

**MINUTES OF THE LOCAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
April 15, 2008**

The local jurisdiction meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, April 15, 2008 at the Holiday Inn Express, Sterling Conference Room, 1190 SE Bishop Boulevard, Pullman, Washington.

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

CHAIRMAN WELCOME AND COMMISSION INTRODUCTIONS

Chair Ford introduced Commissioners and staff and welcomed meeting participants and guests.

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

Paul Parker, Senior Policy Analyst, WSTC, explained that the Commission developed the Transportation 101 PowerPoint presentation to provide local communities with a statewide prospective of transportation challenges. As Mr. Parker stepped through each presentation slide Commissioners exchanged various ideas and opinions regarding transportation issues statewide.

Chair Ford welcomed Shan Kelly representing Congresswoman Cathy McMorris-Rodgers and Judy Olson representing Senator Patty Murray.

CITY AND COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Mayor Glenn Johnson, City of Pullman, welcomed the Commission to Pullman. He emphasized that the city is very thankful for the work that has been done on Highway 270. He provided an overview of local street projects and other transportation and economic development projects in the area. He also shared information and recreational guides for the area. He explained that in the past TIB grants have been straight forward, but now the application process is more complicated with an emphasis on multiple funding streams. Also, review of the application and plans for the project is time consuming and pushes projects out to the next construction season. He briefly discussed the use of mass transit funding sources and airport grants.

Mayor Norma Becker, City of Colfax, welcomed the Commission and expressed appreciation for them coming to the area. She explained that without state grants and loans cities would not be able to do anything. It seems that all we do is patch the roads – where does the money come from. We also need to look at utilizing the railroads, there are more trucks than ever on the road and this doesn’t help the highway system.

Carl Thompson, Colfax City Administrator, provided highlights of transportation projects and safety issues in the area.

Commissioners shared information regarding highway maintenance and funding issues. They also expressed their understanding that traffic becomes congested in Colfax when there are events at the university in Pullman.

Jerry Finch, Whitman County Commissioner, expressed that he understands that there will never be enough money to fix all of the transportation problems, so priorities must be set. He expressed his appreciation that the Nickel Package did include the SR 270 project between Moscow and Pullman. This project improved safety for the area as well as for the university students. It has also helped with the county's economic vitality bringing new business development into the area. The county's number one concern is preserving the current infrastructure. County roads in the area were designed for farm trucks not the heavy loads that travel them today. Partnerships within the county have helped with getting some of the local projects done.

Mark Storey, Public Works Director, Whitman County, provided an overview of transportation funding for cities and counties indicating that they receive only 27 percent of the state gas tax revenues. There have not been any real new revenues to cities and counties for maintenance and preservation in over 10 years. Counties operate and maintain vastly more lane miles than WSDOT. County roads also have the highest fatality rate in the state because of the two lane rural nature of the system. In conclusion he explained that evidence clearly indicates that a small investment in rural road safety will have a tremendous impact on our economic vitality. This investment needs to be directed toward both preservation and safety improvements.

REGIONAL ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES

Kathy Parker, Executive Director, Palouse RTPO, shared that the primary focus of today's presentation is public transportation.

Jennie Dickinson, Manager, Port of Columbia, explained that the Port owns 39 miles of short-line rail that was donated by Union Pacific Railroad in the 1990's. The rail was not in the best of shape when donated to the Port and there is very little lease revenue generated from the rail line itself. She shared that WSDOT has committed \$5.5 million in desperately needed rehabilitation funds for the rail line. The area lost its largest shipper in 2004 – a cannery that moved to Peru. However, the company does have a seed processing facility in Dayton on the line that processes 95 percent of the nation's proprietary Green Giant seed, so it is in the community's best interest to retain this business. The Port and factory/ cannery owner are working together to find a tenant for the empty building and it is essential to have rail service to the facility for a potential tenant. She explained that she has been working with the WSDOT Rail Office on the rehab project. She feels that the solution is to maintain a level of service on the short lines to help preserve the tracks to small communities.

Commissioners discussed short line rates as compared to through haul carriers. The state's concern is how public money is used.

W. Grant Morgan, Garfield County Engineer and Director of Public Works, emphasized that preservation and safety is a number one priority and is critical to our infrastructure. Developing partnerships and one-on-one relationships with legislative members, the Transportation Commission, FHWA, WSDOT, CRAB, TIB and the public/private sector helps to link our common concerns together. Small cities and counties need to catch up with environmental, social, political and economic change and take a look at the big picture. The dollars that are spent on mitigating very insignificant environmental issues should be used on the big picture problems.

Joel Ristau, Asotin County Public Works Director/Engineer, explained that simplifying funding mechanisms and allowing for some project programming to be more programmatic, especially preservation and two-lane safety type projects. He suggested forming a funding committee that includes CRAB, WSDOT, FHWA, county engineers and cities to analyze funding opportunities and needs to develop recommendations.

Commissioners emphasized that local government is the best resource for getting out there and educating the public on infrastructure needs.

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Keith Metcalf, Regional Administrator, Eastern Region, WSDOT, shared that the region includes seven northeastern counties, 17 hundred highway miles and about a \$250 million capital construction budget and \$40 million operations budget. He explained that this winter has been challenging due to extreme snow and ice which caused a budget overrun of \$2.2 million for the region. The region will try to get reimbursement for the overrun so that it doesn't affect the rest of the maintenance program. He provided an overview of local area transportation projects sharing the benefits, needs and budget details. For further information on Eastern Region projects please visit: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/regions/Eastern/>

Commissioners asked questions regarding highway maintenance costs, regional projects and the lack of funds to meet maintenance and preservations needs on the entire transportation system.

TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN A UNIVERSITY TOWN

Elson S. Floyd, President, Washington State University (WSU), thanked the Commission for its leadership and coming to Pullman. He shared that roughly 60 percent of the university's students live on the Westside, so transportation is very important. The university has a team of researchers and scholars that have spent a lot of time thinking about transportation issues in general and bio fuel and how it relates to transportation. The university has made a very strong commitment to focus on clean technology -bio fuels and bio products with much of the work being in the Tri Cities. The university will do all that it can to be a good partner with the community and the Commission.

Commissioners thanked the University for its Transportation Research Contributions.

John Shaheen, Director of Transportation, WSU, shared that he will be discussing getting to and from and around Pullman from the university's perspective and student use of transit and pedestrian traffic on campus. The university's transportation department focuses on getting people where they need to be by coordinating with local transit agencies. The university also participates in the Commute Trip Reduction Program and manages the parking system to the best of its ability. WSU Transportation Department is in the people business, with thousands of visitors on a daily basis, and unique to WSU is the operation of the downtown visitor center. He acknowledged the many highway improvements in the area, although more is needed, with several remaining highway safety issues. He provided a historical overview of student public transit usage and campus pedestrian enhancements.

John Sherman, Pullman City Supervisor, opened his presentation with a briefing on transit funding issues. He noted that Pullman has a population of 27 thousand with 18 thousand of that being students. The majority of those are from Puget Sound. Due to the loss of MVET Pullman Transit lost approximately one – third of its funding and is now funded by a utility tax. The reasons for using the utility tax include competing with a lower sales tax rate in neighboring Idaho and finding a tax that could be assessed to the university. Pullman is one of only three municipal transit systems in the state.

Getting to Central Puget Sound is challenging. It's nearly 300 miles to Seattle/Tacoma and most of the students live in the Puget Sound area. Getting the students safely to and from the university is a major concern. Highway safety is a huge concern and there are potholes that need to be fixed, lines repainted and debris on the highway that needs to be cleared on a regular basis. The safety issues and mileage to Seattle emphasize the need to maintain the local airport that provides a safe travel alternative. Students need multimodal choices and the city offers a variety of vehicle, pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit options. Pullman is a compact city in a remote location with sparse populations that make its transportation needs somewhat different than highly congested metropolitan areas. Essentially there is a need to have fewer strings and more multi-year street funding programs with less red tape like we used to have.

Commissioners and Mr. Sherman discussed student conduct, DUI and drug enforcement, traffic safety and funding issues.

WHEAT, BARLEY AND LENTILS: A ROUNDTABLE ON AGRICULTURE AND TRANSPORTATION IN THE PALOUSE

Scott Witt, Director, State Rail Office, WSDOT, opened the roundtable discussion introducing roundtable participants.

Stan Patterson, President, Washington Idaho Railway, shared a historical perspective of rail/freight issues.

Dave Gordon, Manager, Northwest Grain Growers, shared that he represents grain growers throughout the United States. He distributed a map of short-line railroads indicating railroad ownership and potential changes along with status of the lines. An attached chart provided an overview of harvest intakes by department. He also provided an overview of grain versus other products – carloads (rail cars) and related percentages shipped.

He explained that as the growers get bigger they want to deliver to a port or a river place where they receive a premium for their products.

Commissioners and Mr. Gordon exchanged questions and answers regarding moving rail products and the associated costs.

Don Karls, Region Ombudsman for Montana and Eastern Washington, Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF), explained that several years ago BNSF realized that it needed to broaden its outreach to producers and small shippers. That's how the ombudsman program came about approximately four years ago in North Dakota. In closing he explained that he is here to listen and share information and insight on rail issues. He briefly commented on rail issues and rail car movement.

Commissioners shared some of the issues and complaints that they have heard.

Mr. Karls responded that there were capacity and other issues that have been addressed.

Jackie Tee, General Manager, CoAg Producers, explained that her company's average is over 10 million bushels of grain. She noted that there are growers in the area that deliver directly to the port rather than utilize their services. CoAg does not utilize state rail cars because there is not an available means of doing that right now. There has been talk of line connections that would allow for state car usage. Shipment choices at this time are ship/barge to central rail or BNSF direct to Portland.

Mr. Witt shared that WSDOT is working directly with the rail lines and the shippers on the several issues including state car usage.

Ms. Tee stated that growers will choose to ship by truck because the cost of shipping by rail is more expensive. She explained that their location needs to use rail for efficiency, but the lack of rail cars and high rates are obstacles.

In closing roundtable participants exchanged various questions and concerns with Commissioners.

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH

David McLean, Professor and Chair, Civil and Environmental Engineering, WSU, opened his presentation with an overview of the Washington Transportation Research Center (TRAC). TRAC is a partnership that includes the Department of Transportation, the University of Washington and Washington State University. Its mission is to coordinate state and local research to address the transportation needs of Washington State and the nation.

Over the last five years TRAC has done \$6 million in research at WSU. This research has been funded by WSDOT, the Federal Highway Administration, TransNow and the Utilities and Transportation Commission from both Washington and Alaska. There have been a variety of faculty members, departments, research units and students participating in the research. He provided an informational overview on TRAC research projects currently underway.

Commissioners and Mr. McLean discussed various issues regarding asphalt and concrete, stormwater runoff and water quality, wood plastic composites and alternative fuel products.

Eric Jessup, Assistant Professor, School of Economic Sciences, WSU, shared information regarding the university's Transportation Research Group (TRG). He provided an overview of past and present TRG studies sharing that they can be found on the TRAC webpage.

For further information on TRAC and TRG studies please visit its webpage at:
<http://www.ce.wsu.edu/TRAC/>

It was suggested that perhaps TRAC researchers should provide a more comprehensive presentation to the Commission in Olympia at one its regular meetings.

Mr. Jessup responded to Commissioners' questions regarding freight/rail issues and multimodal choices, economic development and congestion management. He also touched on some of the current issues that are being focused on.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Barney Waldrop, Pullman City Council, shared his concerns regarding regional airports statewide. He emphasized that airports should be visibly included in transportation infrastructure studies, particularly small non-commercial airports. The local airport struggles to meet its operational needs.

Tammy Lewis, Palouse Economic Development Council, explained how important transportation is to a growing region. During the winter it is always a struggle due to road conditions – all weather roads are important. It is very important that we keep multimodal transportation options available to the local economy.

Greg Partch, Whitman County Commissioner and Vice Chair, Transportation Improvement Board (TIB), noted that Whitman County has done a very good job in creating and maintaining partnerships. He pointed out that safety is a huge issue and more funding and flexibility with a regional approach is necessary in order to get things done. He noted that the CRAB does not have nearly as much flexibility as the TIB.

Mr. Storey briefly commented regarding all weather/season roads. He noted that this is a statewide issue with roads in all of the state's counties having deficiencies. Some counties are hit harder than others and all weather/season road standards should/can vary greatly depending on geographic location. Counties are struggling with this issue and are working towards better organization for a one-voice approach.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Review Facility Naming Policy

Reema Griffith, Executive Director, WSTC, presented a revised Facility Naming Policy for approval and adoption. The proposed revisions to the current policy are “extending the time of mourning/observance from six months to 12 months after a person has passed” and “persons or groups positive effect on the lives of those they represented.”

It was moved by Commissioner Stedman and seconded by Commissioner Distler to adopt the revised Facility Naming Policy as amended. The motion passed unanimously.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 5 p.m., on April 15, 2008.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DICK FORD, Chair

ELMIRA FORNER, Vice Chair

PHILIP PARKER, 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