

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Commission Briefing at WSDOT Eastern Region, Spokane WA
Meeting Summary
September 16, 2013

Chairman O'Neal called the Commission to order at 10:00 am. He asked the Commission members to introduce themselves.

Acting Eastern Region Administrator Mike Gribner and his staff provided an overview of regional transportation needs and projects. He talked about the urgent need for more investment in maintenance and preservation. The Pavement Management System rates roads and sets priorities both statewide and region wide for maintenance and preservation. Of the 3,600 state road miles in Eastern region, by the end of 2015, there will be about 900 miles that need work but lack funding.

Is the proportion of unfunded need in the Eastern Region proportionate to the other regions? If the Eastern Region is 25% behind, is that percentage the same for other regions? Mr. Gribner thinks that Eastern region is second from the bottom. The North Central Region also is in poor shape.

There is very little state money going into preservation. Pretty much the entire preservation program is funded with federal money.

The Eastern Region is working to preserve roads more strategically. Instead of doing a few highways "really well," we'll do a lot "good enough." To date, \$899,000 has been spent on strategic repairs – such as wheel path grinding and crack sealing -- extending project life for at least two years and deferring \$55 million in repairs. Of the deferred costs, WSDOT anticipates that up to 25% could be reinvested into current preservation needs.

WSDOT Staff talked about the need to improve the I-90/Geiger and I-90/SR 902 interchanges to meet current and projected demand from new development. Commissioners asked if WSDOT has looked at right-sizing. Alternatives have been considered and the proposed solutions include roundabouts.

WSDOT also is improving capacity in the I-90 corridor from Spokane to the Idaho stateline, increasing to 6 lanes now and the ability to accommodate 8 lanes in the future. The configuration and lane widths will allow for conversion to HOV lanes if they are needed in the future. Cost to improve the corridor from Barker to Harvard is about \$80 million, including interchanges; it will require another \$85 million to reach the Idaho state line.

The US 195 Corridor is a four lane divided corridor that carries a lot of freight between Spokane and Lewiston/Clarkston. Efforts are underway to better separate highway traffic and local traffic. The Cheney-Spokane interchange is funded.

The US 395 North Spokane Corridor (NSC) is partially complete, with 5.5 miles and interchanges complete. The next area of focus is Francis south to Trent, which is estimated to cost \$240 million. WSDOT meets monthly with the Hillyard neighborhood. It will take a total of \$750 million for NSC to reach I-90.

Anthony Carollo and Pete Rayner, representatives from Spokane's Northeast Public Development Authority (NEPDA) spoke to the Commission about the importance of completing the NSC. The NEPDA is dedicated to the redevelopment of Hillyard, a commercial, industrial and residential area that is one of the poorest areas in the state. Food Services of America is one of many businesses in the area that will benefit from completion of the NSC, moving freight from local streets to the highway. Beacon Hill development, which is permitted to build about 3000 residential units, is using a Tax Increment Finance district to rebuild the Wellesley arterial within the PDA.

[Eastern Region Project Update](#)

Colville, Washington Local Meeting Summary September 17, 2013

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 8:30 a.m., on Tuesday, September 17, 2013, at Colville City Hall, 170 Oak Street, Colville, Washington.

CHAIRMAN WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chairman O'Neal opened the meeting with Commissioner introductions.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Litt moved approval of the July 30 & 31, 2013 minutes. Commissioner Haley seconded the motion and they were adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Tortorelli moved approval of the July 30, 2013 Washington State Ferry Fare Public Hearing minutes. Commissioner Litt seconded the motion. Commissioners asked that the hearing location be added to the ferry minutes and on page 6 a word appears missing and needs to be added. With those changes, the WSF Hearing Minutes were adopted unanimously.

TRANSPORTATION 101

Commission Staff and WSDOT Acting Eastern Region Administrator Mike Gribner provided a Transportation 101 Overview for the Colville attendees. The Eastern Region has 3,600 lane miles. Snow and ice removal is a major responsibility; there are over 100 pieces of equipment including snow plows and de-icing equipment. A highlight of the past year was bringing the ferry M/V Sanpoil into service on SR 21 crossing Lake Roosevelt.

Gribner also noted that five transit operations provide limited service in northeast Washington. Together the programs will provide 90,000 trips in the current biennium. WSDOT grants provide \$2.3 million in support along with \$815,000 in local funds.

[Transportation 101 Overview](#)
[Eastern Region Overview](#)

CITY TRANSPORTATION NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Colville Mayor Deborah Rarrick welcomed the Commission to Colville. Eric Durpos, Colville Municipal Services Administrator, told the Commission that the city has 45 miles of streets. A unique challenge is the infrastructure below the street as well as the street; that is a factor in setting street repair and reconstruction priorities. The city's biggest success is the partnerships that have tied SR 20 into the truck bypass route, with help from TIB and WSDOT. This year, Colville has been networking with Spokane County and others in working to improve lifespan of roads.

Another success is diagonal parking in downtown Colville, which WSDOT assisted with. The city also is working closer with Stevens County, which has provided help with engineering. The state is doing well to keep people and goods moving.

Commissioners noted the success of traffic diversion and separation of types of traffic through using roundabouts to get the trucks off of Main Street. Colville received a WSDOT project excellence award in 2001 for its successful downtown revitalization and diversion of truck traffic.

Chris Meng, Public Works Director, City of Republic, said that if it wasn't for the state routes, his City would be shut down. His grader is from 1959. When it rains hard, water and dirt comes down the hills and lands on city streets. About 60% of Republic's streets are gravel. The City's number one infrastructure priority is keeping the water system going, then wastewater. Mr. Meng plans to work with other agencies to make dollars go farther. Because Republic doesn't need much salt, he hopes to get it through another public agency.

Commissioner Litt asked Mr. Meng if the diversion of the Public Works Assistance Account has impacted the ability of Republic to address infrastructure. He answered that it has.

Ray King, City Administrator, City of Newport (pop. 2185) has partnered with the Transportation Improvement Board on Spruce Street improvements and building a sidewalk connection to the schools. The main route to the school is along the state highway. Very few Newport streets are gravel. It is cheaper to maintain a paved road than a gravel road. The poverty rate is 60.5%, according to the Department of Commerce.

Commissioners asked if Newport is banking its property tax levy. The city proposed a .41 cent levy lift; it did not pass. The City does not have a TBD. Newport works with the Port and the County to stretch resources.

Action/Follow-Up: None

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Don Dashiell, Stevens County Commissioner, noted that the ability to shift road funds to other county needs is not a helpful authority. He agreed that paved roads are more efficient to maintain. The county also has an aggressive gravel road rehabilitation program.

Stevens County also is concerned with the raid of the Public Works Trust Fund; Dashiell perceives the raid isn't the fault of education funding, but the Departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife.

Stevens County allows all county roads to be used by off-highway vehicles. There have been no issues or complaints. There is a need for a greater ability to use the Forest Service (USFS) roads.

Stevens County encourages USFS to open its roads, so people can go from county to county. USFS limits use of some roads to licensed state vehicles, limiting use of ORVs, which do not require a license. Some of the ORV user groups are willing to help maintain USFS roads.

Mr. Dashiell also asked that state administrative burdens and cost shifts to counties, e.g., Department of Licensing efficiencies that increase county auditor workload, be reduced.

A road fund levy shift (\$350,000 about 5%) goes to current expense budget – a big portion is spent on criminal justice programs. Current road assessment is \$1.60/thousand. The property tax does not cover road expenses. This levy shift is less than it was 10 years ago (about \$500,000).

Commissioner Steve Parker emphasized the need for prioritization. The roads in the northern counties require a lot of care for safety and preservation. He is not much in favor of fee-based or local taxing authority to supplement transportation projects. He thinks other programs should be reduced to fund transportation. He noted that Stevens County is fortunate in having good roads and can do so because, “we have great people working for us.”

County Engineer Jim Whitbread commented that Public Works Trust Fund diversion is “brutal,” because it not only supports transportation, but also solid waste programs. The County has worked with the cities of Colville and Kettle Falls to help with road pavement projects.

Mr. Whitbread noted that Stevens County has been strategically patching areas that were in dire need of work and followed up with chip-seal. He commends WSDOT for moving in that direction. Stevens County does more with less; county and city gas tax revenue has not increased since 2004. Once, there was significant timber revenue that supported roads; that is largely gone.

Stevens County costs are \$75,000/mile for a hot mix asphalt overlay, \$500,000/mile for a non-all weather rebuild and \$1 million/mile for a "near" all weather roadway. The County road system is unable to accommodate current freight needs and the rural business network. Regulatory requirements for stormwater and drainage are burdensome and impossible to satisfy with current revenue. Another problem is that short span structures (under 20 feet) are ineligible for grant funding for replacement or rehabilitation. Finally, RCW 36.375.300 needs to be strengthened to prevent suits against counties that operate “primitive roads.”

Brad Miller, Ferry County Commissioner, agreed with Stevens County’s comments and is impressed with how WSDOT is stretching its dollars. There was a year, not long ago, when Ferry County (pop. 7750) shifted the entire road fund to run county government. Today, 70-75% of the county budget goes to support criminal justice programs. Ferry County has 740 miles of roads; only 150 miles are paved, and most are in need of repair. There are a lot of maintenance needs; the County has made some safety improvements with guard rails and reflectors.

Mike Manus, Pend Oreille County Commissioner and Sam Castro, Public Works Director, Pend Oreille County, stressed that counties maintain and preserve nearly half the road miles in the state. Counties maintain more than half of statewide arterial miles and one-fourth of urban arterials and collectors. Statewide county road resurfacing has declined from over 1500 miles per year to less than 900 miles, with counties forced to defer maintenance or in some cases convert surfaced roads back to gravel. Distribution of state shared revenue needs to recognize the significant transportation responsibilities of counties.

Mike Manus noted that in Pend Oreille County, USFS roads in the Kaniksu National Forest are open to ORVs. The Colville National Forest is administered from Portland; Kaniksu is administered from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

The north end of Pend Oreille County is dying due to lack of jobs. If the USFS doesn't increase timber harvest the stud mill will close. Pend Oreille County is spending more than it has for Criminal Justice programs and the sheriff has three fewer deputies. All three commissioners are new; they want to eliminate the levy shift, currently \$300,000 but don't know if that is possible.

Sam Castro told the Commission that he previously worked 25 years in Bellevue and Auburn and that Pend Oreille County has the same problems as other jurisdictions. Since 2008, Pend Oreille County has shifted \$3 million of road levy. Both county levies have been taking the one percent increase; there is no levy banking. The budget is hurt more by the cumulative effect of I-747, which limits the revenue increase to 1%, when inflation is greater than that. In a county that is not growing, there is no alternative but to cut.

Other Pend Oreille concerns:

- the county has over 30 bridges and some are closed due to weight restrictions
- The USFS resource advisory committee hasn't made grants because Congress hasn't appointed members to the committee
- Costs are going up; the state permit to work in a stream or lake (HPA permit) now requires a \$200 permit fee.

Action/Follow-Up: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Tony Delgado, a former two-term County Commissioner, would like to see four-laning of US 395. He doesn't expect to see jobs come to the county. Transportation north through Canada to Port Rupert could save the NEW economy if a natural disaster closes the Port of Seattle.

Senator John Smith thanked the Commission for coming to Colville. People at the ground level are solving the problems; local county and city staff are doing the best they can with what they have. There are some good things happening in transportation in the 7th District.

Senator Smith said that in 2012, WSDOT wasted \$600 million on avoidable mistakes. He thinks that moving forward, whether routine maintenance or new construction, requires addressing problems at WSDOT. Washington is not competitive with the rest of the nation. He said that Washington needs to start looking at Canada as a trade partner, not a trade competitor. Because there is not enough money in the state to accommodate the free-flow of traffic sought by the Puget Sound ports, Washington should improve an Eastern WA north-south corridor.

Rod Van Allen, Rural Resources Community Action, said that human services transportation is a big challenge; the aging population grows, but funding is stagnant. His agency is not a transit authority, so it relies on grants. Some of the solutions that work in western Washington don't work in northeast Washington.

William Pifer, Colville resident, would like the Commission to phase out studded tires. US 395 is rutted and hydroplaning is a problem. To him, highways are less safe due to studded tires.

Commissioners noted that the Commission has recommended phasing out studded tires but in that area legislators are not supportive.

Action/Follow-Up: None

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSPORTATION

Rob Willford, Director of Northeast Washington (NEW) RTPO, explained that NEW RTPO is administered by the Tri County Economic Development District. The region is growing much more slowly than the state and is aging quickly. All three counties are distressed counties, with unemployment over 9.5%. Young people are leaving and the resource-based economy is not growing. The region has 6% tribal population, compared to 2.8% statewide. In Ferry County, tribal population exceeds 17%. The distressed counties have unique, and cumulative, needs.

Significant portions of the regional workforce, including 43% of the Pend Oreille County workers, leave the county for work. Willford notes that the WSDOT's Gray Notebook does not address Economic Vitality and it needs to be measured. Also, he noted that NEW RTPO should not be lumped together with Central WA or Spokane for economic analysis.

WSDOT is not collecting enough data on freight movement in the area – neither the cities, the county, nor RTPO have the capacity. The Washington Trucking Association 2007 survey identifies narrow curves and bridges that impede freight movement.

NEW Economic Vitality Policies:

- Community Economic Development, including growing small, home-grown businesses
- Investing in the freight transportation network
- Scenic byways

Key regional issues:

- Flowery Trail Road needs to be all-weather road
- Public transportation
- US 395 improvements
- General aviation airports
- Bike/pedestrian routes
- Rail infrastructure is threatened
- US 395 Kettle falls bridge is deficient
- Challenges with Canadian border crossings

NEW RTPO

Action/Follow-Up: Commission Staff will follow-up with WSDOT and inquire why the Gray Notebook does not measure economic vitality.

TRIBAL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Kalispel Transit (KT) now carries 13 - 14,000 passengers a year. It connects with other regional transit services, with the exception of the Gold Line.

Although Kalispel is part of the NEW RTPO and the Spokane Regional Transportation Council, it has challenges with partnering as an equal player with the RTPOs. The Human Services Transportation Planning is not working well. Across the state, tribes are having difficulty working with RTPOs. Tribes would like a dialogue about what is working and what is not.

The Kalispel partnership with Spokane Transit Authority (STA) is a success; it has contributed about \$180k over the last few years. The partnership helps to maintain a route into north Spokane and to Kalispel Reservation. KT has four round trips into Spokane and Saturday service; ridership is improving. About 95% of KT trips carry non-tribal members. There is a route from Kalispel to Airway Heights to Spokane Reservation; it covers 180 miles. The Colville Tribe would like to join in.

Frank Metlow, interim planning director for the Spokane Tribe, said that the Spokane Tribe operates two 40 passenger vans on the reservation, provides a Friday trip to Airway Heights, and has a paratransit vehicle.

Of 416 miles of roads on the reservation, 205 miles are paved. The Bureau of Indian Affairs funding for road maintenance is adequate, but more cooperation with Stevens County is sought on road maintenance.

Spokane Tribe transportation priorities are:

- Safety (crosswalks, sidewalks)
- West End paving projects
- 57 miles of county roads require collaboration
- County roads on the reservation seem to be a low priority for winter maintenance
- Requests more coordination with county on road improvements
- Clean-up of Midnight Mine will have dump trucks through Wellpinit every two minutes

The Tribe has proposed a casino and other economic development for US 2 in Airway Heights.

Commissioners asked whether the tribal fuel tax is used for other items besides roads and transit?
No.

[Spokane Tribe Transportation](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None

PORT OF PEND OREILLE VALLEY

Kelly Driver, Manager, Port of Pend Oreille Valley (POVA) explained that the Port District was created in 1979, when the Milwaukee Railroad pulled out. The Port relies solely on railroad revenue; there is no property tax levy. In 1998, POVA negotiated a lease with BNSF; there is now a connection to Sandpoint, Idaho. Pend Oreille Newsprint needs the railroad; other shippers are in Idaho. POVA also operates a tour train.

The railroad is struggling. In 2006, carload shipments dropped from 6000 to 2000 a year. Line from Usk to Ione needs \$4-5 million improvement to haul freight. The locomotive dates to 1959.

Ms. Driver said the WSDOT grant scoring system “stinks.” Funding is needed to upgrade a failing tunnel where clearance has dropped from two feet to five inches. Commissioners asked why the railroad won’t charge higher rates to raise the money it needs; at higher rates, the shipments will move to truck.

Action/Follow-Up: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul W. Locke said that he has “been fighting the ferry system for years.” He argues that the ferry system needs to be smaller and several routes eliminated. He estimates that only 20% of his license fee actually goes to repair roads; a lot goes to Sound Transit.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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