



Walla Walla Meeting Summary  
June 20, 2018

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

**COMMISSION BUSINESS**

Mayor Barbara Clark welcomed the Commissioners to Walla Walla. She reported that the city is conducting a corridor study of Poplar Street to look at how to move people and goods through the city in different ways; this would not have been done twenty years ago. It makes a big difference that Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Transportation Improvement Board (TIB) now give credit for multi-use and multi-modal transportation.

Commissioner Jennings moved and Commissioner Young seconded the motion approving the May 16, 2018 meeting summary as amended by staff. The motion was approved unanimously.

**TRANSPORTATION 101**

Paul Parker, Deputy Director, Washington State Transportation Commission, presented an overview of transportation planning and finance.

Transportation 101

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

**WALLA WALLA VALLEY REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES: THE BIG PICTURE**

Andrea Weckmueller-Behringer, Executive Director, Walla Walla Valley MPO, provided an overview of the regional transportation system. She emphasized that safety, preservation; quality of life and economic viability drive transportation policy in the Walla Walla region.

Ms. Weckmueller-Behringer pointed out that on the June 19 transportation tour, the Commission saw:

- Road diet on Isaacs
- Narrow county road with competing uses from agricultural to bike touring
- Historic downtown Waitsburg; truck traffic and a state highway as Main Street
- Collaborative partnerships to provide multimodal connections
- Current slow growth at 1% a year, but growth rate is expected to increase
- The region with the state's highest fatality rate
- Lowest on average pavement rating on NHS highways

- Quality of life rates very highly in this area
- Wonderful, exemplary collaboration between transportation partners

Roger Millar, Secretary, Washington State Department of Transportation, emphasized the importance of safe transportation, pointing out that while congestion costs the state \$2 billion a year, safety costs \$8.3 billion a year.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

### **CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES**

Neal Chavre, Engineer, Walla Walla City, said that when he came to Walla Walla decades of deferred maintenance and declining funding had left much of the streets and related infrastructure in very poor overall condition. Creating new revenue through a Transportation Benefit District (TBD) and an emphasis on preservation has turned that around.

A TBD passed in 2012 generates a little more than \$1 million a year, directed to street improvements. A 2011 Citizen Survey identified the top 25 roads for repair in Walla Walla; the city uses a citizen-driven prioritization for repairs.

Some major local projects completed since 2010:

- Completed Rose Street, 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and Myra Road to SR125
- Alder Street Downtown improvements and Wilbur Street improvements
- Isaacs Avenue
- ADA/Defective Sidewalk Improvements Pavement Preservation – 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, Wilbur Street, Tietan, and others

The remaining challenges include:

- Inadequate overall funding
- Increasing and volatile construction prices
- What happens at the end of the second TBD term
- Preservation vs. addressing “worst first”
- How to fund local street improvements (not grant eligible)
- Many portions of town qualify as low-moderate income
- Increasingly onerous requirements attached to federal funding. The Transportation Improvement Board provides a 3% bonus if no federal funds are in the project

What can the Commission do to help?

- Support changing the statutory limits for Transportation Benefit Districts
- Continue helping promote balance between funding new (expanded) infrastructure vs. taking care of existing infrastructure
- Help support a change in TIB’s preservation program assessed value limits (currently \$2.0 bill.)
- Commission a study to recommend program options for local agencies to exchange Federal Funds for State funds

Mike Rizzitiello, City Manager, City of College Place, told the Commission the population of College Place has grown by 20% over the last 17 years; the population is 9500. Due to Walla Walla University, 15% of the land is non-taxable.

The City is very successful in getting grant funds for federally classified roads; the problem is local roads. At current investment levels, the 17 miles of local roads are on a 200-year replacement schedule. Reconstruction cost is estimated at \$74.4 million. A state match program for local streets would be very helpful.

The City recently completed the College Avenue Rose Street project, investing \$14.87 million to rebuild two miles of road, add three new signalized intersections and 157 ornamental streetlamps, and provide wayfinding and signage. It is currently improving Fourth Avenue and Academy Way, repaving nearly a half mile of roadway and adding sidewalks to a major collector linking Walla Walla University to Walla Walla Valley Academy and Rogers School.

[City of Walla Walla](#)  
[City of College Place](#)

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

### **WALLA WALLA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES**

Jim Johnson, Commissioner, Walla Walla County, provided information and perspectives on transportation from Walla Walla County. He noted that traffic congestion is not an issue, but future growth is projected to be 3 – 5% per year.

Many counties around the state have the same issues as Walla Walla County. The most important is preservation of about 1200 miles of roads and 200 bridges. The County's Transportation Improvement Plan shows needs of \$1 million annually.

The County is committed to a nine-year cycle of chip sealing, which costs about \$20,000 per mile. Walla Walla County has not diverted road funds to criminal justice or general funds. Nearly every county has found that once that it is done, it is nearly impossible to reverse.

Money must be saved for emergencies. A few years ago, a flash flood 15 miles west of the city, a very localized event -- stretched from the Snake River to the Oregon border. It caused approximately \$1.7 million in damage, no state or federal disaster assistance was provided.

The Port is the primary driver of local economic development. Four-laning US 12 is important for freight mobility and the region is looking at the possibility of federal funding for the project.

Anytime the county is redoing county roads, it tries to widen and make them safer for bikes. On Whitman Road, Walla Walla County is creating a multimodal path, separated from the roadway by a swale.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

### **PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES**

Dick Fondahn, General Manager, Valley Transportation, thanked the Commission for its leadership role in recognizing and promoting the role of public transportation. He presented a panel of public transit providers serving the region.

Dwight Robanske, General Manager, Columbia County Public Transportation (CCPT), reported that the County Commissioners created a transportation department in 1996 and a transportation authority in 2005. A 0.4% sales tax supports its public transportation program, serving a population of which 28.3% are 65 and older. There is very little connectivity east to Clarkston and no regional transit connectivity from Clarkston to Pullman and Spokane.

CCPT runs 11- 13 trips a day into Walla Walla and also runs buses for students in Running Start and workers at Walla Walla Community College. Fare to Walla Walla is \$7.50 round trip. There is informal carpooling and vanpooling in agricultural communities. Organized vanpools are typically more costly than informal carpool arrangements. Often several cars will transport numerous workers to orchards for work.

CCPT is trying to get vanpools organized for the approximately 90 people from Dayton and Waitsburg who work at the State Penitentiary. Mr. Robanske also is talking with Columbia Pulp about vanpools. Five vanpools are running now: two go to the dams and three to Walla Walla.

Teresa Dutcher, Human Resource Officer, Milton-Freewater Transportation, said that the City of Milton-Freewater (7000 pop.) began its public transportation program in 1971. It is very important for Milton-Freewater residents to travel to Walla Walla for medical care.

JD Tovey, Director, Tribal Planning Office, Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, talked about Kayak Public Transportation, which started in 2001 with a bus from Mission to Pendleton. Kayak operates in four counties and two states, with 92% of its miles off-reservation. It provides tribal members and the public access to tribal ceded territories including the Hanford Reach, John Day, and Ontario. Kayak runs four buses a day into Walla Walla.

Kayak Transit is looking at doubling its fleet over the next five years. Oregon HB 2017 will assess 1/10 of 1% of payroll taxes for transit, beginning in July 2018. This is projected to bring in \$115 million annually for transit. In contrast, Washington's public transportation budget is about \$221 million per biennium.

Mr. Fondahn concluded the panel with a presentation on iTransitNW, a project to improve the passenger information system for the web of providers. iTransitNW completes the picture established by Google Maps to help people navigate from transit system to transit system.

[iTransit NW](#)

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

## **NAMING US 395 THE THOMAS “TOM” FOLEY MEMORIAL HIGHWAY**

Heather Foley, widow of Thomas S. Foley, expressed her gratitude to Commissioner Tortorelli and Rep. Riccelli for their work in getting US 395 named for him. Mrs. Foley said that Representative Foley was a big believer in transportation and enthusiastically endorsed the widening of US 395 from Ritzville to Pasco. Representative Foley was Speaker of the House when the last federal gas tax increase was passed.

Marcus Riccelli, Representative, Legislative District 3, urged the Commission to take action to name US 395 the Thomas S. “Tom” Foley Memorial Highway.

Stacey Cowles, President, Cowles Company, Publisher of the Spokesman-Review, and a member of the Good Roads Association said that Representative Foley was a great connector and leader, who found common ground among parties 99% of the time. Representative Foley was a great force for Eastern Washington, agriculture, transportation, and Expo '74.

Will Knedlik, President-Elect, State Good Roads & Transportation Association, endorsed the naming of US 395 in its entirety for Representative Tom Foley. The railroad men who founded the Good Roads Association understood that roads were the heart of the transportation system.

Allen Pomraning, President, Benton-Franklin-Walla Walla Good Roads Association, strongly supports the action.

Chairman Litt read Resolution 735.

***Action: Commissioner Tortorelli moved and Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion naming US 395 through the State of Washington be designated as the Thomas S. “Tom” Foley Memorial Highway. The motion was approved unanimously.***

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORTATION**

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

Patrick Reay, Executive Director, Port of Walla Walla, said that the Port manages over 2,500 acres of industrial zoned properties and over 540,000 square feet of industrial buildings.

All of their projects rely on transportation. Boise Cascade, Nelson Irrigation, Key Technology (food processing), Cliffstar/Cott, Railex (now *Union Pacific Cold Connect*), NW Wine Services. The region relies on air, water, rail, and roads.

- Air – Walla Walla Regional Airport, served by Alaska Airlines
- Roadways – US Highway 12
- Navigation – Columbia Snake River System. Removal of the dams would be devastating and put more pressure on other transportation systems
- Rail – Union Pacific, BNSF and Port

Inbound air passengers are up 5.5% and outbound by 4.7% for the year.

The ports' Wallula Gap Business Park, site of the Boise Cascade mill, gets referred on most of the Department of Commerce industrial leads, with two railroads and river access.

From Railex, approximately 1.0 billion pounds of produce and wine are shipped to the East Coast annually, including 250 million pounds of apples and 275 million pounds of onions.

#### Port Initiatives/Legislative Priorities

- Technology cluster for Downtown Walla Walla area
- Large heavy industrial business leads in the western portion of Walla Walla County
- Agriculture and Wine Distribution
- Transportation Improvements (Freight Mobility)
- Commercial Air and General Air Service
- Industrial Park Development
- Capital Infrastructure Investment
  - US 12 Phase 7 Construction -\$146M Funded (Construction 2019-2020)
  - US 12 Phase 8 Construction -\$180M Unfunded

Jennie Dickinson, Manager, Port of Columbia, talked about transportation challenges and successes in Columbia County.

- Road Preservation and Maintenance
- City Street Funding
- Rural Public Transportation
- Walla Walla Columbia Rail Line
- Economic Development –Both industrial and tourism growth affect rural roads

The 1% tax limitation of Initiative 695 continues to reduce current money for cities and counties. Dayton has passed a TBD, which helps generate matching funds, but there is no more local capacity.

Columbia County and Dayton have quadrupled its tax base in the last decade. Among the growth drivers: wind projects have added 70 permanent full-time jobs, and four new corporate offices.

Columbia Pulp purchases wheat, alfalfa and straw bales from regional farmers and processes it into pulp for sale to Boise Cascade and Clearwater Paper. The 150 million project brings over 90 full-time, living-wage jobs at the plant and another 15 jobs in Dayton at the offices.

The Union Pacific Railroad donated the Columbia Walla Walla Rail Line to the Port in 1996. It was operated by Watco for over 20 years, and then embargoed due to needed bridge repairs. It re-opened in October 2017 after bridge repairs and is currently shipping rock and Green Giant seed. It moves almost no wheat because it is cheaper to move it to barges for shipment. The cost estimate to bring the rail line up to good standards is \$29 million.

Every time the Port talked about improvements to SR 261, it was told that traffic counts were too low. Now it is too narrow and dangerous for the traffic, which will increase because the natural gas line has made the industrial area more attractive and designation of Palouse Falls as state waterfall has increased visits dramatically.

Brian Duvall, President and CEO, Walla Walla Valley Chamber of Commerce, said that the Chamber supports transportation improvements on air and road improvements. Infrastructure is critical in recruiting business to the community. Working with the city to put together a grant for small business start-ups.

Air service is essential. Losing a flight is terrible, especially when we are trying to get a flight to Portland. Alaska Airlines has pulled out of Lewiston, has eliminated its Pasco-Portland flight, and is reducing Walla Walla to two daily flights.

[Port of Columbia](#)

[Port of Walla Walla](#)

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

### **AGRICULTURE AND TRANSPORTATION**

Agriculture in the Walla Walla Valley relies on dependable transportation options to get products to world markets.

Chris Peha, NW Grain Growers (NWGG), said that transportation is the heart of the grain growing business. It has about 2000 members in SE Washington with 37 grain handling facilities and \$300 million in annual sales. It operates seven barge loading and three rail loading terminals. The margins are very low in commodities, so freight costs are important. One barge can move one ton of cargo on one gallon of fuel.

NWGG has 10 full-time trucks making over 10,000-truck transfer trips per year. NWGG also loads 3,000 rail cars per year, which keeps 10,000 trucks off County Roads and State highways.

The majority of the 300 miles of railroad that the state owns was laid between 1895 and 1910. By investing in improvements in rail, state will save a lot in road maintenance.

NWGG is investing \$10 million in Endicott Shuttle Facility to assemble 110-car trains. Right now about 98% of wheat is shipped by barge, after Endicott shuttle is completed, only 75% will be shipped.

Jason Magnaghi, Board Member, Walla Walla Valley Wine Alliance, spoke on behalf of 130 wineries in the Walla Walla Valley. Most grapes grown in the Valley are processed in the Valley. The wine industry's priorities are US 12 and air accessibility. There also is confusion on the Commercial Driver's License farm exemption with law enforcement and growers. The intent is that when moving grapes from your farm to your processing facility with your own vehicle, they are exempt from the requirement of a CDL. Most of the wineries here are so small they distribute directly to consumers. Not a lot is shipped across country. Some of the bigger wineries use Railex.

[NW Grain Growers](#)

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

### **MOBILITY AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES**

Travel choices affect our health and environmental quality. Communities in the Blue Mountain Region are working to improve walking and bicycling as active transportation options and integrate them with outdoor recreation.

Meghan DeBolt, Director, Walla Walla County Department of Community Health, talked about how the built environment contributes to chronic disease. Ms. DeBolt is working with planners to improve land use and with transportation planners to consider public health impacts.

Commissioner Litt agreed it is more important than ever that health agencies work with planners.

The more that can be done to increase active transportation to and from work and school is great. Lower speed limits so that parents feel comfortable letting their kid's bike to school. It also is important not only to have a place to walk, but to have an inviting place to walk. Yakima is three steps ahead of us in planning.

Jennie Dickinson, Manager, Port of Columbia, talked about the economic development benefits of bicycling and walking. On-line shopping has hurt rural communities. Three EV charging stations are going in at Blue Mountain Station.

A multi-use path from Dayton to Waitsburg is the number one local priority. The region is seeking grant funds for design from Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). It will then seek construction money in 2020 from WSDOT and the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.

Kevin Mills, Board Member, Walla Walla Community Council Implementation Task Force, said that connecting neighborhoods would improve safety and mobility.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

### **WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES**

State transportation facilities and programs are essential to mobility, economic vitality and livability. Brian White, Assistant Administrator, South Central Region, Washington State Department of Transportation, talked about their maintenance budget and staff for this area of the South Central Region. The SR 127 bridge deck needs repair but it is a low priority due to vehicle traffic volumes.

Mr. White reported that after Phase 7 of US 12 is completed, it is expected that WSDOT will turn the current highway over to Walla Walla County. It is a primary road for wine touring and bicycling.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

Walla Walla Valley MPO and its member entities strive to improve safety, connectivity, and efficiency, while providing mobility options for all users. There is great collaboration here, it is important to have everyone in the room to get the best decision. Sustainable funding is needed.

Transportation is always a means to an end, taken for granted, until it doesn't work. Local priorities:

- Safety is a problem. There are a lot of distracted drivers. It is an education, engineering, and enforcement issue
- System preservation
- Completion of US 12
- Help change the length of TBD funding

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Representative Nealey thanked the Commission for coming to the Walla Walla Valley.

Andy Pryor, Citizen, said that freight mobility is not an issue. The region has good highways and barge transportation. He said that capacity is being added where it is not needed and that it will take over \$300 million to complete the four lanes on US 12.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time

## **REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

Commissioner Serebrin noted that transportation is not always and only a means to an end; her walk to and from work is the best part of her day.

Commissioner Litt said that it is good how much communities are working together.

Commissioner Jennings noted there are many roads without sidewalks, lots of accidents and injuries. We are hearing more about safety and multimodal transportation

Secretary Millar said it is important to talk about crashes and safety improvements. Compare the investment in safety to investment on congestion.

He also noted that within 10 years, 70% of the state gas tax will be paying off bonds for things already built. He asked that Commission staff add the bond slide back into the Transportation 101 presentation.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** *Update the Transportation 101 presentation*

**TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

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JERRY LITT, Chairman

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ROY JENNINGS, Vice-Chairman

ABSENT  
\_\_\_\_\_  
SHIV BATRA, Member

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HESTER SEREBRIN, Member

ABSENT  
\_\_\_\_\_  
JOE TORTORELLI, Member

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DEBBIE YOUNG, Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
VACANT

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

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DATE OF APPROVAL