

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
September 21, 2010**

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9 a.m., on September 21, 2010, at the Omak City Hall, Council Chambers, 2 North Ash Street, Omak, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair Carol Moser, Bob Distler, Dick Ford, Elmira Forner, Dan O'Neal and Philip Parker.

Chairman Moser convened the meeting in the Omak City Council Chambers at 9:00 a.m. She explained that the Commission meets in communities around the state to hear local perspectives on transportation.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner O'Neal reported on behalf of the nominating committee for new officers.

It was moved by Commissioner O'Neal and seconded by Commissioner Moser that Commissioner Parker be elected Chair and Commissioner Ford be elected Vice-Chair.

Commissioner Forner then moved that Commissioner Distler be elected Chair; the motion failed for a second.

Commissioner O'Neal's motion passed with a 4-2 vote. Commissioner Forner then made a brief statement about the election of officers.

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

Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst, WSTC, presented Transportation 101, the Commission Overview of Transportation Policy and Funding in Washington.

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP3_Transportation101.pdf

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Mayor Cindy Gagne, City of Omak, joined by planner Kurt Danison and the City Manager Ralph Malone, welcomed the Commission to Omak, the regional commercial center for Okanogan County, Ferry County and the Colville Reservation. SR 215 serves as the Main Street for Omak, SR 155 – the Coulee Corridor Scenic Byway has its northern terminus in downtown and the City is at the midpoint of the Okanogan Trails Scenic Byway (SR 97). The City airport has a 4,500' runway, parallel taxiway and fueling station.

The issues:

- Replacement of WSDOT-owned Central Avenue Bridge
- Improve traffic flow in and out of SR 215/US 97 Shopping Center
- Safety and congestion improvements on SR 215
 - One-way couplets downtown have been studied since 1983
- Pedestrian improvements between schools, Tribal Community Center, shopping and residences
 - Currently no sidewalks on east side of Okanogan River
 - Possibility of pedestrian bridge below US 97 Bridge
 - Flood levee trail system
 - Safe Routes to Schools Project
- Over 33 miles of streets and roads. Most residential streets have no curbs, gutters, sidewalks
- Maintain viability of Omak Municipal Airport. There is the need to extend the runway to 6,000' to accommodate all current users.

While the population of Okanogan County cities has been static, the county population has been growing. Okanogan County is above 40,000; Omak has 4,800 and Okanogan 2,000.

Omak allocates 50% of its property tax funds to transportation. A CDBG grant in early 1980s provided the city funds to meet match requirements. Omak also is at maximum property tax levies. The sidewalks at Omache Center were built by a developer and required by the City. The City Manager said it would be great to increase the availability of TIB grants and TIB and WSDOT technical assistance.

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP4_CityofOmak.pdf

Mayor Michael Blake, City of Okanogan, explained that the two communities have the same needs. Pictures from 1909 would show how the street system developed. Paths became roads and the old problems linger on today. Okanogan needs to construct real roadbeds for its roads. The City has a great new bridge, no stoplights; there is a lot of congestion at the four-way stop. “We don’t have a box to think in.”

The City may remove the center turn lane to add angle parking on Main Street. Pedestrian movement is a problem even in Okanogan, “We designed our cities for vehicles,” said Mayor Blake. “There is no safe way for kids to get to athletic fields on their own.” The City is trying to find solutions.

Okanogan also has a City airport; it is smaller than Omak’s and doesn’t have fireflow. As the Omak airport gains commercial capability, Okanogan expects more smaller planes.

People don’t feel they are getting their money’s worth from government. We need to explain how much a “standard two-lane road or intersection” costs.

There are some advantages to having corroded infrastructure; it helps the education process. In our city, when we improve a street, everyone notices it and drives on it.

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Commissioner Andy Lampe and County Engineer Bob Breshears highlighted the following issues. (Breshears is County Engineer for three counties: Okanogan, Adams and Lincoln.)

- Regulatory strangulation (we are all up the same creek)
 - Water rights limitations prevent maintenance of gravel roads.
 - More and more funding comes with strings attached.
- Financial limitations. Levy limit has created “involuntary banking” of 36% of road levy, over a \$2 million reduction. Okanogan MVFT revenue is coming in 5-10% below estimates, which were already lower. Okanogan County residents receive \$1.91 of investment for every dollar spent on gas tax. It is a recipient county.
- Local options don’t generate enough revenue to justify implementation. A Transportation Benefit District would generate \$500,000; a \$20 license tab would generate about \$850,000, shared with the cities. A local gas tax would generate \$865,000 and require voter approval. Also, more and more counties need to divert road funds to traffic policing.
- Maintenance of new construction. Repairing new construction sometimes requires special tools and equipment. A contractor won’t come out for just one little job. Only two contractors in state install guardrail (one in Spokane).
- County roads have highest number of deaths per capita.

Okanogan County told the Commission that the state needs to figure out how to tax electric cars so they pay their fair share of the infrastructure.

Okanogan County is using Innovative Construction to reduce project costs:

- Full Depth Reclamation recycles existing pavement and adds cement for a stronger road and thinner asphalt mat
- GPS controlled construction equipment saves man-hours

County priorities:

- Overall stewardship of county infrastructure;
- Maintenance of Safety Features (over a million linear feet of guard rail in the County);
- Preserving Bridges
- Maintaining Pavements

The County maintains a “fair share” of mileage of roads on the reservation. We try whenever possible to partner with cities and the Tribe.

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP5_OkanoganCounty.pdf

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Jeff Wilkens, Director, North Central Washington RTPPO said that the main challenges in the region are:

- The need for a system approach to transportation

- Rural communities will suffer if we lose a system approach
- Low-volume “all weather” county roads are key to the agricultural supply chain
- Improving US 2 through Snohomish County is critical to our tourism economy
- Public transportation in Okanogan County
 - There is minimal service; ongoing interest in forming a PBTA
 - Nonprofits face declining state support; what is the state’s policy objective?
- Lack of 4-lane connection to the Interstate Highway System
 - This goes back to the state’s lack of a growth policy.

The Successes are:

- Via97 International Border Region Coalition.
The City of Oroville Community Development Director, Chris Branch, spoke about regional Economic Development:
 - Trade, Transportation and Tourism are all connected
 - Oroville is halfway between Wenatchee to Kelowna
 - We don’t want a 4-lane highway; we do need some passing lanes
 - We have an Okanogan Trail Scenic Byway
 - US 97 Heavy Haul Corridor. The objective is to increase the competitive position of the Cascade & Columbia RR, and Oroville as an intermodal gateway for international freight. Initially designated to facilitate transport needs of wood products manufacturer, the heavy haul route has now attracted a canola oil crusher.

Why has the economic growth stopped at the Canadian border? Mr. Wilkens explained that the Okanogan Valley is Canada’s Palm Springs. People from all over Canada come there for the dry, warm climate that the US has throughout the West; Canada has it only there. Mr. Branch added that some of the growth is trickling across the border now because the land in British Columbia’s Okanogan is getting scarce. Oroville now has four wineries of its own.

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP6_NCRTPORegionalIssues.pdf

TRIBAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Ernie Williams, Community Development Chairman, Colville Council explained that the reservation was established in 1872. It covers 2,300 square miles, larger than state of Rhode Island and has 9,400 enrolled members, half of which live on or near the reservation. The Colville Tribes is one of the largest employers in NCW.

The Colville Roads and Transportation Program is funded mainly through BIA’s Indian Reservation Roads program. Colville Tribes maintains over 960 miles of road-- 120 miles are paved.

Colville Tribe’s Five Transportation Priorities:

- Maintenance and preservation. \$9 million backlog.
- Safety. Alignment improvements, adding guardrail, etc.
- Economic development. Priority on projects with immediate economic impact. Our economy is based on timber; hurting due to housing construction downturn.

- Inchelium-Gifford Ferry carries 25 cars. Operated by Tribe since 1982, through BIA appropriation. Annual operations cost is \$680,000. Without the ferry, people must take a one-hour detour. It makes two round trips an hour. Long-term goal to replace the ferry with a bridge.
- Transit. Tribe operates a single vehicle transit route between Omak and Coulee Dam, through Nespelem. Leaves Omak at 6:30 am to Nespelem and completes two round trips a day.

Joint tribal projects with WSDOT:

- Added two miles of bike lane from Nespelem to tribal HQ.
- Established a rest stop on outskirts of Nespelem.
- SR 97 improvements
- Omak Bridge feasibility study. It's our primary access to Omak goods and services.
- Keller Ferry on SR 21. Estimated replacement cost is \$14 million.

Tribal transportation funding is directly related to road inventory.

TTPO Program and WSDOT Tribal Liaison set the model for the country.

A letter and deadline is no substitute for consultation. Early notification is very important.

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Dan Sarles, Regional Administrator, North Central Region, WSDOT talked about

- Aging infrastructure.
 - Chip seal is one sixth to one-tenth of the cost of asphalt.
 - SR 155 is functionally obsolete. Over 20' wide curb to curb. Built in 1924. To replace it would cost \$26-\$28 million
 - 776 functionally obsolete bridges statewide; 144 structurally deficient – of a total 3,031 bridges statewide.
 - Narrow roads but no place for bicyclists or pedestrians.
 - Areas without sidewalks.
- Need for Additional Passing Lanes
- Wildlife collisions (largest mule deer herd in state is in Okanogan County's Methow Valley). Loss of bighorn sheep is costly. A bighorn hunting permit costs \$40,000.
- Rock Slope Protection. There is a \$4.75 million project on 97A north of Wenatchee. Statewide, WSDOT spends about \$20 million/biennium.

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP8_NorthCentralRegionalPerspectives_WSTC092110.pdf

RTPO PRIORITIZED PROJECTS

Jeff Wilkens, Director, North Central Washington RTPO told the Commission there are a lot of project lists requested of RTPOs. Lists developed in the last 12 months:

- Top 20
- 2010 STP Chelan/Douglas Regional List
- Human Services Transportation Coordination
- 2010 Transportation Enhancements
- 2009 ARRA (“a complete fire drill”)
- 2010 ARRA 2 (just in case; not used)

A benefit of the Top 20 Project List requested by the Commission is that it is unconstrained.

Other positives include:

- Opportunity to showcase needs
- No constraints on how we prioritize
- May have long-term staying power

Concerns:

- Uncertainty about how list will be used
- Implications for projects not on the list
- Lingering anxiety from ARRA fire drills
- Risk of misjudging the revenue that could potentially fund these projects

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP9_NCRTPOTop20Update.pdf

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul Locke recommended that contracts be open to anyone who can do the work.

Mayor Gail Howe, City of Pateros, came today because she sits on many transportation and economic development boards. Tourism is growing. Just this past week a couple of bicyclists came through; a tent camping site was created for the Cascade-Sierra Route.

Senator Morton spoke of the need to replace the Keller Ferry. He asked the Commission where things stand with finding \$16 million to replace the Ferry.

AGING INFRASTRUCTURE: TRANSPORTATION CHALLENGES IN LOW-GROWTH AREAS

Only about \$4 million in federal funds is directed to NCW transportation projects. If the Federal Government follows through with plans to refocus on priority needs, rural areas are likely to get less.

- WSDOT shifting to lower quality chip seal surfacing on low-volume state highways
- West Monitor Bridge, a one-lane bridge, needs replacement (\$20 million); reconstruction as-is (\$1.9 million).
- Omak Central Avenue Bridge Replacement
 - Built in 1924. Too narrow; won't survive a high water flood; pedestrian safety.
 - Cost estimate is \$22 million.

There is some merit in money silos because no project in this area could compete with 135,000 ADT on SR 520. Perhaps there needs to be a special set-aside for places under x population.

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP11_AgingInfrastructure.pdf

http://wstc.wa.gov/Meetings/AgendasMinutes/agendas/2010/September21/documents/20100921_BP12_InfrastructureTour.pdf

COMMISSION BUSINESS

It was moved by Commissioner Moser and seconded by Commissioner Ford that the Commission send a letter explaining the action on the ferry fares and the cost of delay in acting on the fare increase request.

Action on the letter was deferred until October meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:45 pm to take a short tour of Omak and Colville Reservation transportation sites.

This meeting has been recorded. If you would like additional meeting details audio is available at TVW <http://www.tvw.org/media/mediaplayer.cfm?EvId=2010091006&bhcp=1> . Please contact the Transportation Commission Office if you would like to request an Audio Cd for a nominal fee at (360)705-7070.

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