

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
Meeting Summary
Clarkston, Washington
September 20, 2011

The local meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, September 20, 2011, at Clarkston City Hall, Council Chambers, 829 5th Street, Clarkston, Washington.

CHAIR WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Ford opened the meeting with Commissioner and staff introductions.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

The Commissioners introduced themselves to the Clarkston meeting attendees and proceeded to an item of Commission business.

Commissioner Parker moved adoption of the minutes from the July 19 & 20, 2011 Commission meeting. Commissioner Haley seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Parker moved adoption of the minutes from the August 24, 2011 Final Ferry Fare hearing. Commissioner Cowan seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted 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 funding.

[Transportation 101](#)

CITY OF CLARKSTON

Mayor Donna Engle welcomed the Commission to Clarkston. She cited key needs:

- Sidewalks;
- the diagonal;
- stormwater management, especially new gutters and curbs on Bridge Street;
- both Snake River bridges need improvement.

Jim Martin, Director, Clarkston Public Works, explained that because the City of Clarkston is pretty much built out, the challenge is preservation. Of the city's \$10 million budget, \$1.1 million is for streets.

Grant funding appears to be shifting to "shovel-ready" projects. With a small staff and budget, it is hard to have "shovel-ready" projects sitting on the shelf. We still need funding to design and plan projects.

The condition of Bridge Street, SR 12, “is embarrassing to say the least.” Martin said that WSDOT needs to put more money into highways through cities.

Finally, unfunded mandates continue to be a burden on small cities.

Commissioner Tortorelli noted that Spokane is taking a second bond package to its voters for street improvements. Commissioner Haley asked if the city has banked levy capacity or has looked at creating a TBD for additional funding.

Reema Griffith, Executive Director, WSTC, asked if the city would prefer that new money be structured in a competitive grant program or be direct distribution funds.

Action/Follow-Up: None.

ASOTIN COUNTY

Commissioner Don Brown emphasized that a “little bit of money goes a long ways.” He said that the biggest priority is SR 129, Fleshmann Way.

Joe Ristau, Director, Port of Whitman County, talked further about SR 129. He is the Eastern District representative of the Washington State Association of County Engineers and touted the engineering expertise in Southeast Washington’ counties. He noted that -- unusual for the Palouse -- a significant share of Asotin County roads have urban character.

Asotin County has four fewer FTEs in public works today than in 1996; cuts in maintenance and preservation. Asotin County is “marginally meeting our needs.” We’ve seen a disturbing reduction in reserves and the ability to do projects. We’re getting to the point where we can no longer “do more with less.” I really want to emphasize how a little money can go further. The Legislature criticized WSDOT for spreading the money around, but we got a lot done with a little. We did a lot with Hazard Elimination System grant money; we won the Director’s Award.

There seems to be a new trend for projects that they should be “shovel-ready.” With ARRA funding, we did a lot of projects that would be classified as preservation rather than capital improvements. Commissioner Haley wondered if there could be a role for circuit-riding engineers in helping developing “shovel-ready” projects.

Fleshmann Way is the highest regional priority project; its design is almost complete. Project cost is about \$10 million. It is too big to do with local funds and most grants and too small to compete with most big projects.

Asotin County would prefer a distribution method if new money was significant; but if it is too little to get things done, he would rather see someone else get a priority funded. At the local level, we “want to have the chance to compete fairly.”

If the state required a local match to get new state money, enactment of a TBD or using banked levy capacity would be more compelling.

Lewis-Clark MPO provides “the single best opportunity” for the region to work together on transportation priorities. Unfortunately, it also brought Clarkston into the purview of NPDES Phase II.

There is a potential scour issue on the Southway Bridge. The Blue Bridge and the Wolf Bridge are state bridges. The Southway Bridge is locally funded.

Action/Follow-Up: Provide Commissioners information on the banked levy capacity of counties.

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Mayor Craig George, Dayton and Chair, Palouse RTPO

- We have looked into a Columbia County TBD, but it would only generate about \$50,000 a year. We are now considering a tax vote.
- TIB is our salvation in a small town like Dayton.
- Marshall Doak has been hired as the new RTPO Director.

Mark Storey, Whitman County Engineer, provided an overview of the Palouse RTPO membership. It includes four ports, 8 airports (including two regional airports) and a lot of WSDOT rail. Columbia-Snake barging is very important: 10 million tons of wheat move by barge each year. The rail system also is very important.

Commissioner Ford asked if money for track rehabilitation would be attractive to include in a funding package. Mark Storey thought it would be useful – some rail research is included in the 2010 Palouse RTPO Plan.

A chip seal should be done every 7 years; 10 years ago, Whitman County could chip seal every 12 years. Today, a chip seal is done on a 15-18 year cycle. The cost of oil alone today is more than the cost of the entire program ten years ago.

The County Arterial Preservation Program (CAPP) is a great way to get preservation money to counties. In a span of 10 years, Whitman County dropped from 92 wood bridges to only 38 today.

Last year, Whitman County rebuilt a bridge that was damaged from trucks carrying 120,000 ton loads (overweight). It spent about \$120,000 - \$130,000 on the repair; to qualify for federal funding, Whitman County would have had to spend \$150,000. Sometimes, the federal government will provide 82.5% of funding – but it will take about 5 years to get through the review process.

Maintenance should be done with direct distribution money; preservation and capital improvement should be separately funded. A small bridge fund would be very helpful.

Responding to a question, Drew Woods, Columbia County Engineer, said that Columbia County is not considering leaving Palouse RTPO to link with Walla Walla for transportation. It is looking at working more closely with Walla Walla on economic development.

Matt Jensen, Director, Lewis-Clark Valley MPO, noted that it is an unusual MPO in that it is bi-state. Established in 2003; its first workplan identified the Fleshmann Way interchange as a priority.

He sees the MPO as a bioregion. The river doesn't divide the region, it unites the region. A new MPO Plan is being developed.

The federal reauthorization discussion continues to talk about eliminating small MPOs. Some propose to grandfather all existing MPOs, regardless of size. Commissioner Ford said that it is especially important to keep an MPO like this, where it covers two states.

Two concerns:

- Need to have multiple owners of bridges be at the table to move forward with improvements
- Coordination to develop Annual Transportation Improvement Plan

Action/Follow-Up: None.

Asotin PTBA

Kim Gates and **Greg Gill** revealed that Asotin PTBA brought transit in-house in 2010. Prior to that Valley Transit provided the service. It has 10 vanpools in service; saving over 800 thousand gallons of fuel. Dispatch is shared with Lewiston Transit; some routes cross the river.

In the first year, there was a 30% increase in ridership; since then a 56% increase in ridership. Last year, Asotin PTBA provided over 10,000 ADA rides, and an increasing share on fixed routes.

Commissioner Ford asked if state funding should assist Dial-a-Ride service. Kim Gates responded that for Asotin PTBA, it is 4-5 times the cost.

Action/Follow-Up: None.

MEETING TRANSPORTATION NEEDS FOR THE ELDERLY

Dean Burton, Garfield County Commissioner, introduced Rachel Slusser. He told about an elderly woman who relies on Garfield Transportation to get to the hospital to get a bath and her hair washed twice a week. The important thing is to keep seniors living in their homes and provide a way for them to get where they need to go without a car.

Funding with grants is not the way to run a system. The grants are biennial. A permanent fund source is needed.

Rachel Slusser, Assistant Coordinator, Garfield County Public Transportation, explained that Garfield County Transit is an unincorporated Transportation Benefit Area. It operates Monday-Thursday 8-4 and Friday 8 -2.

In Garfield County, 36% of the population is disabled. Commissioner Burton estimates that about 40% of the population is elderly. Medical appointments in Clarkston/Lewiston must be made to coincide with Tuesday/Thursday service. GCT has a hard time finding staff because it operates only a few days a week.

Stephanie Guettinger, General Manager, Columbia County Public Transportation (CCPT) ,shared its motto, "We're not just a ride, we're an adventure."

CCPT started operations in 1996. Since March 2005, it has been organized as a County Transportation Authority (RCW 36.57.010-.090). It began vanpool operations in April 2005 and won a 0.04% sales tax in November 2005.

CCPT provides demand-response service, 7 am – 7 pm during the school year, including service to Waitsburg and Dixie. It provides limited Saturday service and is available 24/7 to provide Medicaid services.

CCPT makes a minimum of 10 trips a day into Walla Walla. None of the social services agencies in the counties provide transportation. It makes connections to the Walla Walla airport, Valley Transit, the Grapeline, and Garfield County Transportation. CCPT coordinates with People to People and social service facilities and providers.

Funding sources:

- Federal grants 42%
- State grants 25%
- Local match 33%

Commissioner Dean Burton thinks his voters would be more willing to support transit funding than freeway improvements. Commissioner Cowan asked if there should be more local involvement in project selection and Commissioner Burton said that would be great.

[Meeting Transportation Needs of the Elderly](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORTATION

Wanda Keefer, Port Manager, Port of Clarkston, stressed the importance of dam and river channel maintenance. The three ports view the three river ports as a system with each having its special niche. The Port of Clarkston services cruise tours, and has exceeded its storage capacity for agricultural products this year. It lacks rail access.

The Port of Clarkston has worked on two grant projects:

- evaluating the dock capacity
- an active vibrant waterfront – adding new sidewalks on the waterfront

Keep in mind, in addition to the navigable river channel, a Port needs to have a dock, a roadway to the dock and adjacent areas.

Eastern Washington ports also need to think about connections/benefits/impediments with data transportation.

Joe Poire, Executive Director, Port of Whitman County, talked about the purchase and rehabilitation of the PCC. The state owns it, but the counties are the PCC Board, responsible for governance. In 2010, shipping increased 20% over 2009 to 8,000 carloads. Consulting firm HDR and WSDOT have developed an \$80 million rehabilitation plan.

There is a \$17 million private investment underway in Oakesdale for a unit train facility and McGregor is building a chemical facility. Cost-benefit analysis for PCC depends on the savings in road investment, less pollution, economic advantages to farmers. PCC is currently benefitting from a 5:1 private investment.

The rail system allows for shipments east. The Grain Train cars add an immense amount of stability to the network.

Only Tidewater Barge Lines ship above the Lower Granite Dam.

Mr. Poire said that it has been a real challenge working with WSDOT recently – the message he gets is that PCC doesn't matter. He hasn't heard from the acting rail manager; they took someone working on safety crossings and assigned them as a liaison, and then moved that person on. Now we have a part-time consultant working from her home.

Commissioner Haley commented, "You've been parked on a siding." Mr. Poire added, "With one wheel on the track and another in the fields."

David Doeringsfield, Port Manager, Port of Lewiston, talked about the Port of Lewiston, the one port in Idaho. Rail moved most of the cargo from 1900-1950s, then trucks took over for 20 years. In the mid-1970s, the navigation channel brought barges. Lewiston moves 10,000 containers a year.

The Port of Lewiston moves 16-17 million bushels of wheat a year. North-central is a box canyon when it comes to rail. To go any other direction, you pretty much have to go as far east as the tri-cities. Highway 12 and Hwy 95 are the key roads – both are two-lane roads and environmental activists are protesting some of the shipments if they are destined to mine fossil fuels.

[Economic Development and Transportation](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Paul W. Locke said that money that is collected that should go for roads is going for other things. He said that only 19% of the new \$60 license fee in Seattle will go to roads.

"We're back at the point where we have to get it done with what we have."

2. Jill Ekberg, a Clarkston resident who has worked for the National Park Service throughout the west, commented on revenue collection and megaloads.

She said that many Asotin County residents are not licensing their vehicles in Washington. She also said that fees per truckload are not high enough. There are too many megaload and oversize permits; they are becoming routine and there is inadequate analysis of the impacts. It isn't just tar sands driving the weight; in some places it is wind turbines and natural gas equipment.

Washington is shifting megaload issues to Idaho and Montana; there is inadequate policing and the shipments are causing accidents.

Washington State Troopers Association argue that big trucks are doing damage to roads and causing safety issues.

Siltation and accumulation of heavy metals will make shipping untenable on the upper reaches of the Snake River.

“Our region is being trashed and will then be tossed.” She said that federal lawsuits may be filed to stop the megaloads. She asked that the Commissioners imagine the modules at the Port of Lewiston on two-lane winding roads in other corners of the state.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL