has 400 million people without electricity – more than US population.

BNSF is currently shipping coal through Washington to Roberts Bank and handing off coal trains to CN to export from Prince Rupert.

BNSF has not received any formal complaints about coal dust. Most of the load settles within 100 miles of the mines; also, the loads are sprayed with a surfactant to suppress coal dust. BNSF also disagrees that additional coal traffic will disrupt intermodal, agricultural, or passenger service.

Commissioners asked about the legal need to address cumulative impacts. BNSF is concerned that the scope of cumulative impacts analysis may affect other train transport, such as grain trains. BNSF is concerned about having to do a programmatic EIS.

Ross MacFarlane, Senior Advisor, Climate Solutions, explained that the states of Washington and Oregon have committed to eliminate coal-fired generation. Nationally, coal demand is dropping and demand is increasing in Asia.

There are six major proposals for coal port terminals in the Northwest:

- Gateway Pacific, Cherry Point 48 mmt/yr
- Millennium, Longview 44 mmt/yr
- Rail America, Grays Harbor 5 - 10 mmt/yr
- Morrow Pacific 3.5 – 8 mmt/yr
- Port Westward 15 – 30 mmt/yr
- Project Mainstay, Coos Bay 6 – 10 mmt/yr

Communities are concerned about the following transportation impacts:

- Traffic from long trains
 - City of Marysville has 14 at-grade crossings
 - Rail bottlenecks and impacts on other shippers (cited in 2006 Report)
- Coal dust
- Additional cargo ships through the Strait of Juan de Fuca (San Juan County)
- Cumulative, foreseeable impacts on other rail cargo

Some commissioners expressed concern that coal shipments will move through the state to ports in Canada or Mexico, with impacts to Washington and no benefits.

Climate Solutions asked that Commission join the Department of Ecology, Congressmen McDermott and Smith, and several communities in requesting a programmatic EIS of coal shipments.

Bob Watters, Senior Vice President, SSA Marine, talked about the \$700 million Gateway Pacific proposal for Cherry Point. It is location designated heavy industrial and designed for bulk export. He talked about mitigation for the impacts of the terminal. He also talked about impacts from rail traffic and coal dust. At full build out, there would be 9 full trains a day and 9 empty trains. The average train crossing time is 4-5 minutes.

BNSF will pay for 5% of grade crossing mitigation; over 100 years ago, Congress decided that local community impacts would not impede rail operations.

[BNSF in Washington](#)
[Coal Exports](#)
[Bulk Commodity Exports](#)

Action/Follow-up: Draft letter for Commission consideration.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Paul W. Locke says that asking people for more money to complete transportation projects won't work. We shouldn't keep borrowing to build new infrastructure.

Steve Sundquist reminded the Commission that Washington is the most trade-dependent state in the country and that the Puget Sound ports are facing huge competitive challenges. From his perspective, BNSF already has capacity challenges, and Washington State is investing substantial sums to improve rail capacity. Coal, a low-value commodity, will create relatively few jobs and use valuable capacity. He sees little benefit to the state from coal export. He asks that the Commission ask a lot of questions and keep the big picture in mind.

Edward Colton spoke to some of the studies on grade crossings and rail capacity he has done. Cumulatively, there are 70,000 – 100,000 daily trips at the grade crossings in the state. He is concerned that using rail capacity for coal trains will reduce the functioning of Sounder commuter trains and Amtrak passenger rail service.

Phil Williams, Public Works Director for the City of Edmonds, noted that train traffic conflicts with ferry operations and the City Marina.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DICK FORD, Chair

PHILIP PARKER, Vice-Chair

TOM COWAN, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

JERRY LITT, Member

ANNE HALEY, Member

JOE TORTORELLI, Member

JENNIFER ZIEGLER, Ex-Officio Member
Governor's Office

PAULA HAMMOND, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL