

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Walla Walla, Washington
Local Meeting Summary
June 19, 2013

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Wednesday, June 19, 2013, at Walla Walla City Hall, 15 North 3rd Avenue, Walla Walla, Washington.

CHAIRMAN WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman O’Neal opened the meeting by thanking the organizers of the Tuesday afternoon tour. He asked the members of the Commission to introduce themselves.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Parker moved adoption of the Port Townsend, May 19, 2013 meeting summary. Commissioner Haley seconded the motion. The meeting summary was adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Parker moved the adoption the meeting summary from the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Tolling Public Hearing on May 20, 2013. Commissioner Haley seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

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

Staff presented Transportation 101 to the Commissioners and the audience.

Troy Suing, South Central Assistant Regional Administrator for Planning and Project Development, WSDOT, briefed the Commission on the current status of the project to widen US 12 to four-lanes. Two portions of the project remain incomplete. Phase 7, which bypasses Touchet and Lowden, is funded for design and right-of-way. Completion of Phase 7 will require about \$120 million. Phase 8, connecting Phase 7 to the Columbia River portion of US 12 at Wallula is unfunded and is estimated to cost \$250 million.

[US Highway 12 Update](#)

[Four-Laning US 12 Phases 7 & 8](#)

[Four-Laning US 12 Phase – Nine Mile Hill to Frenchtown Vicinity](#)

[Impacts to Alfalfa Seed Production in Walla Walla](#)

Follow-Up/Action: None

CITY TRANSPORTATION NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Ki Bealey, Walla Walla Public Works Director, told the Commission there are big challenges prioritizing spending within a city budget. In Walla Walla, the major state and regional needs are improving US 12 and the SR 125/Dalles Military Road/Plaza Way/Tietan Corridor.

The City of Walla Walla at 150 years old has old infrastructure. The city used a 2011 Citizen Survey to identify and prioritize the top 25 roads for repair.

Areas that are critically underfunded include:

- Bridge program
- Off-street structures
- ADA improvements
- Pavement preservation
- Traffic signals – replacement, coordination, upgrades
- Transportation system planning

Opportunities for funding include grants, loans and local funding.

The city's biggest success is starting to deliver local improvements funded by the Transportation Benefit District (TBD), including the rebuild of Rose Street. To follow the progress, click on www.GOwallawalla.us

What can the Commission do?

- Support creation of a street utility program
- Advocate changing the statutory limits for TBDs
- Help find a better balance between funding for maintaining infrastructure vs. new infrastructure
- Consider creating a program to allow local agencies to trade federal funds for state funds

Commissioners asked if economic impact is a factor in considering which projects to move forward. The answer is yes, indirectly.

Mayor Rick Newby, City of College Place, and Pat Reay, City Manager, talked about College Place transportation needs. Transportation is key to mobility, economic development and quality of life. College Place has similar needs and challenges as Walla Walla. Its six-year plan includes items well beyond capabilities. The city has about 40 miles of road and its main arterial, College Way, is an 80-year old road that was once a state highway and now needs a full rebuild: the College Avenue Road Street (CARS) project. It will include 10-foot sidewalks, street trees and will improve walkability in downtown College Place.

Challenges include:

- Funding/Financing
- Bureaucratic burden
- Inability of public sector to timely and predictably respond to private investments
- Unfunded mandates, such as storm-water run-off control, retention, purification

- Local opposition

Newby noted that the Legislature often focuses on the revenue side and less on the side of expenditures and efficiencies. How do we get more out of the money we already have, he asked? He suggests that a project in an existing right-of-way should be subject to less review and fewer requirements than building a new road.

Commissioners agreed that there is room for more efficiencies and that transportation planning needs to be better integrated with community and economic development.

Commissioners asked how the state turns over a road to a city. Staff responded that there are different rules that apply depending on the situation. The Commission oversees some Route Jurisdiction Transfers.

Randy Hinchliffe, City Administrator of Waitsburg, noted that the Touchet River Bridge in Waitsburg – built in 1925 -- has a lower rating than the Skagit River Bridge that recently collapsed. Waitsburg has six bridges on the state and local system. Because only structurally deficient bridges are eligible for state replacement funds, Waitsburg recommends a change in how project selection is done.

Since talking to the Commission last September, Waitsburg has reassessed its design needs for the Touchet River Bridge. The city estimates that a pour-in-place bridge will cost about 2 million dollars or more. A prefabricated bridge could potentially cut the price tag in half to somewhere between 1-1.2 million.

Barbara Clark, member of the Walla Walla City Council, spoke in her individual capacity. She suggested the Commission provide strong support for public transportation and bicycle/pedestrian facilities and infrastructure in the WTP to provide mobility options, to reduce carbon emissions, and to enhance the sense of community.

[City of Walla Walla](#)
[City of Waitsburg](#)
[City of College Place](#)

Follow up/action: None

WALLA WALLA COUNTY

County Commissioner Jim Johnson and Public Works Director/County Engineer Randy Glaeser told the Commission there is tremendous need for additional preservation funding. Preservation is the single most important county road activity. Walla Walla County has 1000 miles of county roads and over 200 bridges. The cost to chip-seal roads has almost doubled since 2007, from \$14,000 per mile to \$26,000 per mile. Walla Walla County requires an additional \$1.3 million annually to meet maintenance and preservation needs.

Rural communities need better ways to compete for funds. There is almost no money for construction. The county's 6-year Transportation Improvement Plan shows a \$64 million need. The federal Surface Transportation Program provides about \$120,000 a year; the new formula in MAP-21 reduced rural funding by 70%. TIB and FMSIB programs are not designed for rural or urban county roads. Through County Road Administration Board (CRAB), the Rural Arterial Program dependably provides \$1.4 million every two years. State bridge funding is also unpredictable with significant (20%) match requirements.

A flash flood in July 2012 caused \$1.7 million in damage to Walla Walla County roads, none of which has been reimbursed. It depleted county road reserves. County staff estimates only about \$100,000 will be recovered. Walla Walla County recommends an emergency response funding source for small jurisdictions to survive isolated, damaging storm events.

There is tremendous pressure on county governments to spend additional money on public safety. Johnson is proud that Walla Walla County has not diverted road funds.

Commissioners asked if the county has pursued additional funding options. Currently, the County has a 4% banked capacity in property tax authority. Johnson said there must be commitment from many entities to improve transportation and communication to legislators for a greater local share.

Glaeser add that the lack of revenue means farm-to-market roads cannot be upgraded to to all-weather standards in any realistic time frame.

[Walla Walla County Transportation Challenges](#)

Follow-up/Action: None

TRANSIT NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dick Fondahn, General Manager of Valley Transit, told the Commission that the AARP is visiting Walla Walla next week to learn and share with its membership how a small community is responding to the mobility needs of seniors. He talked about the many partnerships including the Grape Line collaboration between the state and local transit that has filled in for the loss of greyhound service to Walla Walla. There are now a variety of connections between communities in SE Washington and NE Oregon.

Fondahn suggests more should be done to educate people regarding what transit options are available. Increasing numbers of seniors are looking for mobility options. Google Transit provides public transit directions and connections. Valley Transit has Google Transit on its home page. But the information depends on transit agencies or WSDOT putting the information on Google transit. There is, for instance, no information on the Gold Line in NE Washington.

He noted that the Umatilla Tribe took the lead to build a regional transit website, in which Valley Transit participates.

Follow-up/Action: None

PORT OF WALLA WALLA

Jim Kuntz, Executive Director of the Port of Walla Walla, spoke of planes, trains and automobiles. Although Phase 7 of the US 12 project is in the House Revenue package, it is not in the Senate revenue package. The local investment in US 12 – over \$750,000 has been matched by \$127 million in state money.

Walla Walla is the smallest market served by Alaska Airlines. The Port Commission reduced airline fees by \$80,000 to help keep service to Walla Walla. The port is spending \$2.2 million to repave a portion of the airport runway.

Railex has operated for six years: approximately 800 trains have shipped 5 billion pounds of produce. The venture has removed 100,000 long-haul trucks from the road, avoiding over 330 million long-haul miles on the US Highway System. The port is currently adding \$2.1 million dollars of track to accommodate Railex expansion.

The Port owns 18 grain cars, which were placed in service in 2000. They can be used anywhere in Eastern Washington, but don't travel out of state. The grain cars bring in \$22,000 a year in profit.

[Port of Walla Walla Overview](#)

Follow-up/Action: None

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSPORTATION

Tom Glover, Walla Walla Valley RTPO, talked about the unexpected creation of the Walla Walla Valley MPO, necessitated by the 2010 census. The census categorized the cities of Walla Walla and College Place, Washington and Milton-Freewater, Oregon as an urban area that requires an MPO for transportation planning. The Walla Walla Joint Community Development Agency was selected as lead agency.

While creating the MPO has been a challenge, there will be benefits as well from communities working together more as a team. Another benefit is that Walla Walla County now has more ability to create its own identity separate from the Tri-Cities area.

[A New Bi-State Experience](#)

Follow-up/Action: None

AGRICULTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

Tory Brown, Railex, briefed the Commission on the growth of Railex, which provides 5 day or faster refrigerated rail car service coast to coast. The track is owned by the Port of Walla Walla; Railex leases the cars from Union Pacific Railroad.

Currently there are two shipments a week – Wednesday and Friday with over 500 customers. A refrigerated indoor loading dock allows 19 rail cars to be loaded at one time. A 500,000 square foot wine warehouse and distribution facility just opened this spring.

Railex now carries more than produce: dairy, cheese, seafood, and pharmaceuticals. About 20% of the return train carries products, including imported wine.

Railex plans to begin service to the Southeast US in 2014 and expansion to the Midwest in 2015. The long-term vision is to grow multi-modally.

Jim Kuntz, Executive Director of the Port of Walla Walla, added that Railex is so successful that products are now changing ownership en route. Also, produce is coming to Railex from as far as the Skagit Valley. He suggests there also is room for growth by partnering with the ports for rapid cross-country service.

Professor Ken Casavant, WSU School of Economic Sciences, briefed the Commission on the Freight Policy Transportation Institute at WSU. Peter Tozer, International Marketing Program for Agriculture and Commodities Trade, talked about agricultural production and export trends.

Tozer said that Washington agriculture currently generates about \$8 billion in value, and exports \$10 billion of product, due to value added and production from other states. Washington is the nation's largest or second largest exporter of soybeans. A significant portion of production value is field crops, tree fruits, and livestock products:

- Apples are number one crop in state and Washington is the largest US grower. The apple market is expanding domestically and internationally.
- Wheat is the largest crop by area and export oriented. The value varies due to international markets.
- Milk production is increasing.
- Potato acreage is relatively constant, but yield is increasing. There was a 300% growth in potato products from 2001 to 2011.
- Hay acreage is constant, but yield is up. Production and value is up slightly.
- Cherries production is expanding and growing. Value is increasing significantly and exports are driving the market.
- Corn grain production is expanding and the yield increasing.
- Onions acreage is expanding. They are grown primarily for domestic markets.

Most growth is in fresh or processed horticultural products such as cherries and potatoes. Both crops have limited storage life and need rapid delivery. Other crops still need to get to market.

Jeremy Sage, WSU Freight Policy Transportation Institute, discussed issues with the Columbia-Snake River system and freight movement on the river system. During the lock outage, most businesses planned ahead to ship by truck or rail. Before the lock outage, truck rates increased 4% and rail by 2%. Wheat farmers shipped early or held back shipments to avoid alternatives to the river, but production was 20% higher than in a normal year. Traffic returned to barge in more than average quantity.

The River is not close to reaching physical capacity. Collapse of the Columbia River Crossing would stop barge traffic.

[Railex](#)
[Columbia/Snake River Lock Outage](#)
[Trends in Agriculture](#)

Follow-up/Action: None

THE ROLE OF TRANSPORTATION IN THE MAIN STREET PROGRAM: THE WALLA WALLA DOWNTOWN SUCCESS STORY

Tim McCarthy, Deputy City Manager and Elio Agostini, Director of the Downtown Walla Walla Foundation, talked about the Main Street program and its role in downtown vitality. After the opening of the mall, downtown property owners petitioned in 1991 to create a Local Improvement District (LID). A \$2.2 million investment in downtown improvements was completed in 1993. LID property assessments ranged from \$137 to \$96,000.

Downtown Walla Walla is a community social center. The City recently streamlined the process for sidewalk cafes, which no longer require city council approval. The Foundation promotes tourism and economic development. The city's Downtown Master Plan is about sustainable development. The environment sought includes:

- Pedestrian friendly – tree lighting, flower baskets, street light banners
- Information Center/ticket sales
- Downtown parks
- Public Art
- Transit Center

Valley Transit is part of the success equation. The buses look like they belong in Walla Walla.

The downtown of the future may involve another LID:

- Alder Street improvements (angle parking provides 71 more parking spaces)
- Way finding signage
- Second story living quarters

Conceptual ideas include:

- Parking garage above ground floor retail
- Open Mill Creek channel
- Farmer's Market improvement

The Bon Marche (now Macy's) expansion into the Liberty Theater and the Starbucks sidewalk café helped the revitalization. So did the wine tourism.

[Downtown Walla Walla](#)

Follow-up/Action: None

WASHINGTON'S REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY AIRPORTS: INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL CHALLENGES

Jim Kuntz, Executive Director of the Port of Walla Walla, began a discussion of the challenges of funding regional and community airports.

Tristan Atkins, Director of WSDOT Aviation briefed the Commission on the limitations of current aviation planning and funding. Airports statewide impact 248,500 jobs, \$15.3 billion in labor income. Public use airports generate about \$792 million in tax revenue.

Atkins said that Washington collects – and spends – less money on public aviation than comparable states. In WSDOT's 2012 Airport Aid Grant Cycle, \$4 million was requested; only \$1 million available. Colorado provides \$22 million a year in public grants.

Examples of funding shortfalls include:

- In 2005, WSDOT estimated a backlog of \$163 million in airport essential pavement maintenance
- A 2012 study indicates pavement conditions have declined statewide

The aviation fuel tax (11 cent per gallon) is not paid by the US government or commercial airlines. The aircraft excise tax is allocated 10% to aeronautics fund and 90% to the general fund. Boeing is exempt from the aviation fuel tax for training crews.

Tom Curran, Program Manager for the WSDOT Airport Investment Study that is just underway, explained its purposes:

- Evaluate current funding levels for airport preservation and safety projects;
- Assess short-term (0-5 years) and long-term (5-20 years) airport improvement needs;
- Determine consequences of doing nothing in terms of economic and aviation system needs; and
- Develop and recommend funding options to address airport investment needs.

The study will be complete for the 2015 legislative session.

Ron Foraker, Airport Manager of Tri-Cities Airport, told the Commission that airport operations at his airport have dropped from 94,000 to 50,000 due largely to fuel price increases. There isn't the business that there used to be in general aviation.

Tom Curran added anecdotally that he spent \$1200 to get his pilot's license; he has met students who have spent \$20,000 and haven't yet had a solo flight experience. In addition to the cost, there is not the environment that once existed to encourage young people to fly. He agrees that the general aviation pilot program is in peril.

[Airport Investments](#)

Follow-up/Action: get updates as the Study continues.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul W. Locke told the Commission that the state cannot afford the ferry system as it is. He recommends funding the replacement of the Deception Pass Bridge and eliminating service to Whidbey Island. He recommends only one route to serve Vashon Island. If Bremerton and Southworth service is eliminated, he reasons, more people will use the TNB and help pay the bridge debt.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Absent

DAN O'NEAL, Chairman

TOM COWAN, Vice-Chairman

ANNE HALEY, Member

PHILIP PARKER, Member

JERRY LITT, Member

CHARLES ROYER, Member

JOE TORTORELLI, Member

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL