WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Local Meeting Summary
Pullman Washington
April 16, 2014

Chairman O'Neal opened the meeting at 9:00 am with Commissioner introductions. The Commission observed a moment of silence in memory of Commissioner Parker

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Cowan moved adoption of Resolution No. 718 in honor of Commissioner Parker. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Haley and it was adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Haley moved adoption of the March 18 & 19, 2014 meeting summary. Commissioner Litt seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Tortorelli made a motion to change the November meeting in Lakewood from November 18 to November 19. Commissioner Litt seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Haley moved that the Commission meet with the California Transportation Commission in San Jose on August 19, 2014. Commissioner Tortorelli seconded the motion and it was adopted.

Staff briefed the Commission on the status of toll revenue and traffic on the SR 520 Bridge. Staff recommended the Commission increase toll rates consistent with Commission action in 2011, which enacted toll rates and a planned annual 2.5% toll increase for the next four years.

Commissioner Haley moved the Commission adopt the anticipated 2.5% increase and adopt a new toll rate table, with rounded rates. Commissioner Tortorelli seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously.

Adopt SR 520 Toll Rate Schedule

Action/Follow-Up: None.

TRANSPORTATION 101 – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TRANSPORTATION IN WASHINGTON

Paul Parker, Deputy Director, WSTC presented Transportation 101 an overview of transportation in Washington State.

Transportation 101

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Mayor Glenn Johnson welcomed the Commission to Pullman. The City has 66 miles of roads and 55 miles of trails. The Public Works Trust Fund (PWTF) has been a great fund source in the past and it needs to be restored. The low-interest loans are important for city and county infrastructure.

Pullman has four main hills and two state highways. Almost all vehicular traffic moves through downtown Pullman. A long-planned north bypass around the city, for which WSDOT acquired right-of-way in the 1970s, is no longer in the state long-range plan.

Pullman's transportation challenges are:

1. Downtown congestion. Ring roads are being studied and some have been built.
2. Americans with Disabilities Act transition plan. Topography is a huge challenge.
3. Street maintenance cannot keep up with deterioration. The city transportation budget has been cut from $600,000/yr to $300,000/yr.
4. About half the WSU employees come from outside Pullman.
5. Pullman is a border city and wants to remain competitive with Idaho.

Successes:

- Grind and mix repair.
- Pedestrian and bike trails. Discussions on a Pullman to Colfax rails-to-trails project have begun.
- The City is using its full levy and the property tax was reset at the full amount.
- Bishop Boulevard has become a key commercial arterial. It now needs widening from 3 to 5 lanes.
- The Transportation Improvement Board (TIB), WSDOT Surface Transportation Program and WSDOT Bridge Preservation are critical funding partners.
- Pullman Transit has been in operation for 35 years. It has 48 employees and 19 buses. Since 1991, a prepaid fare program enables WSU students and faculty to use the system without fare payment. WSU student fees and parking fees contribute over $1.7 million annually to Pullman Transit. Today, 85% of ridership is students and transit use is expected to grow as WSU moves to a more pedestrian-friendly campus.

  Funded by a 2% utility tax, Pullman Transit is the only system in the state funded in that way.

- Pullman transit needs to replace five buses, ranging from 17 to 22 years old. New hybrid buses cost over $650,000 and standard diesel buses cost over $400,000. Although Pullman Transit cannot purchase new buses without grant assistance, USDOT has eliminated discretionary grants for small transit systems. The state only has a small amount of money available to purchase buses.
- The state mandate that public transit systems, "where practicable," convert to alternative fuels by July 1, 2018 will be very difficult to implement. It is feasible to switch to bio-fuel in the warmer months of the year, but bio-fuel gels in the winter cold when the transit system faces high demand. Electric buses are very expensive and there is no CNG supplier in the area; conversion to CNG probably would require Pullman Transit to build a filling station.

Commissioner Royer asked about legislative support for transit. Commissioner Haley mentioned that ferry riders pay a $0.25 cent surcharge per ticket for capital acquisitions; has it been considered by transit systems?

Mayor Todd Vanek, City of Colfax, also stressed the importance of TIB and the PWTF. Colfax has a small population and tax base with a large volume of state traffic. Issues traveling through Colfax include:

- pedestrian safety
- traffic flow
- bridges

Three primary challenges are:

- 6th Street Bridge is too narrow
- Main Street/Thorn Street Intersection is dangerous
- SR 26/US 195 intersection needs to be rebuilt for constant flow, pedestrian safety, welcoming, traffic control

Another major concern is the rail crossing over the Palouse River that students use as a shortcut.

Vanek also raised examples of communication problems with WSDOT:

- Thorn Street intersection
- Installation and failure of drainage ditch. Colfax sent a bill that WSDOT would not pay.
- SR 26/US 195 intersection

Colfax is raising its full one percent in property tax levy. It has not considered a TBD.

Glen Wagemann, WSDOT responded to the drainage ditch issues. He told the Commission that the culvert had iced and that the third failure, characterized as an Act of God, brought rocks and debris into the city that WSDOT had not placed. Andy Rogers, Colfax Director of Public Works rebutted the WSDOT response and provided the Commission with a binder detailing Colfax transportation needs.

Pullman Transit
Pullman Arterial Plan
City of Colfax

Action/Follow-Up: None.

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Whitman County Commissioner Dean Kinzer talked about the importance of the transportation system to Whitman County's economy. Whitman County has about 1900 centerline miles, of which 1100 are gravel roads and 400 miles seasonal dirt roads. It spent $5.5 million on maintenance in 2013.

Times have changed in farming; equipment has gotten much bigger; the wheelbase on a combine can be up to 22 feet wide and headers are too large to move on the road. One county sheriff deputy is assigned to enforce road weight and safety limits. The average wheat truck is licensed for 80,000 to 105,000 lbs. gross.

The top priority for the County Engineer is road preservation funding. He also recommends that state funding be more equitably distributed to local governments. SR 194 – a major grain transport route to the Snake River -- is in desperate need of repair and maintenance. Commissioner Tortorelli indicated that grain movement is not included in state freight mobility plan.

The county has been removing trees from county right-of-way to improve safety and reduce liability.

Whitman County recommends the state consider ways to swap local STP and MAP-21 funds with state to provide counties and cities additional flexibility on funding.

Prevailing wage and charging sales tax on construction add to project costs.

Commissioners noted the changes in farming and the impacts on local communities. Back when Kinzer was a kid, the average farm was about 500 acres and most farms included livestock. It took a whole family to run a farm. Now one family can run several farms. Towns in the rural area are getting smaller.

Action/Follow-Up: None.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Glen Wagemann, Program Manager for the WSDOT Eastern Region, told the Commission that in the 2014 construction season, WSDOT is spending $59 million on 13 projects.

WSDOT's greatest challenge is keeping what is already in place. WSDOT is doing pavement repair and chip-sealing on SR 194 to Almota. It is meeting with grain haulers, the port and barge lines to discuss how to keep SR 194 in good condition. A full rebuild would cost $12-15 million.

Commissioner Haley asked if the Eastern Region must compete for preservation money within WSDOT. Each region has been provided preservation funds out of the P1funds program, the amount is based on what they need to do. Other preservation money is programmed from Olympia and each Regional Administrator has a discretionary fund for emergent issues.

Unfunded needs WSDOT is pursuing in the region:

- Passing and climbing lanes on SR 26
- Passing lanes on US 195
- Barrier and Sidewalk Replacement on SR 26 spur bridge in Colfax

Marshall Doak, Executive Director of Palouse RTPO and Executive Director of the Southeast WA Economic Development Association, explained that the dual responsibilities of his position helps to tie transportation and economic development in the region.

Palouse RTPO coordinated a Safe Routes to Schools project for 18 school districts in 4 counties.

The issues in this region stem from being rural. The needs are greater than the population can manage. While the population is small, there is a huge need for multiple modes of transportation. Siltation of the river system is a small problem in the context of the entire state, but a huge problem for this region. Railroads also are hugely important and require many dollars of investment.

Regional population is growing at only 0.5% per year. Look at the triple bottom line for funding projects: economic, social and environmental benefits. It will be interesting to see how WSDOT reorganization and creation of an Assistant Secretary for Community and Economic Development will impact decisions.

The WSU Stadium expansion is bringing more RVs to events and there is nowhere for them to park. In Asotin County, the big project is the Fleshmann Bridge. A road realignment project in Tekoa requires state grant funds to move forward.

Eastern Region Facts

Action/Follow-Up: None.

PORT ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

The first shipments of grain by river were shipped from Whitman County in 1883. From 1945-50, rail infrastructure development stopped. Three different rail operators in the region now operate the PCC Rail System, 300 miles of rail line spanning four counties. WSDOT owns the system and does the engineering; the four county governance board includes Whitman County Port Commissioner Tom Kamerzell.

Full development of the Columbia-Snake River System provided a cost-effective shipping alternative to rail, but the continued existence of the river system is threatened due to environmental pressures and the rising cost and complexity of maintaining an aging lock and dam infrastructure. Three barges carry the same amount of wheat as a unit train.

The grain train program pays for itself and needs expansion beyond the current 100 cars. The program:

- moves Washington-grown products reliably and efficiently
- generates revenue that helps to support short-line railroads
- reduces wear and tear on roads and improves air quality

If a unit train can be assembled, UP or BNSF will pull them.

Commissioner Royer asked why the state needs to buy rail cars. The answer is that the railroads are keeping inventory low, making money on coal and oil, and other states are providing cars to move agricultural products.

Port of Whitman County

Action/Follow-Up: None.

MAJOR EMPLOYERS' TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Bill Gardner, Executive Director of Public Safety, WSU noted that WSU loves the Palouse, but needs to be connected to the world. The Pullman campus has 19,000 students; there are 27,000 in the statewide system. Most students get to and from Pullman in cars. Pullman Transit is vital to WSU and the town. The airport is critical for faculty access to the world. Improved connectivity between Spokane and Seattle would also help.

There are a couple of vanpools operating between Spokane and Pullman.

WSU has tried two things to reduce accidents on SR 26:

- freshmen arrive a week early – it spreads out the volume of travel on two-lane roads and avoids hard deadlines
- message signs are posted outside Colfax and farther on SR 26 to calm travel anxiety

There is a reduction the last two years in students driving cars. It is now common for students to arrive without licenses.

People are clamoring for more Green Bikes than WSU can provide. WSU is trying to get some located in town. Zip cars are very popular, especially with foreign students. There is a desire to merge Zipcar with Zimdrive to enable carpools to the west side.

Action/Follow-Up: None.

AGRICULTURAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Ken Casavant, Director, Freight Policy Transportation Institute, WSU and Jeremy Sage, Assistant Director, Freight Policy Transportation Institute, WSU briefed the Commission on current research projects, including:

- Infrastructure investment impacts on international trade and modal choice.
- Short line rail study
- Oil, coal, agriculture and AMTRAK

The Freight Policy Transportation Institute has looked at the cost of weather induced closures on Washington Roadways. WSDOT has cooperated with the Washington State Patrol's Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Officers (CVEOs) and Lion's Club Crews working around the clock performing 3-5 minute questionnaires with the drivers. The projected collected between 150-700 surveys per survey day. Of the trucks stopped, 90-95% responded to the survey, which takes 3-5 minutes.

Dick Hatterman, General Manager of Co-Ag talked about the importance of wheat production to the local economy. In 2009, Whitman and Spokane County farmers grew over 31 million and 8 million bushel of wheat. Idaho counties in the Palouse grew an additional 10 million bushels in 2010. Other crops include barley and pulse crops:

- peas
- lentils
- garbanzos

Co-Ag stores and ships wheat from its elevators throughout the Palouse, including the McCoy Grain Terminal near Rosalia, which can load 60,000 bushels an hour into rail cars. Hatterman told the Commission there is more value in improving other transportation modes than investing in more all-weather roads.

Alex McGregor spoke on behalf of the McGregor Company about the needs of agriculture. Ag exports have doubled in the past decade. Agriculture is the largest employer in the state.

- 11million tons by barge
- 102 million tons by rail
- trucks for short hauls

McGregor has built a 38,000 ton capacity transport facility on the Snake River across from Clarkston.

Cooperative Agricultural Producers
WSU – What's on Our Roadways?
Nourishing & Transporting Agriculture

Action/Follow-Up: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul W. Locke told the Commission that the problem is that we are spending more than we have. Spend on a cash flow basis. His tax bill is twice what he spends to live on.

Jamie Brush, a bicycle advocate in Pullman, noted that getting a license at 16 is no longer the rite of passage it once was. Her 12-year old daughter bikes from Pullman to Moscow five times a week in fair weather for swimming lessons. The obesity epidemic and other illnesses are related to transportation choices.

Ms. Brush emphasized that proper land use and multi-modal choices are critical; how we build our cities is crucial. Higher density cities and walk/bikeability are essential aspects to hone in on.

1. Work towards policy or laws that require all public schools to be walk/bike accessible. Pullman High School is a car dependent facility, with a Walk Score of 33 out of 100, but a potential path way, the right of way or SR 276, can serve of an arm off our existing Pullman path system, where people who want to bike to PHS and the surrounding development can do so safely and separated from traffic. We can simultaneously address the issue of helping to reduce pupil transportation costs. The State should consider allowing Pullman to build a path there.

2. Please listen very closely to public & other concerns/input regarding coal & oil trains that want to increase traffic through our pristine PNW region & have proposed export terminals.

Dionne Davidson, a Pullman resident, spoke on behalf of bicycling as a way to connect with her community and save money. She uses a car when it is not effective or convenient to bike. Housing developments with cul-de-sacs and dead ends don't allow kids to safely visit friends on their own. The Pullman comprehensive plan seems to have no teeth and is ignored. Development needs to be walkable and connected.

Scott McBeath said that 85% of the trail use in Pullman is recreational. More people would bike commute to the high school if a trail connected it to downtown Pullman.

JOINT MEETING OF WAHSINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION AND IDAHO TRANSPORTATION BOARD

INTRODUCTIONS AND BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ROLES

Idaho Chairman Jerry Whitehead expressed his happiness at meeting jointly and noted the many commonalities between the two states.

The Washington Commissioners and Idaho Transportation Board (ITB) members introduced themselves: Jim Coleman is from the five northern Idaho counties; Jim Kempton is from central Idaho and a U-I graduate; Julie DeLorenzo is from Boise and southwest Idaho; Jan Vassar is from Lewiston, which shares an MPO with Clarkston and Asotin; Dwight Horsch is from Pocatello and southeast Idaho; Lee Gagner is from Idaho Falls and counties bordering Wyoming and Montana.

PULLMAN / MOSCOW REGIONAL AIRPORT OPERATIONS

Two cities, two universities, a county and port all share in the governance of the Pullman/Moscow Regional Airport. Mayor Glenn Johnson of Pullman and Mayor Bill Lambert of Moscow noted that the runway realignment is the top priority FAA project in the northwest. Without the realignment, the airport cannot expand.

Tony Bean, Executive Director of the Regional Airport, explained that as commercial air service has shifted to larger planes, the distance between the runway and taxiway has become too small. Navigation restrictions due to weather require many winter/spring flights to cancel or divert. And, there is no room for expansion to meet demand for additional hangars and affiliated operations.

Relocated Runway

- Feasible to implement with current resources
- All Weather Landing Capability
- Business and Hangar Capacity
- Adequate Aeronautical Support to the Region
- New Destinations and Routes become possible
- Economic Impacts over the Current $25 Million / Year as the Region Grows with an Airport Capable of Growing With It.

Runway Project

- 7,100 x 150' Runway With Design to 8,000 Feet
- All-Weather Landing and Lighting Systems
- Study of Existing Terminal with Solutions
- Planning for additional General Aviation growth
- Provides for Future Forecasted needs
- Supports existing business and encourages new businesses to stay or relocate within the region

Projected Timeline and Costs

- Master Plan is Complete and Project is in Process –Financial Clock Start
- Environmental Assessment-2012-2014
- $2.9 Million Federal $320,000 Match from PFC's
- Land Acquisition and Design 2014-2015
- Construction 2015-2018
- Cost -Est. $60 Mil Federal with ~$6 Mil Match

Project Funding Sources

- AIP Entitlement - AIP Discretionary -Funds distributed by the FAA for high-priority projects. ~$60 Million
- Airport Funds -Passenger Facility Charges (PFC's) ~ $160,000 / yr.
- State Department of Transportation Grants -DOT funds count towards the local match percentage of a federal grant, assisting the Airport sponsors. WSDOT and ITD funding is critical
- Private Sources, Bonding, etc.
- The Sponsors must currently contribute 10% of the project's funding due to project location.

Commissioner Gagner commented on the challenges faced by Sun Valley attempting to build a new airport. Mr. Bean indicated that this is a realignment, not a new airport. Commissioner Whitehead asked if Idaho's contribution could be met by Washington.

Mike Pape, Director of Aeronautics, Idaho DOT, considers the airport to be one of Idaho's primary airports. Many students fly to University of Idaho from their homes in Treasure Valley.

Schweitzer Engineering Lab is making 15 - 20 flights a week using its own planes. They will be at the table.

Chairman Whitehead indicated the ITB would lend its support to the effort to seek a lower local match from the two states.

PMRA Runway Realignment

Action/Follow-Up: Review ITB action supporting the Pullman-Moscow regional Airport and consider supporting a lower local match.

COLUMBIA / SNAKE RIVER PORTS OF COMMERCE

Kristin Meira, Pacific Northwest Waterway Association briefed the two Commissions on the operations and value of the Columbia/Snake River waterway. Every March the Corps of Engineers closes down the river for regular maintenance. A longer closure is planned in 2017 for major renovation.

Wanda Keefer, Manager of the Port of Clarkston, spoke about the importance of the entire transportation system. The Port of Clarkston niche is tourism. Cruise boats land at Clarkston; during the unplanned Little Goose closure this spring, cruise operators bused clients to Clarkston for jet boat rides.

David Doeringsfeld, Port Manager, Port of Lewiston asked the ITB to respond to USFS action to prevent movement of oil equipment to Canada on US 12. ITB members indicated their disagreement with USFS action and the District Court injunction. Mr. Doeringsfeld emphasized that ports are about job creation. Drill pipe is shipped from other countries to the Port of Clarkston, where it is threaded and shipped to oil producing regions.

Commissioner Haley asked if WSDOT was aware of and had commented on this issue. Wanda Keefer responded that Mike Gonseth, WSDOT had said that they had been told to not get involved. Joe Poire replied that the Idaho litigation is a strategic threat to the Ports. There is great uncertainty on the environmental issues on the river.

Chairman Whitehead indicated that Idaho has increased weight loads and has asked that Washington increase the weight loads on SR 128. So far, WSDOT has granted load variances to SR 128. Washington loads are typically limited to 80,000 and 105,000 pounds.

Commissioner Cowan asked if Idaho had considered looking at a road usage charge to eventually replace the gas tax. Commissioner Coleman indicated that because Idaho is a conservative state it will wait to see what other states do first.

Commissioner Gagner noted that it is a human factor more than a technological challenge. Commissioner Coleman also said that Idaho is seeing more and more trucks convert to natural gas and other alternative fuels and has discussed the potential loss of revenue.

Commissioner Whitehead also expressed an interest in visiting the tunnel project in Seattle.

Columbia / Snake River System

Action/Follow-Up: Examine the possibility of a tunnel tour.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DAN O'NEAL, Chairman	TOM COWAN, Vice-Chairman
ANNE HALEY, Member	Vacant
JERRY LITT, Member	CHARLES ROYER, Member
JOE TORTORELLI, Member	

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director	DATE OF APPROVAL