

**SUMMARY OF THE LOCAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
April 19, 2011**

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 8:30 a.m., on Tuesday, April 19, 2011, at Olympia City Hall, Council Chambers, 601 4th Avenue East, Olympia, Washington.

CHAIRMAN WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Parker called the meeting to order and introduced Commission staff. Commissioners introduced themselves and shared their backgrounds and perspectives.

MINUTES APPROVAL/ADOPTION

It was moved by Commissioner O’Neal and seconded by Commissioner Ford to approve the meeting minutes of the March 22-23, 2011 Regular Commission Meeting as amended by Commissioner Cowan. The motion passed unanimously.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

It was moved by Commissioner Moser and seconded by Commissioner Hill to appoint Commissioner Ford to serve on the Aviation Economic Impact Study group. The motion passed unanimously.

It was moved by Commissioner Ford and seconded by Commissioner O’Neal authorizing the Executive Director to work with two potential consultant applicants toward a Commission decision to contract with a consultant to lead the I-405 Express Toll Lanes Traffic and Revenue Study directed by the Legislature. The Commission scheduled a conference call for Monday, April 25th at 1 p.m. to select the consultant. The motion passed unanimously.

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

Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst, WSTC provided an overview of transportation needs and challenges.

[Transportation 101](#)

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Mayor Doug Mah welcomed the Commission to Olympia. He noted that Olympia was one of the first to establish a Transportation Benefit District (TBD) and stressed the following:

1. Continue to be partners
2. Recognize regional impacts both good and bad
3. Reward regional cooperation in planning
4. Look for return on investment

5. Support a regional initiative to do a comprehensive evaluation of I-5 between the Nisqually Bridge and Maytown

Steve Hall, Olympia City Manager and David Riker, Transportation Manager, talked about transportation in Olympia, now a city of 45,500. Mr. Hall noted that we cannot build our way out of transportation problems, and that Olympia is an innovator. It was the first city in the state to adopt impact fees, one of the first to establish a TBD, and voters recently enacted a utility tax for sidewalks and bike paths. In Olympia, 56% of the arterials have a bike lane.

Transportation Policy Direction includes:

- Bus Corridors – to enable “spontaneous use of transit” with 15 minute headways
 - Operational improvements, including signalization and special lanes
 - Streetscape design
 - Land use and zoning. We’ve created zoning for density, but the development has been slow to follow.
- Land Use and Transportation
 - Need to better target density and improve streetscapes
 - More successful in building density along corridors than in downtown
- System capacity
 - Concurrency revision project – create viable alternatives to driving
 - Fund transit, walk and bicycle improvements with development fees
 - Adopted Level of Service (LOS) E in the downtown core and on high-density corridors
- Connectivity
 - Evaluate connectivity with “use route directness” measures
 - Bike and path connections can mitigate poor historic design
 - Need a strong I-5 for many reasons, including movement of freight and transit
 - West Olympia Access Study
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM)
 - Education and Encouragement Grant Project
 - Steve Hall says the State is “doing okay” on TDM
 - Downtown Commuter Program – Olympia is one of 7 Growth and Transportation Efficiency Centers (GTECs) in the state
- Complete Streets
 - Currently \$1 million annually dedicated to sidewalks
 - All of the new sidewalks have been poured with porous concrete
- Asset Management
 - Working to be proactive, rather than reactive on preservation and maintenance
 - Goal is 100% of pavement in fair or better condition by 2024
 - LED conversion project reduces power use by 80% and saves \$50,000 annually. Beginning to slowly replace traditional streetlights with LED.

[Transportation in Olympia](#)

Virgil Clarkson, City of Lacey, Council member and Roger Schoessel, City Engineer, talked about growth and transportation in Lacey. One-third of the 152 miles of city streets are arterials and collectors. Lacey has an aggressive capital construction program, upgrading 2-lane roads into 3-4 lane sections with bike and pedestrian facilities. It has completed the Woodland Trail.

In the last 6 years, Lacey has spent \$47 million in roadway construction, 63% from grants. Lacey uses the Local Transportation Act and has collected \$14 million in traffic mitigation. It has partnered with WSDOT on four regionally successful projects.

- Lacey built the first multi-lane roundabouts in the State
 - 6 multi-lane
 - 6 single-lane
- One of the first to use LED street lighting
- Early conversion to LED traffic signals
- Using solar-powered school crossing beacons
- Sustainable streetscape

Lacey said it really could use a street utility. There is no funding mechanism for pavement preservation. It also needs the state to maintain capacity and safety on I-5:

- Two Interchange Justification Reports (IJR) underway – I-5/Martin Way and I-5/Marvin Road
- The existing 3-lane interstate is a problem
- What is WSDOT plan for I-5? This area needs a lot of work on I-5.

[City of Lacey](#)

Mayor Pete Kmet, City of Tumwater and Jay Eaton, Public Works Director, talked about Tumwater issues, primarily addressing traffic from a suburban perspective. Mayor Kmet said that Tumwater is a little more conservative than Olympia and has not asked voters for increased taxes except for schools.

Success: The Littlerock Road improvement project has invested \$10 million in converting a rural county road to a multi-modal, commercial and residential corridor. Median and roundabouts can help move a lot of traffic slowly and safely.

Challenges: Non-motorized improvements:

- Thurston County Region has invested a lot in non-motorized transportation, such as the Chehalis-Western Trail. Tumwater segments are next in line, some of which will be costly, such as crossing the Deschutes River and Capitol Lake. Probably about 150 people bike to Ecology during the summer.
- Street maintenance and preservation.
- Economic Development:
 - Inability to charge state agencies impact fees leaves the city with undersized interchanges.
 - Insufficient funding impacts redevelopment of the Old Brewery – a classic brownfields site
 - Difficult to transform legacy streetscapes, such as Capitol Blvd and Trospen Road.

[City of Tumwater](#)

THURSTON COUNTY: KEY REGIONAL FACILITIES, CORRIDORS AND PROJECTS

Karen Valenzuela, Board Chair and Public Works Director Lester Olson talked about county improvements and partnerships in transportation. All three County Commissioners participate in the Thurston Regional Planning Council. Over the past year, the Commission has been talking with all of the jurisdictions about developing a regional TBD. Thurston County is now in the process to put transportation impact fees in place – this should help to shift new development into incorporated areas.

Lester Olson emphasized that the county has changed its approach to transportation to be a regional partner, working with the urban cities and the smaller cities. The county is looking at councilmanic adoption of a \$20 license fee, and once results are demonstrated, possibly asking voters for a larger fee. Thurston County is also working collaboratively on emergency response.

Challenges the County sees include climate change, less federal funds. A new trend is increase in deaths from texting while driving.

The \$10 million Yelm Highway Project adds traffic, turn and bike lanes over 1.25 miles. It has funding from TIB, Thurston County, City of Olympia, federal funds, and Intercity Transit.

[Yelm Highway Project](#)

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Thera Black, Senior Planner talked about transportation planning in the region. The MPO population is 174,000 and the RTPO population is 252,000, but TRPC but does not distinguish between the two areas in its work. The core philosophy is to accommodate all modes of travel safely and efficiently. The region has agreed to a 5-lane mid-block maximum on arterials (notion of ‘can’t build our way out of congestion’). However, communities have invested in some new roads (e.g. Mullen Road extension, Yelm Loop, Britton Parkway) and also have widened some existing roads up to that 5-lane maximum (e.g. Harrison Avenue, Tumwater Boulevard, Yelm Highway).

The focus on efficiency is exemplified by the “Smart Corridors” Signal Upgrade and Transit Signal Priority Program. An area of innovation is the Rural/Tribal Transportation Program.

Regional challenges include:

- Managing demand
- Humanizing the suburban arterial
- Mitigating impacts
- Finite resources. What we have on the ground today is very close to what we will have in 30-40 years.
- Environmental threats. We are getting more extreme weather.

Opportunities:

- Active transportation
- Retrofit existing infrastructure
- Make new connections
- Infill and redevelopment.
- Engage our community
- Plan for the next generation

The regional priority is to develop an I-5 Mobility Strategy:

- Role of High Capacity Transport
- Freight mobility
- Maximize efficiency
- Coordination with Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) (the largest single one-point employer in the state)
- Environmental limitations
- Appropriate pricing --Consider a South Sound Tolling Study

The traditional performance measure of volume/capacity is contrary to much of the region's vision. It has exempted corridors from concurrency requirements to get the growth we need for density.

[Thurston Regional Planning Council](#)

Mike Harbour began his presentation by acknowledging that the Commission has already heard a lot about transit from the city and county partners. Ridership is increasing due to gas prices; in 2008, it really picked up when gas hit \$4.00. IT has avoided cutting service, in part with a voter-approved 0.2 percent sales tax increase.

IT He talked about the regional connections; also IT operates about 190 vanpools. IT provides 16 RT per weekday, 714 passengers. Pierce Transit provides 8 RT/day carrying 288 passengers, but is dropping to 4. Vanpool traffic carries about the same number of people as fixed route transit.

Tacoma to Olympia Corridor Challenges:

- Growth of Joint Base Lewis-McChord (JBLM) – there is no internal circulation, no transit on the Base
- I-5 expansion is limited by environmental issues and cost
- Extension of ST Commuter Rail is not likely soon
 - BNSF main line cost and capacity
 - No direct rail line to downtown Olympia
 - Political difficulty of expanding district

Options for public transportation to the north:

- Increased express bus service
- Direct Seattle-Olympia Express Service (requested a Regional Mobility Grant)
- Increased Vanpool Service
- Subscription bus
- Extended Sounder Service

The State of Washington is not an effective partner in providing regional public transportation service. The State needs to engage more in cross-regional transit.

[Intercity Transit](#)

Ed Galligan, Executive Director of the Port explained that the Port of Olympia is one of the few consolidated ports in the U.S., having a seaport, marinas, airport and real estate operations. The Port is currently handling a historic high level of business.

Port of Olympia priorities are:

- Berth and navigation channel dredge – navigation channel maintained by US Army Corps of Engineers. Disposal of dioxin-contaminated sediments is a major challenge. Upland disposal triples the cost: \$36 million.
- Restoring Commercial Air Service, which has been limited by:
 - Airline specific business plans
 - Market demand
 - Airport facilities – runway length and instrument approaches
 - Community support and approaches

[Port of Olympia](#)

TRIBAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Joe Cushman, Planning Director, spoke about tribal economic development, most of which has been adjacent to SR 510 through the reservation. Past development has taken place on a piecemeal basis. The Nisqually Tribe is investing \$40 million in infrastructure improvements over next three years, including a \$4 million frontage road.

Tribal gas tax revenue is critical to be able to plan, finance transportation improvements. The Tribe's relationship with WSDOT has improved over last 25 years. Traffic speeds on SR 510 have slowed, traffic signals installed. The tribe's major safety concern is the Reservation Road/SR 510 interchange.

WASHINGTON'S CAPITAL: DESTINATION? BEDROOM COMMUNITY? OR BOTH?

Karen Messmer, a citizen member of the IT Board, Chair of the Olympia Safe Streets campaign and former Olympia City Council member, facilitated a discussion of several regional transportation issues, including: the I-5 Mobility Strategy, Smart Corridors, and the Capitol Campus Study. Participants included Thera Black, Senior Planner at TRPC; Karen Parkhurst, Senior Planner at TRPC; Mike Harbour, Executive Director of Intercity Transit, and David Schaffert, President and CEO of the Thurston Chamber.

Thera Black began the discussion noting that there is no master plan for I-5 south of Tacoma. You don't need models to see there is inadequate capacity on I-5 right now. It's not about enabling a bedroom community; we also need to think about freight movement. The I-5 Mobility Study will examine:

- The Nisqually Bridges
- Capacity on I-5 from Lakewood to Maytown
- The I-5/US 101 interchange
- JBLM
- Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) for Ft. Lewis and State Offices
- Multi-modal solutions

About 35% of the trips to JBLM each day come from Thurston County. Jobs to the north pay 15-20% more; land and housing costs less here.

How do we improve mobility? Build capacity or wring more efficiency from what we have. The "Smart Corridors" program will enable signals and buses to communicate.

Ms. Messmer pointed out, and others agreed, that this area is very car-dependent when it comes to getting out of the region. Even if there were a magic train tomorrow, how would people get to it? How would they get to the businesses and schools at the other end?

Ms. Parkhurst noted that the Capitol Campus study made three key recommendations:

- Change market rate for parking
- Stick with the vision
- State leadership

Employees on capitol campus pay \$25/month; off the campus, employees pay zero. State government is not contributing to the operating cost of IT's Dash Shuttle.

Speaking of State government raises the question: customer or commuter? The Capitol Campus study showed that there are transportation issues for the Capitol Campus; there also are transportation issues for other state office centers, for connectivity within the community and connectivity outside of it.

David Schaffert explained that most businesses in Thurston County are small businesses and service industry. Manufacturing is nearly gone. Health care is our biggest employer. Thurston County also is changing very quickly; there is a lot of outside investment looking at this area. The big transportation issues is personal mobility; the 10-person or smaller businesses that dominate in this county are auto-dependent. We need to maintain mobility to keep our competitive advantage.

Mr. Harbour emphasized that where this community is today is due to land use decisions made by state government; state employees are dispersed. WSDOT is looking at locating a major facility in Hawks Prairie, so is SPSCC. It is cheap land, but it makes it very hard to get there without a car.

On the other hand, Mr. Schaffert asked, does charging for parking downtown make parking more available or shift shoppers to the mall? Or both?

He added that the private sector does take externalities into account in choosing to locate here – schools, transportation network, and quality of life. Often businesses move outside of urban core for transportation access. Property values are probably lower downtown; but new construction is probably more expensive. Small storefronts are advantageous for some businesses, but it doesn't fit them all.

Commissioners added that it is very difficult to get to Olympia from Eastern Washington. It should be easier for people to comment on legislation and participate in government. As a state, we should be looking at ways to make Olympia a destination for democracy. Imagine how many cars we could remove from I-5 if we could facilitate transit from SeaTac to Olympia.

Is Bus Rapid Transit in our future? What key elements are needed?

- Need an HOV Lane on I-5 – either build a new lane or convert an existing lane.
- A 15-minute headway is another important trigger.

For IT, federal money is only 10% of its budget. Transit funding is local jobs; money that stays in the community. It provides access for the entire community.

Public/private interplay: The Thurston Chamber sits down with TRPC and local governments on an on-going basis to talk about Puget Sound clean-up and transportation needs. Regarding land use, all

the public sector can do is provide zoning and 15-minute transit service, it's up to the private sector to build or locate there.

There was a lot of public/private collaboration in developing the vision and plans for Hawks Prairie. There was a lot of conversation with Capital Mall about transit service and access.

There are not a lot of east-west or north-south corridors in this area. The Yelm Highway work will help. All of the jurisdictions have connected streets policies; the Feds and the state want us to avoid using I-5 to meet local needs. Part of the purpose of an IJR is to look at impacts on local streets.

Final remarks:

- Ms. Parkhurst – we just finished an I-5 origin/destination study and are getting results. Toll the facilities and we will really see what trips are local. We have, however, developed around I-5 and it definitely affects how we move.
- Ms. Black -- Hawks Prairie is a big greenfield opportunity. On the other hand, redeveloping the SR 99 corridor won't happen without public-private partnerships directing the kind of growth we want into that corridor.
- Mr. Harbour – there is no one answer. We do lots of things well. Good transit, sidewalks and bike paths, CTR, roundabouts.
- Mr. Schaffert – This is a community very focused on partnerships.
- Ms. Messmer – Focusing land use on our corridors will help connectivity within and out of the region. We need to consider HOV 3+ lane for I-5, even if taking away a GP lane. I wish we could focus more on the state government land use decisions that have shaped this community.

Ms. Messmer concluded by commenting that she is proud to see how our local leaders think and focus on transforming our community; and aware that we are part of a bigger system, especially to the north.

RURAL AND TRIBAL MOBILITY PROGRAM

Karen Parkhurst asked that the Commission help keep the Agency Committee on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT) going. The WSDOT Consolidated Grants program also is worth keeping; one version of the budget cuts staff by 25%.

The Rural and Tribal Transportation Program provides transportation services for the Nisqually Tribe, Chehalis Tribe, the towns of Bucoda, Rainier, Tenino, and Yelm, and the Rochester-Grand Mound UGA.

Do these programs encourage people to live in the rural area? Most of the people served are aging in place. Often social programs cannot use money for transportation, even if they have it.

But, she added, people really should be taking transportation costs into account when considering housing.

PEDESTRIAN AND BICYCLE ACCESS IN THURSTON COUNTY

Paul Brewster and Jack Horton talked about the Thurston Regional Trails Plan. It identifies 125 miles of shared-use trails; 52 miles available today. Thurston County is hoping this year to break

ground on the final bridge crossing a major thoroughfare (Pacific Avenue) on Chehalis-Western Trail.

In 1970, 50% of students walked or biked to school; today, fewer than 15% walk or bike to school.. At least 25% of the traffic at peak hours is parents driving kids to school.

Jack Horton, President of Woodland Trail Greenway Association, has used a bicycle as his major form of transportation since the training wheels came off. He would give Holland a 10, Olympia a 6, Corvallis (9) and Portland (8.5). We have crossed the tipping point on bicycle safety; drivers have changed. And, cyclists are better, too.

It takes two things to get on your bicycle: commitment and taking a chance with your life. Bikes are fun and liberating; biking is faster than walking and builds a sense of community.

[Pedestrian and Bicycle Access in Thurston County](#)

WSDOT REGIONAL UPDATE

Kevin Dayton, Region Administrator for the Olympic Region, talked about WSDOT projects in the I-5 corridor. Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and ramp meters will be installed at Mounts, Nisqually, and Marvin Roads.

The improvements to the I-5/Trosper Road interchange are being paid for and built by Wal-Mart, as a traffic mitigation impact.

[WSDOT Regional Update](#)

PUBLIC COMMENT

Bob Jacobs, former Mayor of Olympia, spoke to the need for extending the concept of impact fees to the state level. Water and sewer impact fees, SEPA, and GMA impact fees all set a precedent for the state to pay its share. He also noted that freeways are built to a higher standard due to the weight of large trucks; shouldn't they pay more? Broadly, how do we get the right people to pay?

He asserts that freeway deterioration is due to large trucks (80%); studded tires (15%); and cars (5%) and urges the Commission to explore ways of matching funding to those who cause the impacts.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

PHILIP A. PARKER, Chair

DICK FORD, Vice-Chair

TOM COWAN, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

CAROL MOSER, Member

VACANT, Member

LATISHA HILL, Member

TERESA BERNTSEN, Ex-Officio Member
Governor's Office

PAULA HAMMOND, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL