

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
June 19, 2007**

The local jurisdiction meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, June 19, 2007 at the Port of Walla Walla, Blue Mountain Room, 45 Terminal Loop Road, Walla Walla, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair Dick Ford, Dan O'Neal, Ed Barnes, Bob Distler, Elmira Forner, Carol Moser and Dale Stedman.

CHAIRMAN WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Ford introduced Commissioners and staff and welcomed meeting participants and guests. He provided a brief overview of the Commission's role and responsibilities.

CITY OF WALLA WALLA TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Mayor Pro-Tem Dan Johnson, City of Walla Walla, explained that the City of Walla Walla has over 135 miles of streets and roads. The city is also located on an important interstate transportation corridor between Oregon and Washington. He emphasized that the efficient movement of traffic in today's world of high fuel costs is critical to the economic health and vitality of the region, the state and the nation. He provided examples of transportation accomplishments, in progress projects and projects on the drawing board. The City of Walla Walla works closely with the City of College Place and Walla Walla County on major projects of common interest. They Myra Road extension project is a classic example of partnership and cooperation. Walla Walla like other Washington cities faces major financial challenges in funding all levels of transportation projects. The loss of license tab fees striped the cities ability to fund street projects and has required the council to examine and find other ways to fund streets, while continuing to maintain essential community services, such as police, fire, parks and recreation. The outcome has been severely reduced street programs in cities. He provided highlights of projects in the region that are currently underway or in planning, along with funding issues. He emphasized that the 13th Avenue/Highway 125 interchange project has significant storm water management issues. The interchange provides access to the state's largest penitentiary on this most important north/south state highway connector. With the expansion of the penitentiary it should be important for the state to cooperate in the planning and design as well as provide adequate funding to resolve this issue.

Duane Cole, City Manager, City of Walla Walla, provided further explanation of the 13th Avenue/Highway 125 interchange funding issues. Negotiations with the Department of Corrections have been cumbersome and WSDOT's funding mechanisms are limited. He provided an overview of various projects throughout the region.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Mark Kushner, Transportation Director, Benton-Franklin Council of Governments, provided an overview of MPO/RTPO activities and its membership growth. He touched on the penitentiary expansion as well as other tri-county projects, noting that over the last 10 years there has been a growth spurt in the area. Regional accomplishments include the Railex Project, SR 240 improvements and the Inertia connecting SR 395 to the Finley Industrial area as well as various other projects. There are also several concept projects under review and in planning.

Commissioner Moser noted that she supports the Commute Trip Reduction Program, but it is viewed by the business community as a detriment.

Mr. Kushner emphasized the importance of keeping and maintaining the light rail line and Snake River Dams.

Chair Ford commented on the short line issue. He indicated that it is primary to preserve the right of way and secondly keeping it operational. Firstly, where does the money come from to keep these rarely used lines viable as actual freight hauling facilities. He expressed that he feels the legislature is amenable in trying to acquire abandon rights of way, so that they can be held and be available at some point.

Commissioner O'Neal commented that it's important to leverage state money to get local participation instead of looking to the state to bail these facilities out.

Mr. Kushner referred to a regional level of service analysis for urban and rural facilities within the region, noting that there are areas that fall below level of service and a couple are borderline inadequate according to the analysis. He provided an update on the status of the US Highway 12 four-laning project. He moved on to share information on the Tri City Columbia River Bridge crossing concepts and model development assumptions.

STATE TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS, ISSUES AND CHALLENGES WITHIN THE SOUTH CENTRAL REGION

Don Whitehouse, Regional Administrator, South Central Region, WSDOT, provided an update on the status of US 12 construction phases noting that minimizing the impact on environmentally sensitive areas is a primary objective in the design of these projects. He provided an overview of the completion of phase one and two and an update on funding for phases three through six. Phases seven and eight have not been funded, but will be developed as part of phase four, the Wallula to Walla Walla Corridor Study. The project is on schedule and on budget. Further information on this project can be found at: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/Accountability/Lately/US12.htm>. He noted the benefits of the SR 124 interchange and the Myra Road projects. In closing he highlighted Myra Road project milestones and gave a brief overview of its history. The completion of this project, the last ten miles, will aid in the congestion on I-90 Snoqualmie Pass. In closing he emphasized the importance of maintenance operations and the associated costs.

Commissioner Stedman provided a status update of the Commission's Inland Northwest Transportation Summit to be held on September 19 & 20th at the Spokane Convention Center. The event is scheduled to kick off with an evening reception on September 19 with

workshops all day on 20th. The summit will focus on freight mobility, transportation funding, with an emphasis on partnering, and finding new ways to fund highways, bridges and cooperative projects.

BRIEFING ON THE MYRA ROAD PROJECT AND ITS RELATION TO THE US 12 PROJECT

Randy Glaeser, Public Works Director, City of Walla Walla, briefed the Commission regarding the Myra Road extension project's milestones. He also provided a bit of the project's history. Some of the project challenges have been: environmental mitigation and coordination with US 12 along with cost increases. Other challenges have been coordinating with multiple agencies and development needs. There have been several open houses and active public involvement.

UPDATE ON RAILEX AND REVIEW US 12 CONNECTION TO FREIGHT MOVEMENT

Paul Gerola, Director of Economic Development, Port of Walla Walla, opened the presentation with an overview of the Port, its functions and responsibilities. The Railex Project's primary function is to distribute fresh produce from the West coast to the East coast in a cost effective manner. There are 55 railcars that ship weekly from Wallula, WA to Albany, NY, in less than five days. He provided an overview of funding partners for the project noting that the project has been very successful. In closing he provided an overview of phase three of US 12.

Jim Kleist, Railex, provided an overview of the history of Railex, where the funding for the project came from and the variety of items (mainly produce and nursery stock) that the trains carry. He explained that Railex is expanding its west to east coast operation into other states with back haul opportunities.

Dr. Fred Bennett, Commissioner, Port of Walla Walla, noted Railex's success and shared that large companies are looking at it for services.

VALLEY TRANSIT ALTERNATIVE FUEL USE

Dick Fondahn, General Manager, Valley Transit, provided an overview of the various types of alternative transportation that Walla Walla has available. Natural Gas used as a fuel has environmental benefits that can reduce nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide by up to 9 percent and reactive hydrocarbons by up to 80 percent, as well as the base price being substantially cheaper per gallon. He explained that the cost of natural gas buses is substantially higher than traditional fuel buses, but there is an energy credit for the use of natural gas as an alternative fuel.

OVERVIEW OF LONG-TERM TRANSPORTATION ARTERIAL PLAN (LTAP)

Hal Thomas, Public Works Director, City of Walla Walla, explained that Long Term Arterial Plan established a long term plan that was agreed to by the agencies for transportation corridors. It provides a predictable and long-term development tool for citizens and developers to incorporate agency development planning and comprehensive growth plans. Essentially governments define the need, public hearings are held and action takes place. There are ongoing efforts to continue open communication between agency engineers and policy makers.

PUBLIC AND LEGISLATOR COMMENT PERIOD

Barbara Clark, Walla Walla City Council member, shared her concerns regarding intercity transportation, and the cancellation of Greyhound stops in the city. She explained that alternative transit service is being explored to fill the gap.

Stanley Green, citizen, expressed his concerns regarding the state's reluctance to view intercity buses as being as important as intercity rail. He pointed out that buses are vital to rural communities as well as urban areas.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 5 p.m., on June 19, 2007.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DICK FORD, Chair

ELMIRA FORNER, Vice Chair

EDWARD BARNES, Member

DALE STEDMAN, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

CAROL MOSER, Member

ROBERT S. DISTLER, Member

PAULA HAMMOND, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

JENNIFER ZIEGLER, Governor's Office

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL