

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Kirkland, WA

I-405 Kickoff Meeting

November 20, 2013

Vice Chairman Cowan opened the meeting and asked Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves.

I-405 PROJECT UPDATE

Craig Stone, WSDOT Assistant Secretary for the Toll Division, briefed the Transportation Commission on the history of the I-405/SR 167 corridor and the Executive Advisory Committee (EAG). A 2002 I-405 Master Plan calls for two new lanes in each direction, a 50% increase in transit service and significant investment in park and ride access and vanpools.

In 2009-10, the Executive Advisory Group issued principles designed to:

- optimize freeway performance
- leverage toll revenue to maximize corridor improvements
- develop a 10-year strategy for a 40+ mile system, including express toll lanes
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The 10-year strategy begins with construction of express toll lanes from Lynnwood to Bellevue. They are scheduled to open in 2015. The Bellevue to Renton segment and I-405/SR 167 connector is not funded.

[I-405 Executive Advisory Group](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Keep EAG informed of continuing Commission discussions and actions on I-405 toll rate setting.

I-405 EXECUTIVE ADVISORY GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Advisory Group has recommended that transit 3+ carpools can travel free during peak travel times and that 2+ carpools travel free off-peak.

Executive Advisory Group members spoke directly to the Commission.

Mayor Joan McBride presented the recommendations and the rationale behind them.

Fred Butler spoke on behalf of Sound Transit. Included in their recommendations, they ask that transit service be eligible to receive toll revenue.

Rich Crispo, Mayor of Newcastle, explained that “it is important to try to do something.” He urged the Commission reward people who are already doing their part to reduce congestion.

Kevin Wallace, Bellevue City Council, spoke how important it is to get the I-405 project off the ground. The 2+, 3+ option is unanimously supported on the Bellevue Council and the eastside communities. Because it doesn't look like a viable source for bonding, he suggested the state look at the toll revenue as a supplement to the gas tax funding.

Action/Follow-Up: Keep EAG informed of continuing Commission discussions and actions on I-405 toll rate setting.

I-405 FUNDING AND PHASING DRAFT FINDINGS

Kim Henry and Denise Cieri, I-405/SR167 Project Office, WSDOT presented Draft Findings on I-405 Funding and Phasing. The HOV system, on which over \$2 billion has been invested is currently experiencing breakdowns. Lanes should operate at 45 mph 90% of the time. Many do not meet this standard during peak hours, resulting in increased transit service costs and lack of reliability.

The Legislature has directed that Express Toll Lanes must generate enough revenue to pay for their operating costs within two years. The EAG looked at a variety of tolling scenarios, which subsequently were modeled for performance and revenue. Options considered included:

- 3+ carpool free
- 2+ carpool free
- 3+ carpool free peak/2+ carpool free off-peak
- carpool discount

Commissioners asked how the EAG reached decision to recommend 3+ carpools. What does the modeling for the Express Toll Lanes (ETL) show? What does the modeling show for the operation of General Purpose lanes?

Other options were considered, including carpool discounts. Modeling indicated better speeds during the peak hour and a shortening of the peak period. At the time of opening, modeling indicated about a \$2.30 average.

Commissioners asked how WSDOT expects people will change behavior.

There is little data to show how people will behave when carpool designation goes from 2 to 3. Focus groups here and experience elsewhere have indicated that it will be difficult to form a three-person carpool.

Why don't people take transit? Reliability. Inadequate service.

What level of transit service was used in the model? Sound Transit is looking at more Bus Rapid Transit service. Transit is currently experiencing congestion in the HOV lanes up to 10 am.

Have any Express Toll Lanes facilities bonded against toll revenue? There is some experience with SR 91 in Florida. There is not a lot of experience, which is a concern to the treasurer.

Commissioners noted the existing diversion from I-405 to city streets and wondered whether I-405 expansion will fill up with those cars. Kim Henry responded that WSDOT assumes those cars will return to I-405. He agreed that we can't build our way out of congestion but that the state needs to do better and provide more travel opportunities. We need a balanced system.

Did you discuss using toll revenue to support transit? No. Transit agencies recognize we need to make the facility improvements and then talk about how to improve transit.

Will there be a greater tendency for people to cheat up to three than to cheat up to two? WSDOT has the same concern. The State Patrol thinks that it can handle the smaller number of cars.

[I-405 Funding and Phasing Draft Findings](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Continue to review and discuss carpool policies and other I-405 Express Toll Lane operational issues.

I-405 RATE SETTING KICKOFF

Mr. Stone set out the proposed schedule and the policy considerations the Commission will want to consider.

Commissioners asked whether the additional revenue from offering a photo tolling option is worth the additional cost? Stone answered that the choice is between photo tolling or photo enforcement.

Doesn't photo tolling make it more challenging for the State Patrol to enforce? Stone thinks it will be easier – State Patrol will only be watching for transponder signaled cars with carpools.

Commissioners are concerned about customer experience:

- applying for a Good to Go pass
- availability of transit
- simplicity and transparency
- enforcement and compliance
- equity

[Rate Setting Process & Policies](#)

Action/Follow-Up: Continue to review and discuss carpool policies and other I-405 Express Toll Lane operational issues. Check with WSP regarding enforcement challenges with recommended 3+ and 2+ carpool options. Begin rulemaking in December.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Sonny Putter, former mayor and councilmember from Newcastle and EAG member from 2000-2011 feels very strongly the system should move to 3+ as quickly as possible.

- most other facilities around the country get most revenue from 3+ peak
- use dynamic pricing to change behavior

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Absent

DAN O'NEAL, Chairman

TOM COWAN, Vice-Chairman

ANNE HALEY, Member

PHILIP PARKER, Member

Absent

JERRY LITT, Member

CHARLES ROYER, Member

JOE TORTORELLI, Member

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL