



Yakima Meeting Summary
May 16, 2018

Chairman Jerry Litt opened the meeting at 9:00 am with introductions by Commissioners.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Young moved and Commissioner Tortorelli seconded the motion approving the May 16, 2018 meeting summary. The motion was approved unanimously.

TRANSPORTATION 101

Paul Parker, Deputy Director, WSTC, presented an overview of transportation planning and finance.

Transportation 101

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

YAKIMA REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES: THE BIG PICTURE

Jim Restucci, Chair, Yakima Valley Council of Governments, welcomed the Commission to Yakima and reported that several major projects are underway to increase economic activity:

- Cascade Mill Site (East-West Corridor) in Yakima
- South Union Gap Interchange / Beltway Project in Union Gap
- SR 24 / Morrier Lane Intersection Project
- Zillah Vintage Valley Parkway

In addition, the length of the Yakima Greenway doubled to 20 miles by completing the final 2-mile section of the 10+ mile Naches Rail to Trail Project between Old Naches Highway and 40th Avenue in Yakima last fall. .

Larry Mattson, Executive Director, Yakima Valley Council of Governments, noted that the Yakima area does not experience the economic ups and downs of the rest of the state. The Yakima Valley is different from the Tri-Cities. For instance, there is no Hanford clean-up site, none of the growth and development that was brought to the Tri-Cities.

Mr. Mattson noted that Washington has the most regressively tax system in the nation and that affects low-income households the most. Yakima County scores low in household demographics statewide and the lack of tax base from the federal and tribal land in the county constrains the local ability to fund infrastructure. We are creative because we have to be.

Action: None

Follow-Up: *Include some highlights in 2018 Annual Report.*

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Scott Schaefer, Public Works Director, City of Yakima, provided some data on the transportation system in this city with 93,000 residents. Yakima has 400 miles of public streets, 44 miles of alleyways, and 111 traffic signals. The investment is valued at \$500 million. Struggling with day-to-day maintenance needs, Yakima has not recovered from the recession. Its funding today is 13% less than 2010, and staffing is even less.

The City issued \$18 million in bonds to resurface 120 lane miles. A Transportation Benefit District (TBD) will generate \$1.4 million annually beginning July 2018. The city has a 20-year spending plan for the money, which includes the North First revitalization project, River Road improvements to a new aquatic center, improvements to the intersection at First and Washington, and roundabouts on 34th Avenue.

The City has anticipated savings from a streetlight project, conversion from sodium vapor to LED, but additional electrical requirements from Labor & Industries will add \$1 million in additional costs.

The \$43 million railroad grade separation project, completed in 2016, won the American Public Works Association Project of the Year.

Rob Peterson, Director, Yakima Air Terminal, reported that Horizon and Alaska Airlines serve the Yakima Valley. In 2007 -08, Delta flew to Salt Lake City, but ended the service after a year. In 2015, Alaska added a fourth flight to Sea-Tac. Ridership has increased 35% over the last few years and enplanements are now higher than in 2008.

The biggest challenge facing the airport is pavement condition. Although WSDOT provides aviation grants, demand far exceeds the available funds. The Yakima Airport is identified as a critical airport for C-130 support assistance to Western Washington for earthquake recovery.

Joe Henne, Public Works Director, City of Selah, reported that City of Selah has 34,000 vehicles a day on First Street. Its population has more than doubled in 30 years from 3500 to 7800 and there are over 220 new building lots, averaging \$115,000 per lot. The city is proposing a \$3.5 million roundabout to move traffic better.

Arlene Fisher, City Manager, Union Gap, talked about the projects in her city:

- Main Street Revitalization Project
- Completing the I-82 Interchange to relieve pressure on Valley Mall interchange; and
- The \$17.5 million Beltway Project to connect to the Yakima Airport and industries, including roundabouts, a new bridge over BNSF tracks, and a 12-foot wide bike-pedestrian pathway. It will create a safer path for trucks and schoolchildren, in an area where 1500 semis go through the school zone every day

Union Gap has created a TBD for local funding for the Beltway. Landowners are donating right-of-way. Currently five or six partners are in on the project. The design phase is fully funded; the current funding gap is \$15 million.

Lance Hoyt, City Manager, City of Toppenish, reported that the Lower Valley has 15 projects at \$30 million ready to go and build within 2 years. Toppenish has 28 miles of streets, which are in bad repair after winter of 2016 – 17. Repair costs exceed \$450,000. Toppenish has the highest utility rates in the state, a 32% utility tax used to balance its general fund.

Roger Millar, Secretary, WSDOT, told Mr. Hoyt that roads on the National Highway System (NHS) are eligible for state assistance. WSDOT is holding off on NHS improvements until roads in cities and counties are at same standard as those in the state.

Ben Annen, HLA Engineering, reported that the City of Zillah is moving forward with the \$10.6 million Vintage Valley Parkway to improve access to the Zillah Lakes development and add 250 acres of commercial land to the city. Of \$8.758 million cost, the unfunded portion is \$3,298,000. The project includes 364 residential lots, 2 multi-family tracts, 23 commercial lots/tracts, and open space. At full build-out, the economic area benefit is estimated at \$60 million annually.

City of Yakima

City of Zillah

Yakima Air Terminal

Action: None

Follow-Up: *Include some highlights in 2018 Annual Report.*

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Matt Pietrusiewicz, P.E., County Engineer, Yakima County, said that Yakima County funds road maintenance and operations first and improvements second. The use of county roads are changing. Every road carries farm vehicles.

Mr. Pietrusiewicz pointed out that Safe Routes to Schools funding is not helpful to Yakima County because all schools are in rural areas of the county. He recommends the state let regions decide how to best spend the money. Yakima County shifts \$2.5 million from the road levy, leaving \$12 million for county roads.

Mr. Pietrusiewicz also noted the difficulty in funding road improvements where areas are in transition from rural to urban. Mr. Millar recognizes the challenges of urban fringe development. In some places, the county has invested in improvements and worked out a long-term buy-down agreement with the city. Public works departments have to engage in the land use business to survive long-term.

Mr. Millar said a problem with the Growth Management Act (GMA) is that state transportation facilities are not considered when cities and counties develop. County staff responded that the East-West Corridor project is collaborative and should be a benefit to infill, rather than green field development.

Action: None

Follow-Up: *Include some highlights in 2018 Annual Report.*

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Alvie Maxey, Manager, Yakima Transit, reported that Yakima Transit is a Division of the City of Yakima Public Works Department. It operates nine fixed routes in the City, paratransit, and vanpools (which mainly travel to Hanford). Yakima Transit has 24 low-floor buses and 27 paratransit vehicles. It is making route changes to serve more territory, provide shorter trips, and increase ridership.

The Yakima-Ellensburg commuter is a success story. It has about 24,000 riders and operates about hourly from 6:30 am to 6:30 pm.

Dennis Henne, Public Works Director, City Union Gap, talked about Union Gap Transit. With 6200 residents and 7000 jobs, Union Gap has a larger daytime population than residents. It began a transit system in 2007 with a 0.2% sales tax. No fare is charged.

Joe Henne, Public Works Director, City of Selah, reported that Selah Transit collects a 0.3% sales tax. It began operation of its own transit service in May 2018 for one fixed route in the city, a route connecting to Yakima and other systems, and paratransit. Service is fare-free. Selah is a stop on the Yakima-Ellensburg Connector.

Karen Cunningham reported that the Yakama Nation operates Pahto Public Passage with seven employees. It six fixed routes and paratransit and charges no fare. It has been operating for four-and-a-half years as a tribal operation. It averages 30,000 unlinked passenger trips annually.

Currently the Federal Transit Administration funds Pahto Passage, but it is eligible for state grant funds. Mr. Millar suggested that Yakama Nation bring to WITPAC the challenge it faces in accessing state grants.

Madelyn Carlson, Executive Director, People For People (PFP), reported that the nonprofit agency has been providing special needs transportation in Yakima County since 1982. In 1989, it began providing Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation (NEMT) as a broker for Medicaid-eligible residents in nine Eastern Washington counties. It also provides Meals on Wheels.

With funding from WSDOT and Aging and Long-Term Care of SE Washington (the Area Agency on Aging) PFP provides door-to-door transport for special needs clients outside of transit-served areas.

People For People's Community Connector is a fare-free, fixed-route transportation service for the public that carried over 58,000 passengers in 2017. The Connector travels weekdays along the I-82 Corridor from Yakima to Prosser, three times daily. ADA accessible, the Connector has designated stops in Yakima, Wapato, Toppenish, Zillah, Granger, Sunnyside, Grandview and Prosser. It provides a connection between Yakima Transit and Ben Franklin Transit in Prosser.

About 50% of PFP's funding comes from the state. Another 15% is from local sources and 35% is federal funds.

People For People

Action: None

Follow-Up: *Include some highlights in 2018 Annual Report.*

YAKAMA NATION TRANSPORTATION

Economic development and safety are transportation priorities for the Yakama Nation. Karen Cunningham, Economic Development Director, Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation reported that Eastern Washington University helped the Yakama Nation create a Tribal Traffic Safety Committee. It includes Tribal Police and youth services. Tribal Police also have hired a traffic enforcement officer. A traffic safety corridor is proposed for US 97 where pedestrians are frequently struck. Mr. Millar suggests Ms. Cunningham contact Barb Chamberlain with the Active Transportation Division, WSDOT.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Carl See, Senior Financial Analyst, WSTC, presented an overview of the current toll exemptions by facility and the proposed system-wide toll exemptions recommended by the Tolling Team.

WAC 270 Draft

Before and After Exemptions

Action: *Commissioner Jennings moved and Commissioner Batra seconded the motion that the Commission file the CR-102 to make substantive changes in toll exemptions. The motion was approved unanimously.*

Commissioner Young stated that the purpose of the rulemaking is to standardize exemptions on all toll facilities. Chairman Litt noted that the Tacoma Narrows Bridge Citizens' Advisory Committee did not support expanded exemptions for that facility.

Follow-Up: *The Commission will hold a public hearing on the proposed rule at 1:00 pm, July 17, 2018.*

EAST-WEST CORRIDOR AND CASCADE MILL REDEVELOPMENT

The City of Yakima is pursuing a major brownfields redevelopment at the site of the former Cascade Mill. The city, Yakima County, and the state are collaborating on transportation improvements connected with the redevelopment. Improvements include access to the former mill site and a new bridge over I-82 and the Yakima River improving connections between the City of Yakima and Terrace Heights. The design also improves access to and from I-82 without adding an interchange.

Brett Sheffield, Chief Engineer, City of Yakima, said that closure of the Boise Cascade mill in 2006, eliminated 225 jobs.

Designated as a Local Infrastructure Financing Tool (LIFT) project, the redevelopment opportunities on 225 acres has the potential to create 4500 jobs and generate \$426 million in tax revenue over 30-years.

The Yakima River crossing and I-82 improvements are funded. Next steps include:

City of Yakima

- Enter into Agreed Order with the Department of Ecology
- Acquire Right of Way for Bravo Company Boulevard extension
- Obtain Railroad Crossing Permit from BNSF
- Secure Funding and Complete Design of the H Street Improvements

Yakima County

- Pursuing TIB Funding for county's Phase 1 project
- Pursuing Washington State Recreation and Conservation grant funding for the pedestrian bridge over the Yakima River

WSDOT

- Continue scoping and preliminary environmental work for I-82 improvements

Total project cost is estimated to be \$165 million.

Cascade Mill District

New East West Corridor Connector

Action: None

Follow-Up: *Include some highlights in 2018 Annual Report.*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is an essential component of economic vitality in the Yakima Valley. Agriculture, tourism, and industry require access, mobility, and reliable options.

Jonathan Smith, Yakima County Development Association reported Yakima County has the lowest per capita property tax collection in the state. Yakima County has experienced out-migration since 2001. Mr. Smith added that revenue from the .9% sales tax for rural economic development funds Supporting Investments in Economic Development (SIED) grants. Yakima County has received \$45 million from the .9% sales tax rebate, which has funded over 100 projects. Commissioner Tortorelli noted that Yakima County has been one of the most successful in utilizing the 0.9% sales tax for rural economic development.

Mr. Smith emphasized that in the past companies have wanted to come to Yakima County, but has not seen the infrastructure there.

Jim Sewell, Commissioner, Port of Grandview, noted that that the Port of Grandview is the youngest port district in the state. Transportation is critical. The dairy industry is growing; there are 91,000 cows in the Lower Yakima Valley. It also is the home of the only Wal-Mart Distribution center in the Northwest, and the largest petroleum distributor. The food processing industry is growing.

When the Henningsen cold storage facility opens, there could potentially be 1000 semis in and out of Grandview every day.

Jay Hester, Executive Director, Port of Sunnyside, said that transportation is essential to growing the agricultural economy. The Port of Sunnyside hosts the largest Darigold facility. Ostrom Mushrooms is adding a new mushroom farm in Sunnyside. The Port of Sunnyside is also working on downtown redevelopment. It has helped to open a brewery and winery in downtown Sunnyside.

John Cooper, President and CEO, Yakima Valley Tourism, said that quality of life is fundamental to our success. Yakima County is ranked 9th in tourism spending in the state. Half of the \$410 million visitors spend stays in King County. The vast majority of visitors come to Yakima by personal car. Rail travel is a distant dream at best.

Almost seven years ago, Washington State closed its small tourism department. The tourism industry created the Washington Tourism Alliance. Good news: in the 2018 session, the Legislature enacted a funding source for tourism promotion. The plan offers the potential for a maximum \$9 million per biennium. It is a small start: Oregon is spending \$30 million and British Columbia is spending \$50 million.

Action: None

Follow-Up: *Include some highlights in 2018 Annual Report.*

MOBILITY AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Travel choices affect our health and environmental quality. Communities in Yakima County are working to improve and expand walking and bicycling as travel options.

Kellie Connaughton, Executive Director, Yakima Greenway, said the partnership between the Greenway and WSDOT dates back to the beginning of the Greenway. A growing number of commuters are using more than 20 miles of paved pathway as a commute option, including Larry Mattson. Alaska Airlines will feature the Greenway in a future issue on Yakima tourism.

Elissa Southward, Supervisor, Community Health, Yakima Memorial/Virginia Mason, briefed the Commission on the City's Bicycle Master Plan, a product of the city's Yakima County Bike and Pedestrian Committee. The bike plan aims to add 60 miles of on-street improvements and four miles of new trail connections to tie together existing trails and bike routes.

Ms. Connaughton also spoke about the Yakima Health and Well-Being Coalition, which is working to bring a Blue Zones project to Yakima County. There are certain communities in the world that have many healthy centenarians.

National Geographic identified shared principles among these “Blue Zone” communities that contribute to long, healthy lives. Deploying these Blue Zone principles in a less healthy community revealed significant improved health benefits. The idea is to make the healthy choice the easy choice. If the coalition successfully gets a Blue Zones grant, the project would begin in the City of Yakima and expand to other parts of the county, involving five staff, over five years for about \$6 million.

There is the potential for the project to improve the image and self-perception of Yakima, which has generated strong support from the Chamber of Commerce.

Action: None

Follow-Up: *Include some highlights in 2018 Annual Report.*

WSDOT REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

State transportation facilities and programs are essential to mobility, economic vitality and livability. Todd Trepanier, Region Administrator, South Central Region, WSDOT, and Brian White, Assistant Region Administrator, South Central Region, WSDOT, reported on projects in the Yakima region.

State of Good repair is a challenge. Of the 488 state-owned bridges in the South Central Region, the average age is 47 years and the total replacement cost is \$5.6 billion. The oldest bridge was built in 1916. Forty-two bridges are over 80 years old and three are over 100 years old.

The region has 855 lane miles of concrete pavement. 8% of lane miles are past due for replacement. Another 26% is due or near due. Of the region’s 1141 lane miles of asphalt pavement, 12% is past due and 25% is due or near due.

Other important activities and challenges include:

- Elk in the median between Ryegrass and Vantage
- Working with the Yakama Nation on US 97 Corridor safety
- US 12 Wildcat Creek Design-Build project
- US 97 Toppenish to Oregon Border, passing lanes and lack of alternate route
- SR 823 to SR 821, too much Highway and too little Main Street
- US 12 Naches to Selah, accidents and traffic volume, erosion
- Rattlesnake Hill Landslide above I-82

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

LOOKING AHEAD

Larry Mattson, Executive Director, Yakima Valley Council of Governments, summed up the presentations and tour and reflected how the region is growing in many ways throughout the county.

- The Yakima Greenway is a story of persistence and 40 years of work
- Local advocates are needed to create a countywide transit system

- He advocates for the right project, in the right place, at the right time. YVCOG is a policy shop, not a project shop. We try to educate members to promote healthy choices, not the easy choice of a green field development
- He is reading *Moneyball for Government* and working to steer YVCOG from anecdotes to data

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lou Musso, All Aboard Washington, reported that his organization commissioned a study of passenger rail service to Eastern Washington with Central Washington University.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Agriculture drives what happens here. However, every community is looking for something else.

It is amazing to see the Greenway grow and expand over 40 years.

More discussion of quality of life in this meeting than I can remember.

Yakima County communities are working toward a positive future. A lot of cities are thriving. Look at lessons learned on urban areas and suburbanization.

Impressive amount of construction, activities, and collaboration.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

JERRY LITT, Chairman

ROY JENNINGS, Vice-Chairman

SHIV BATRA, Member

ABSENT

HESTER SEREBRIN, Member

JOE TORTORELLI, Member

DEBBIE YOUNG, Member

VACANT

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL