

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

The local jurisdiction meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Monday, March 19, 2007 at the Cowlitz County Expo Center, Coweeman and Columbia Rooms, 1900 7th Avenue, Longview 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 opened the meeting with Commissioner and Commission staff introductions. He extended welcome to meeting participants and public attendees. He noted the presence of Amanda Dotson, representing U.S. Senator Baird's office and Bob Dingethal, representing U.S. Senator Cantwell's office.

LONGVIEW'S TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Bob Gregory, City Manager, City of Longview, thanked the Commission for extending the opportunity to address the Commission. He shared a presentation that provided an overview of transportation needs and challenges within the area. He emphasized that Longview's economy is presently very strong, but there are transportation challenges ahead. He highlighted that Longview has 150 miles of roadway with three state highways that traverse the city: SR 4 Ocean Beach Highway, SR 411 3rd Avenue/1st Avenue and SR 432 Tennant way/3rd Avenue/Industrial Way. System deficiencies within the area are the Cowlitz River Crossing, SR 432 and SR 4/411. The Cowlitz River Crossing Study-1996 analysis forecasted unacceptable congestion levels on existing bridges by 2020. With continued growth in the Lexington area resulting in a 45 percent increase in traffic SR 411 by 2020. The study also concluded that an additional bridge connecting Interstate 5 and SR 411 should be built connecting SR 411 at Lexington to I-5 at Ostrander Exit 42, which would provide congestion relief. The SR 411 Urban Mitigation Plan will improve intersections with traffic signals and widening of Long Avenue. Another major challenge is Ocean Beach Highway (SR 4). This highway carries the highest daily traffic count in the Longview area. Possible alternate routes and connectors are under consideration. Transportation funding challenges are finding the funding sources. Previously Longview did receive a funding allocation based on population, but beginning in 2008 funds will be allocated on a competitive basis for projects with regional significance. He provided an overview of current funding sources and further explained the city's need.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Rosemary Siipola, Transportation Planner/Manager, Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments, explained that the Council has been very successful over the last ten years obtaining funding from a wide variety of sources to complete major construction projects within the area.

The COG has worked very hard to bring parties together on transportation projects. There are challenges ahead resulting from the increase in economic development in the area that has impacted the transportation infrastructure. She gave kudos to WSDOT Southwest Region for all of their dedication, hard work and partnership. She provided highlights of projects currently in progress, future transportation partnership projects and future Nickel projects.

OVERVIEW OF STATE TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS, CHALLENGES AND ISSUES WITHIN THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION'S SOUTHWEST REGION

Jack Burkman, Planning Manager, Bob Kofstad, Maintenance Supervisor and Paul Harrison, Assistant Area Engineer, Southwest Region, WSDOT, provided an overview of growth and funding issues in region. Mr. Burkman shared information regarding funding and delivering projects on schedule, noting that his primary focus is on long-term planning. He touched briefly on the Columbia River channel deepening project noting that a large section of it was just completed.

Gene Donaldson, Southwest Region Maintenance, WSDOT, commented briefly regarding highway maintenance and slope stabilization on various highways in the region. The escalation of project costs was briefly discussed.

STATE ROUTE 4 BYPASS

Cowlitz County Commissioners provided a presentation on the impacts of slide occurrences on SR 4 between Germany Creek Road and Bunker Hill Road. The Boards of County Commissioners of Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties determined that it was best interest of their citizens to evaluate the potential for a bypass to the slide area. Public meetings were held in where the outcome determined that there needed to be a bypass only to be open during events or emergencies. It is felt that the State should participate in the project since the blockage occurred on a state route. The purpose of the bypass is to provide a safe, cost effective, alternate route to SR 4 for emergency use when a blockage occurs. Four alternatives were provided with the third alternative being the recommended choice that is least cost and follows an existing alignment. The Boards of Cowlitz and Wahkiakum Counties requested the assistance of the Transportation Commission in prioritizing this vital project within the Washington Transportation Plan and assistance in obtaining project funding.

MARINE AND RAIL ISSUES FACING THE REGION

Port Perspective

Mark Wilson, Manager of Planning, Port of Kalama, kicked off the presentation with an overview of the port's geography and a bit of its history. He distributed a handout titled "Washington Ports"-source of data provided was from the Pacific Maritime Association Annual Reports 2001-05 graphing cargo volume of Washington Ports. He provided an overview of products that are imported and exported via the port. He emphasized that rail capacity has become strained.

Kalama export has plans for additional expansion in the next year or two that would add storage capacity and enhance turnaround time for loading and off loading of rail cars.

The Army Corps of Engineers continues to deepen the Columbia River navigation channel. This channel is economically vital to the nation and region with \$16 billion in exports and imports transported via the river each year.

George Cress, Director of Real Estate & Planning, Port of Longview, shared recent rail developments that impact the port. Rail developments to the port infrastructure have improved connection to BNSF and UP main lines that serve the ports industrial property and marine terminals. These developments reduce traffic and improve traffic congestion and safety. There is also proposed construction of two new grain terminal sites along the rail corridor that would speed the process of loading and off-loading trains. In closing he provided an overview of the Columbia River channel deepening explaining that it is vital to the navigation of the major import/export channel. He shared highlights of progress made so far on the dredging of the channel.

Private Industry Perspective

John Leber, President, Swanson Bark & wood Products, Longview, explained that his company both ships and receives products via truck. Due to increased traffic volume from new businesses in the area, and summer travelers to the coast, there are additional congestion and safety hazards because there are no shoulders on the roadway. The best long-term solution is development of an industrial way bypass (elevated) that would create a direct link. Presently there are no public reload facilities in Cowlitz County. There are also challenges working with the railroads as well. He moved on to discuss issues and challenges with the Columbia River Crossing as well as airport limitations. In closing he emphasized that transportation slowdowns affect the economy at every level.

Tom Rozwood, Customer Service/Warehouse Manager, NORPAC, explained that NORPAC has over 1,800 employees, and is Weyerhaeuser's single largest manufacturing facility. Weyerhaeuser is the largest private employer and landowner in the county. It is also the world's largest exporter of wood products. Forty percent of its wood products are exported out of the country via Longview. He provided an overview of truck, rail and marine transportation statistics highlighting specific challenges and issues with each mode.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Ted Sprague, President, Cowlitz Economic Development Council (CEDC), explained that the CEDC is an advocate for business ensuring that Cowlitz County corporations have an influential voice in economic policy making. The Council takes a proactive approach and expertise that provides a competitive advantage to its members. It navigates complex legal and political channels to streamline regulatory burdens and ease the permitting process creating an efficient, cost-effective expansion strategy. He noted that there are 31 EDC's around the state working together as non-profit organizations that rely on the people for their power. He provided an overview of new companies that will be moving to the area within the next few years.

PUBLIC AND LEGISLATOR COMMENT PERIOD

Paul Locke, citizen, addressed the Commission sharing his concerns regarding escalated taxes and projects costs.

Paul Clark, citizen, shared his concerns regarding storm water runoff created by non-transportation construction projects.

Bill Ott, citizen, expressed his concerns regarding the State Route 4 Bypass proposal.

Dick Peters, citizen, shared his concerns regarding the proposed State Route 4 Bypass.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 5 p.m., on March 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

DOUGLAS MACDONALD, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

JENNIFER ZIEGLER, Governor's Office

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL