



Washington State Transportation Commission

Regular Meeting Summary
April 26, 2017

Chairman Jerry Litt called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. He then asked Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Action: Commissioner Tortorelli moved and Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion approving the March 21 & 22, 2017 meeting summary. The motion was approved unanimously.

TRANSPORTATION 101

Paul Parker, Deputy Director, WSTC, presented Transportation 101 to provide an overview of transportation policy and funding in the state.

[Transportation 101](#)

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Kahle Jennings, Public Works Director, City of Centralia, welcomed the Commission to Centralia and commented on projects of particular interest to Centralia:

- I-5 flooding; particularly projects that protect I-5 and protect Centralia
- I-5 – Gateway to Centralia
- Maintenance of Highway 507 that serves as our main north-south route through Centralia
- Bicycle/Pedestrian improvements to Highway 507 north of the Pearl Street Bridge – the direct connection from north Centralia to the City center
- Bridge replacement: Pearl Street Bridge over the Skookumchuck River (1950's) and Mellen Street (1959)
- Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) funding: very important to our “Borst Avenue Safety Improvements” project
- Transit
- Bicycle/Pedestrian infrastructure and safety
- Truck to Rail solid waste transfer site for region. There is no provision for fees to mitigate impact to local streets (or Highway 507)

- Stopped trains block access North/South and East/West. Sometimes delays can be 40 minutes. Someone fell asleep in their car waiting for the train to pass
- Chehalis Western and Willapa Hills Trails
- Railway quiet zone – something we did not discuss but we are working on

Mr. Jennings recognized that WSDOT and in particular Bart Gernhart and his staff have been a good partner with Centralia. I-5 forever changed Centralia but that does not need to be change in a bad way. WSDOT is a key influence on Centralia's future. Rail also is a key influence on Centralia's future.

Mr. Jennings said that all units of government have the same basic needs: crumbling infrastructure, undersized infrastructure and changing needs. What are the impediments to improvement?

- Funding
- Permitting
- Regulation: Centralia is a phase 2 storm water permit community. I know WSDOT knows what operating under a storm water permit is like. It used to be "What" not "How" but now Ecology is starting to dictate "How"
- Cultural Shift:
 - Economics plays a big role in cultural shift – we have shifted from producing "things" to providing "services." That has an impact on transportation needs. "Things" need to be distributed but "services" often require a very different infrastructure to be competitive. Is access to high speed, reliable communication any different from access to high speed, reliable roads, rails and air transportation in our modern, evolving economy? They call it the transportation "highway"
 - "Fluidity" - our transient lifestyle - also plays a big role. Historically, many of our roads were paved and curbs and sidewalks installed by people getting together to form Local Improvement Districts (LIDs). People taxed themselves to build improvements that make their lives better. There has been no street LID in Centralia since the 1950s
 - Centralia has a Transportation Benefit District (TBD) at .02% sales tax that generates about \$630,000

Rick Sahlin, Public Works Director, City of Chehalis, reported that beginning in 2014 the city has dedicated 4% of its sales tax for public works. Its Transportation Benefit District (TBD) will collect .02% sales tax revenue, beginning later this year. This will generate an estimated \$800,000 a year.

Chehalis has 54 miles of road: 23 miles of asphalt, 24 miles of chip-seal, and 9 miles of concrete. Several improvements have been completed in recent years, particularly in the commercial area near the airport.

Railroad Crossings are a problem in Chehalis:

- Four BNSF mainline crossings
- One overpass, Chamber Way
- Six spur line crossings

- Three Western Washington Rail crossings

Issues:

- Flooding
- I-5 interruptions when freeway is closed due to accidents or flooding. This is worse now that people have GPS and there is more awareness of alternate routes
- BNSF crossings closed for long periods of time
- Unfunded mandates, e.g. American with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Pedestrian bi-modal facilities lack funding
- Traffic congestion on Chamber Way and the airport area

The Chehalis airport has 55 hangars at full capacity. The major tenant is Pacific Cataract and Laser Institute with three Citation jets.

[Chehalis Transportation Funding](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Erik Martin, Public Works Director and County Engineer, Lewis County, talked about transportation opportunities:

- Tourism
- Chip seal
- Anticipating a final report by summer on North Lewis County Industrial Access from I-5, a regional project involving the cities, tribe, state, federal government, county, and port
- Habitat restoration/fish passage. Challenges are costs, permits, timing and time. The opportunities include funding, ease of maintenance, and resource protection. He is looking for projects that reduce flood impacts to roads and benefit fish
- Maintaining existing infrastructure. Lewis County needs to maintain about 142 miles per year (7 year cycle); but can afford only 80 miles per year (12 year cycle). The opportunities:
 - Timber tax
 - Local funding
 - Cooperation/holistic view of funding

Flooding drains resources that could be spent elsewhere. Lewis County has had 13 Presidential Disaster Declarations in 20 years.

- Total Public Assistance - \$42,668,000
- Local Responsibility -\$5,333,500 (12.5%)
- Average Annual Flood Loss -\$2,113,400

**Table 10 – Summary of Economic Impacts
and Losses from 2007 Flood Event (2010 \$)**

Cost Type	Local/Regional Impact	Statewide Impact	Total
Local Business Disruption ¹	\$57,443,691	-	\$57,443,691
Property & Content Damage, Cleanup ²	\$340,342,820	-	\$340,342,820
Transportation/Infrastructure Damage ³	\$86,696,488	\$23,374,900	\$110,071,388
Government Revenue Loss (tax dollars)	\$70,087,199	-	\$70,087,199
Transportation Disruption ⁴	\$48,782,400	\$310,997,963	\$359,780,363
Total	\$603,352,597	\$334,372,863	\$937,725,460

County road projects include partnerships:

- Borst Avenue with Centralia
- Hwy 603 connecting Winlock to Chehalis
- Jackson Hwy

Lewis County also is working closely with the Packwood business community on infrastructure. Several years ago, a sewer study was completed with a Commerce grant. The county partners with small-incorporated communities on maintenance and repair.

[Lewis County Transportation Opportunities](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES I

Rob LaFontaine, General Manager, Twin Transit, reported that his agency is one of the smallest transit providers in the state. Operating for 40 years, it is one of the state’s older Public Transportation Benefit Areas (PTBA).

Twin Transit has a \$2.2 million operating budget, providing 22,000 hours of service, with six buses operating at peak. There are four fixed routes and about 50 bus stops. Riders make about 240,000 boarding’s a year.

Twin Transit fare is \$1 one way, \$2 for a day pass. It collects .02% sales tax; there is a lot of nonresident sales activity. It is the lowest PTBA tax in Washington. Grants comprise about 30% of operating revenue – about 2/3 federal and 1/3 state grants. Twin Transit reduced service in 2013 to balance budget and invest in infrastructure. For many years, the system operated as a flag system, where people flagged down a bus to board. It is now working to place bus stops on its routes.

ADA is a big deal for transit agencies. Sidewalks, pedestrian ramps and cutouts are key for reducing paratransit demand.

A nonprofit that has operated for about 18 years providing bus service in eastern Lewis County has indicated that it will cease service at the end of the 2017 – 19 biennium. Twin Transit is considering seeking voter approval to expand the PTBA to serve people in outlying areas, along the main corridors of US 12 and SR 6.

Twin Transit is purchasing an electric bus that weighs 23,000 pounds – almost identical to a diesel bus. It makes sense in flat terrain with a small travel footprint. Fuel savings will be \$11,000 – 14,000 a year.

Trains are a big challenge for a transit system. Routes are designed to minimize train crossings.

Buses can be useful in emergency response; they have radios, heat and mobility.

Homelessness is a problem in Lewis County. From a transit perspective, for a few dollars someone can travel to Lewis County from the north but cannot travel farther south. River Cities Transit, a small PTBA operating in Kelso and Longview, does not extend north to Lewis County.

Amtrak provides five trips northbound and southbound each day. Two additional trips each direction will be added in the fall 2017.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Bill Fashing, Executive Director of the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Planning Organization (SWRTPO), indicated that the five counties in SWRTPO comprise 66,000 square miles. Population growth and the local economy is lagging. SWRTPO is losing jobs to metro areas and the population is older than the statewide average. There also are fewer two-income households than statewide average.

The region is highly dependent on the automobile. Workers must travel farther to work. Regional average travel times exceed the state average. The new ilani Casino near Ridgefield creates new travel demand.

ADA compliance is a big challenge for small, rural communities. Federal funds come with additional requirements. Communities are questioning whether they want to apply for federal funds.

The three deep-water ports in SWRTPO are experiencing strong interest from new shippers.

- Cowlitz County has over \$4 Billion in pending projects at Ports
- Grays Harbor Port negotiating deals that would significantly increase rail traffic

SWRTPO is updating its regional transportation plan and emphasizing freight movement. Freight priorities include:

Cowlitz County: improve Exit 22, reconfigure Exit 30, improve the interchange and access at Exit 32, and improve the SR 432 corridor

Grays Harbor County: East Aberdeen Mobility Project, US 101 Truck Route EIS, and complete seismic upgrades to Chehalis River Bridge and Heron St Bridge

Lewis County: add lanes to I-5, widen shoulders on county roads, and improve access at Exit 82

Pacific County: Straighten the Pluvius Bridge on SR 6, reduce slides on US 101 and meet bike and pedestrian needs, improve SR 103 between Seaview and Oysterville

Wahkiakum County: SR 4 safety issues – slides and widening

Recent SWRTPO activities include:

- Implemented a transit connection project
- Regional bike and pedestrian assessment
- Supported complete streets work
- Promoted Electric Vehicle charging stations

Southwest Washington Regional Planning

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

TRIBAL GOVERNMENTS & TRANSPORTATION: MOBILITY, SAFETY AND ECONOMY

Jesse Gleason, Chehalis Confederated Tribes, reported that the Chehalis Tribe is focused on the reservation and pedestrian activities. It is improving a trail from the reservation to Oakville. The tribe also is working with Thurston County on an access road for the Marriott Hotel at Exit 81. The tribe is waiting for permits to expand its fuel service. It will use fuel tax revenue to pay for more improvements.

With opening of the ilani Casino, the Chehalis Tribe is concerned with diversifying its business. It is designing an area for transit stops and pickups. Rural and Tribal Transit provides some access; Grays Harbor Transit makes has four trips daily through Oakville, connecting Hoquiam-Aberdeen to Centralia.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

10 YEARS LATER: FLOODS, I-5 AND AT RISK TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Jim Kramer, Facilitator, Chehalis River Basin Flood Authority, briefed the Commission on the Chehalis Basin Strategy. The Chehalis Valley is the least expensive farmland in Western Washington. The five largest floods in the basin have occurred since 1986. Habitat productivity has declined by as much as 87%.

The Chehalis Basin Workgroup has been tasked by the Governor to recommend a long-term strategy and budget for next biennium. Membership includes Chehalis Confederated Tribes, Quinault Indian Nation, Grays Harbor County, Thurston County, business, farming and environmental representatives, and the Governor's Natural Resource Advisor. The process is managed and facilitated by William D. Ruckelshaus Center.

The purpose is not to stop flooding. Nothing can do that. The focus is on reducing flood damage. It requires a recognition that efforts must address floodwaters and fish; they occupy the same geographic area. It is a dual-purpose strategy. One objective is not more important than the other.

The strategy includes two overarching types of actions: both large and local scale actions.

Various "local-scale" actions are being considered, including:

- Flood-proofing buildings in floodplains (elevating, building floodwalls or berms, etc.), buying out frequently flooded properties from willing landowners, and building farm pads
- Localized, area-specific projects aimed at protecting key infrastructure, frequently flood-damaged properties, restoring flood capacity. Such as protecting wastewater treatment plants and roads, some floodplain reconnection projects

Other Local-Scale Actions:

- Land use management – improving floodplain management to protect remaining floodplain functions and avoid future flood damage. Recommendations broken down into three categories: regulatory flood data (flood of record), floodplain protection, and construction standards
- Flood warning system improvements – expand inundation mapping program, add new National Weather Service river forecast point, implement new hydraulic model in lower basin (improve forecasts below Porter), confirm gage rating/curve for Chehalis River at Centralia

Large Scale Projects and Actions:

- I-5 Projects - series of levees, floodwalls to help prevent flooding, and closure of I-5 in the Chehalis and Centralia areas

Improve Chehalis Centralia Airport levee (raise it)

- Aberdeen/Hoquiam North Shore Levee that would provide coastal flood protection for residents and businesses in those two cities

- Restorative flood protection to re-establish the natural flood storage capacity by reversing landscape changes that contribute to downstream flooding and erosion
- An additional large-scale action being considered is a flood retention facility – or a dam and associate reservoir. It is being considered for the main stem of the Chehalis River, about one-mile south of Pe Ell. Two types of dams are being considered – one with a permanent reservoir, and one without

A dam without a permanent reservoir would hold back the water temporarily during major flood events only, and the river would flow normally during regular conditions or smaller flood events. A dam with a permanent reservoir would hold back the water continuously instead of only during major flood events. In addition to reducing flood damage during the winter, in the summer water from the reservoir could be released to provide more water and cooler temperatures for salmon and other species. Both flood dam options would include fish passage.

Habitat restoration is designed to protect, improve, and create sustainable ecosystem processes and functions that support the long-term productivity of native aquatic and semi-aquatic species, and at much higher levels of abundance than current conditions support.

Benefits to salmon:

- Current average abundance 265,000 salmon and steelhead
- Increases range from 50,000 (18% increase) to 190,000 additional salmon and steelhead (73% increase)
- Increases for spring-run Chinook salmon range from approximately 2,000 additional fish (96% increase) to 15,000 additional fish (716% increase)

Transportation impacts of the alternatives under consideration range from three days less of flooding to no reduction. None of the alternatives will entirely eliminate closures on I-5 and other state routes during a 100-year flood.

The Governor's proposed budget includes \$60 million for 2017-2019 biennium:

- \$30.4 million to advance long-term strategy and determine preferred option for flood projects and habitat restoration
- \$20 million for construction of habitat restoration projects (\$10 million State, \$10 million federal)
- \$9.6 million for construction of local flood damage reduction projects

The Chehalis Basin Board is tasked to choose the preferred approach. It is up to the Legislature to fund it; the cost of alternatives ranges from \$600 million to \$1.5 billion.

[Chehalis Basin Strategy](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORTATION

Matt Matayoshi, Executive Director, Lewis County Economic Development Council (EDC), noted that Lewis County stretches 126 miles from Pe Ell to Packwood. Unemployment is at 7.6 – 8%. The average income is \$38,000, compared to state average of \$57,000.

Major economic sectors are forestry, health care, retail trade, manufacturing and distribution. Three trucking companies have located in Lewis County since the fall. The EDC is projecting 700 – 1000 new jobs in warehouse and distribution.

US 12 is critical for tourism and commodity movement, for timber and agricultural products. Rail is key for forest products, plastics, glass products.

Randy Mueller, CEO, Port of Chehalis, reported that the Ports of Chehalis and Centralia were established about 30 years ago. The Lewis County ports focus on industrial development. The Port of Chehalis owns rail infrastructure.

Economic recovery has been uneven statewide. A more complete transportation network is a priority. Community desirability and livability is an important business recruitment tool. Congestion in urban areas affects us, too; travel time to urban centers is not predictable.

Airport revolving loan fund is a good idea. Chehalis Airport is a helpful amenity. Site selection is a process of elimination. We do not get to the starting line without commercial air service.

Secretary Millar noted that 40% of millennials want to live in a small town with the amenities that Centralia and Chehalis have.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

TOURISM AND TRANSPORTATION

Mary Kay Nelson, Marketing Manager, White Pass Scenic Byway, said tourism is about creating or recreating memories. The millennials who do not want to live in a small town want to recreate and play in places like Centralia and Lewis County.

Elimination of the state Tourism Office and the Scenic Byways program almost killed the White Pass Scenic Byway. The Byway has struggled but survived since 2002, when the National Park Service first did planning for the US 12 Corridor. The - 2002 National Byway was designated in – 2009.

The Port of Seattle provided a grant to publicize the South Cascades/Rainier tourism route, as a regional tour for cruise boat visitors. Electric charging is important to attracting tourism.

Much of the byway is on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and Wenatchee National Forest lands. Located between three major mountain peaks, Mt. Adams, Mt. Rainier National Park, and

the Mt. St. Helens National Monument, distinguishes this byway as one with unique character and prominence. The diverse landscape from the lakes district to river valleys into the foothills and alpine cascade mountain climate to the arid steppe of Eastern Washington provides a cross section of Washington state geography and geology.

Both Centralia and Chehalis are Main Street Communities. Randy Mueller said the Chehalis Community Renaissance Team is focused on enhancing downtown Chehalis. Chehalis is considering changing one-way couplets to two-way streets.

Jan Nontell, Vice President, Downtown Centralia Association, said that the train brings a lot of people to town. Amtrak staffs the station – at least until the end of the year.

Most shoppers at the antique and art galleries are from Seattle and Portland. Centralia Downtown Association is working on tourism. Centralia is celebrating the 200th anniversary of the birth of George Washington, the founder of Centralia.

Both downtown associations have added bike racks. It also is important to improve safety of Willapa Hills Trail at SR 6.

Ms. Nelson added that weddings are a big business in Lewis County. There are many well-located and inexpensive outdoor venues.

[White Pass Scenic Byway](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

WSDOT REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Kris Strickler, Southwest Region Administrator, WSDOT spoke on regional successes, including the reconstruction of the Chamber Way Bridge. The bridge span was removed four days after it was hit on July 22, 2016 and a temporary span opened to vehicles on August 4. Pedestrian access followed that.

Over \$300 million has been invested in the I-5 corridor from Rush Road to SR 121.

- Blakeslee Junction to Grand Mound
- Mellen to Blakeslee
- Labree Interchange
- Chamber Way Bridge

Winter operations in 2016 – 17 were not business as usual. Vancouver had 10 school closures, compared to a typical four. The Southwest Region usually budgets \$7 million a biennium for snow and ice. This year it spent over \$4 million.

Winter pavement damage on SR 14 and US 12 is estimated to cost \$2.5 million due to freeze-thaw cycles. SR 503, about 10 miles east of Woodland, had a slide earlier this spring that resulted in a closure due to a precarious 20-million pound rock. It has been trim-blasted into

smaller pieces. Hopefully, a single lane of traffic will open in May – we do not know yet what is behind that rock.

WSDOT Regional Projects and Perspectives

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

PUBLIC COMMENT

Edna Fund, Lewis County Commissioner, talked about the tourism and history in Lewis County. The annual Seattle to Portland (STP) bike ride goes through Centralia and Chehalis; it would be great to have a bike trail through the area that does not go through the cities.

Steve Dobosh, Mayor, Toledo, would like to see the Jackson Hwy included as part of the Fire and Ice Scenic Route, past the old Courthouse and Lewis & Clark State Park to the Mt. St. Helen's Highway.

Bonnie Canaday, Mayor, Centralia thanked the Commission for visiting.

Reflections and Recommendations

Commissioner Tortorelli has biked through Centralia and Chehalis on the Seattle to Portland (STP) ride about six times. He had not realized how extensive the flood problem is. He hopes the state helps solve the problems.

Commissioner Batra likes the historic districts.

Commissioner Jennings was stymied by flood closures in the past – he had to cancel attendance at meetings in Seattle that he could not get to.

Commissioner Litt noted that what we heard is similar to what we have hear elsewhere. It is good to hear about the local collaboration; tying together the Main Street program with other programs is good. As we prepare for a Cascadia Subduction Zone quake, we should not lose sight of preparedness and response for flooding disasters.

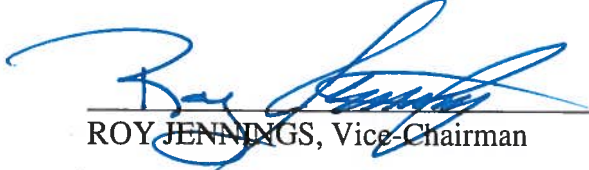
Commissioner Young remarked that flooding defines the community. The lack of public transit to the south creates a problem. The solid waste traffic to Centralia is something she did not know about.

Commissioner Serebrin noted the importance of supporting rural transit as a means of opportunity. She also likes the quantification of upstream benefits of flood mitigation.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION




JERRY LITT, Chairman



ROY JENNINGS, Vice-Chairman



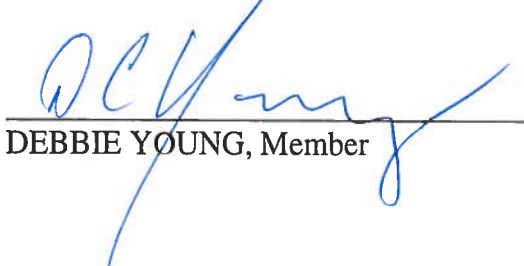
SHIV BATRA, Member



HESTER SEREBRIN, Member



JOE TORTORELLI, Member



DEBBIE YOUNG, Member

VACANT

ATTEST:



REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

5/16/17

DATE OF APPROVAL