



Washington State Transportation Commission

Moses Lake Local Meeting Summary April 20, 2016

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Chairman Haley opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. with introductions of Commissioners and staff. She reflected on the tour the previous day and said that the motto for the trip to Moses Lake could be “Growing and Going.”

Action: Commissioner Tortorelli moved approval of the Meeting Summary for March 15 -16, 2016. Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

TRANSPORTATION 101

Staff provided an overview of transportation policy and funding in Washington.

[Transportation 101](#)

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Mayor Todd Voth welcomed the Commission to Moses Lake. He noted that Moses Lake has unique transportation challenges for the Columbia Basin region; unlike most cities in the area, Moses Lake is built around a lake, and not on a grid.

Moses Lake City Manager John Williams is putting together a complete streets plan, including bike trails. The city has used a TIB grant to add sidewalks.

Mr. Williams recently came to Moses Lake from Battle Ground, a city that implemented a Transportation Benefit District (TBD), and plans to talk with the Moses Lake City Council about TBD as a potential revenue source. The TBD \$20 license fee only impacts city residents; he noted the sales tax might be a more fair approach in Moses Lake, where there is a lot of tourism, but added that it requires a public vote. Commissioner Tortorelli asked whether the county and cities have discussed a countywide TBD. Commissioner Litt shared that Lacey is one city that has directed TBD revenue to residential streets.

Wes Crago, City Manager of Ephrata, complimented WSDOT as a good partner and stressed that his city is working on challenges and is not waiting for the state to “bail us out.”

Mr. Crago listed six challenges that Ephrata faces:

1. Safety, hazardous materials, and disaster mitigation. (The BNSF mainline runs through Ephrata). Additional funding for planning and emergency response training is difficult to acquire in a small town.

2. WSDOT support for traffic incidents. The city responds to about 35 incidents a year on SR 28.
3. Increasing rail traffic. The BNSF rail line bisects the community and an average of 25 trains a day move through at 50 mph or more.
4. Walking routes and sidewalks.
5. Protection of surface streets. State revenue to the city has been flat but inflation has increased over 50%, requiring a greater local expenditure on infrastructure. This is especially challenging with the raid of the Public Works Trust Fund.
6. Aviation and economic development. The city and port work closely to market and showcase the airfield. WSDOT is a vital partner in getting federal funds for the airport.

Ephrata will have a TBD discussion with its citizens, but increasing license fees is wildly unpopular.

Tim Snead, City Manager of Quincy, said that his city has a lot of truck traffic coming right into the downtown, due to two large food processors. Six to seven hundred million tons of product move each year. The Con-Agra product goes to Asia, through the Port of Seattle, and about 70% of Quincy Foods product is exported.

Truck traffic and backup diesel generators for data centers have created a concern with diesel particulate. Quincy has used TIB funding, with a 30% match, to address truck traffic. The city is fortunate that the data centers have brought in revenue to allow the city to keep up with maintenance. The City Council is looking at impact fees on new industries coming in.

Wade Ferris, City Manager of Othello, discussed three intersections of city streets and state routes that are safety and congestion concerns. Othello is voting next week on a sales tax funded TBD. It would generate \$230,000.

Commissioners and city officials discussed funding options, including the benefits and drawbacks of different funding options. Discussion included the potential for a road usage charge to replace the gas tax in the future.

[City of Othello](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Jeff Tincher, Grant County Engineer, said that the county's 2507 road miles is second highest in the state. Of that road surface, 1465 miles are paved and 1042 miles are unpaved.

Pavement preservation consumes 30% of the county transportation budget. Hot mix asphalt overlay is the surface for 145 centerline miles. It costs \$230,000 a mile, compared to \$30,000 a mile for sealcoat. Ninety-three percent of the pavement in Grant County is rated good.

Grant County created the "Gravel to BST Priority Program" in 2001. A priority array of projects is established by a citizen committee and consultant. Main Scoring Characteristics are:

- Traffic Volume
- Number of Residences / School Bus Route

- Road Maintenance Costs
- Dust Susceptible Crops
- Agricultural Land Value

The program completes 2 - 3 projects per year (\$500,000 to \$750,000), with 58 completed since 2001. The program contracts for earthwork, gravel surfacing, and uses county forces for BST surfacing.

Under a first-come first-served cost share program, initiated by a petition from the public, over 78 miles constituting 89 projects have been completed since 1995. The cost share portion includes liquid asphalt and cover stone. It averages approximately 25% of the project cost and costs about \$23,000 to \$32,000 per mile. Grant County budgets \$250,000 per year for the cost share program and the projects normally are 100% completed by county forces.

Mr. Tincher also emphasized the burden of unanticipated events. A dam/road crossing constructed in the 1920's failed in September 2013 when major sinkholes started appearing on Sand Dunes Road at the dam crossing location. Grant County was responsible for the road and the Moses Lake Irrigation and Rehabilitation District (MLIRD) was responsible for the dam, which control the flows in/out of Moses Lake and Potholes Reservoir.

The failure had major economic and traffic impacts that required quick action:

- Avoid a 46 mile detour in moving large and slow moving farm equipment around Moses Lake
- Any vehicle accidents causing the closure or failure of I-90 where it crosses Moses Lake would require a detour around Ephrata and/or Warden
- The roadway was important to recreation and tourism activities, including off-road vehicles, hunting, fishing and boating.

Grant County installed a sheet pile cutoff wall at the front of the dam structure to reduce the water flow below that was creating the piping and material loss associated with the sinkholes. Design of a new dam began in October 2013. An open channel design, it required a bridge across the dam for Sand Dunes Road. MLIRD received a grant from WA Department of Ecology for 80% of the \$2.5 million cost. The Sand Dunes Bridge cost \$650,000, of which Grant County committed \$350,000 and a County SIP grant contributed \$300,000, Construction started in November 2014 and completed in May 2015.

Todd O'Brien, Adams County Public Works Director, said that Adams County is trying to preserve what we have. The county population is 19,200 and Othello is its largest city. Adams County Public Works has 63 full-time employees, including solid waste and fleet management.

Adams County collected \$3.575 million in fuel tax in 2002 and \$4.049 million in 2014. Although this represents a 13.8% revenue increase, the inflation rate from 2002 to 2014 was 31.4%. Sealcoat oil, used in preservation projects, cost \$135/ton in the late 1990's was \$562/ton in 2014.

In the mid- to-late 1990s, Adams County would sealcoat 70 miles of road per year on a 7 - 9 year cycle. During the 1990s, 30 to 40 miles were converted from gravel to pavement. In early 2000s, the county began using STP funds for preservation. Sealcoat declined to 60 miles per year on an 8 - 11 year cycle. In 2006 -07, sealcoat preservation dropped to 45 miles per year and the county began patching roads with sealcoat, instead of a full repave.

From 2009 – 2012, Adams County reviewed its entire paved road system to determine how long pavement would last. It looked at hot mix asphalt on 10- and 15-year replacement cycles and sealcoat on 7-, 10-, 14- and 21-year cycles. Since then, Adams County has converted 3 miles back to gravel.

The focus since 2013 and beyond is managing the system. Policy recommendations to the state include the following:

- Find a reliable funding source for county general fund.
- Develop a federal fund exchange program. Kansas, Minnesota, and California all do this.
- Establish dedicated funding for short span bridges.
- Reduce regulation:
 - time spent on federal compliance in unpopulated areas.
 - can get CRAB-funded project done 6-8 months faster.
- Also, let's build one Freight and Goods system and use it.

Travis Goddard, the Community Development Director for Othello, pointed out that small, rural towns lack the planning and technical infrastructure to compete in grant programs with better equipped jurisdictions. The grant application process can be very complex.

[Transportation in Grant County
Adams County](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: *Highlight Grant County's Cost-Share program in the 2016 Annual Report.*

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

QUADCo is the RTPO for four counties in Central Washington that connect by I-90. The four counties, Adams, Grant, Kittitas, and Lincoln, comprise 14% of Washington's land area, with 21% of the state's road miles, 31% of the harvested croplands and only 165,100 residents. The four counties maintain almost the same amount of roadway (6,858 miles) as WSDOT does statewide (7,044 miles).

QUADCo priorities are:

- Preservation. Blowing and drifting snow, combined with large roadside banks, makes snow removal difficult.
- Safety.
 - The most dangerous roads in the state are two-lane county roads, with a fatality collision rate of 1.28 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled. The fatality rate for state highways is 0.58 and for city streets 0.63.
 - In Adams County, there are no bike paths. The policy is share the road. If roads were at current design standards, there would be a wider shoulder, safer for cyclists to use.
- Freight and goods movement. Some of QUADCo's roads do not have adequate sub structure to support heavy truckloads during spring thawing conditions and are either closed or restricted during the spring thaw. Roads that do have adequate sub structure are referred to as All Weather Roads.

[QuadCo RTPO](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

SPEED LIMITS ON I-90 IN EASTERN WASHINGTON

John Nisbet, State Traffic Engineer, talked about WSDOT's evaluation of the option to increase the speed limit to 75 mph on state highways.

- HB 2181 passed the 2015 Legislature allowing the Secretary of Transportation to increase the speed limit on any highway to a maximum 75 mph (RCW 46.61.410).
- Lawmakers in eastern Washington asked WSDOT to consider such an increase on I-90.
- Since August 2015, WSDOT has worked with the state Traffic Safety Commission and the Washington State Patrol to evaluate the I-90 request.

The 75 mph speed limit evaluation process included:

- Gathering information from other states that have raised speed limits
- Developing criteria to evaluate where and how speed limits might be raised
- Assessing the effects of an increase and identifying any needed highway modifications
- Examining how decisions about speed limit increases can take into account vehicle crash history, societal costs due to crashes, fuel costs and benefits associated with travel timesaving.

In other states where the speed was raised above 70 mph, speeds increase 1 to 4 miles per hour. WSDOT is now looking at an approximately 107 mile-section on I-90 from near George to the vicinity of the west Spokane County line.

Findings:

- Fairly low traffic volumes and heavy right lane usage allows ample passing opportunities
- 15 fatal and 27 serious injury crashes from 2011 to 2015
- 38 Single Vehicle-Crashes and 20 Multi-Vehicle Crashes
- Most frequent contributing crashes: under influence of alcohol, exceeding safe speed and driver apparently asleep
- For a current posted speed limit of 70 mph, the average passenger vehicle speeds are about 73 mph
- For a speed limit of 75 mph, the expected average passenger vehicle speeds will be between 75 & 77 mph

The I-90 mainline was designed for higher speeds, but some off ramps are not. Some western states, including Idaho and Montana, allow speeds up to 80 mph on the Interstate.

Next Steps:

- Analyze public comments and consult with traffic safety partners.
- WSDOT will decide in May whether to raise the speed limit for this section of I-90.
- If the decision were made to increase the speed limit, the new limit would go into effect once any identified safety elements have been fully addressed and new signs are posted along the affected segment of roadway.

Commissioner Litt said that personally he would not support raising the limit. If it resulted in one more death, it would not be worth it.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Constance Doreen Bendixsen said that she avoids I-90 now because she is passed driving 70 mph. She drove in Utah and Idaho last year and it was scary. Her neighbors agreed that 70 mph is plenty fast.

Steven Johnson, from Seattle, advocates for 75 mph. Majority of people already are driving 75 mph or faster on the stretch that is suggested. On the autobahn, there are electronic speed limit signs that can change the limit based on conditions. During Montana's "reasonable and prudent" speed limit era, fatalities actually dropped. Most are due to driving under the influence.

Carol Ann Swartz, Grant County Commissioner, said that more road miles could be built if government didn't have to pay prevailing wage.

Sheldon Townsend emphasized that speed does not kill. People fall asleep when they are bored; increasing the speed limit will reduce deaths. Less time on the road is more productivity. Cars also are safer today than in the past.

Sydney Hardenberg, resident of Moses Lake, enters I-90 three times a day and noted that it is difficult already to merge into traffic from Broadway onto I-90. Increasing the speed limit will make it more difficult.

Randy Zelke agreed that merging is difficult in the Moses Lake area. He also advocates another northern bridge crossing in Moses Lake. At Ritzville, traffic is added from US 395, and suggests Ritzville as the end of a 75 mph limit.

[Speed Limits on I-90 in Eastern Washington](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Jim Ackley, Operations Manager for Grant Transit Authority (GTA), reported that the agency serves 200,000 – 240,000 riders a year. Based in Moses Lake, the GTA system has about 20 buses. It provides service for workers to dams, food processors in Quincy and Warden. Moses Lake, Warden, Quincy, Ephrata, Coulee City, and Grand Coulee all have service. Currently there is no service to the Wheeler Corridor.

GTA is funded with a 0.2 percent sales tax and has a 5% fare box recovery. GTA has received funding for a new transit center in downtown Moses Lake. It wants to bring Greyhound and other providers there for intercity connections. GTA also is planning hourly service looping between Soap Lake and Ephrata, and is adding weekend service in Moses Lake if the board approves.

In the future, GTA wants to connect with service to Othello, add connections between Big Bend Community College and Central Washington University, and connections with Link at Rock Island Dam. People-to-People provides the Dial-a-Ride service in Grant County.

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Dan Sarles, WSDOT Regional Administrator for North Central Washington, explained that the region covers 20% of the state land mass but includes only 4% of the population. Preservation and maintenance continues to be a challenge: WSDOT is using more chip-seal on highways. It is a noisier product, which detracts from the tourism experience. The Region is sensitive to its tourism and agricultural economy and WSDOT tries to schedule work around community festivals and harvest (apple trucks stopped too long can damage the apples).

Rail projects received funding in Connecting Washington:

- PCC Rehabilitation: Budget of \$47 million will be spent between 2015 and 2031
- Port of Moses Lake Rail Improvements of \$21 million will be completed by 2021
- Port of Warden \$2 million rail storage siding will be complete by 2019

[WSDOT Regional Perspective](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

AVIATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR GRANT COUNTY

The Port of Moses Lake is one of 10 port districts in Grant County. The airfield dates to WW II and is among the top 60 airports in the world. The longest runway is 13,500 feet and there is 240 acres of ramp.

Boeing is the major client.

- Commercial flight test and certification
- Aircraft and parts storage
- Military aircraft flight-testing
- Aircraft operated in Moses Lake include 747-8, 737-800 and 900, Poseidon (P-8), 757, 767, 777, 787-8 and 787-9

The US Forest Service uses the airport as its forest fire attack base. It operates aircraft up to DC-10s. The US Military accounts for 60% of the port's business.

Major tenants include:

- Aviation Technical Services, an Everett-based company with 1,000 employees in Everett, Moses Lake and Kansas City. It leases the Port's two largest hangars, an 18,000 sq. ft. industrial space and office building for aircraft storage, maintenance and service, recycling and demolition, and interior upgrades.
- AeroTEC is a 20 year old, Seattle-based aerospace testing, engineering and certification company. It has leased a permanent facility at the Port since 2012 and does a wide variety of aircraft testing for Original Equipment Manufacturers as well as owners throughout the world. It is building a brand new 65,000 sq. ft. hangar at Grant County International Airport (GCIA) for Mitsubishi MRJ 90 testing which begins this fall.

- Columbia Basin Technical Center offers programs in Advanced Manufacturing, Computer Sciences, Entrepreneurship and other fields.
- One runway is almost exclusively for Big Bend Community College and its aeronautics program. Dr. Bob Mohrbacher, VP, Instruction and Student Services at Big Bend, said the college has been training pilots for 50 years. In the last year, 82 pilot certificates were awarded. About 6% of Alaska Airlines pilots are Big Bend graduates.

The Port of Moses Lake is using \$20.9 million in state funds to extend rail from the Wheeler Corridor to the airport. This is important for non-aviation industrial clients, such as SGL/BMW, AstaReal technologies, Moses Lake Industries, Takata, and Genie.

GCIA also will be an important site for recovery operations from a major coastal earthquake. The Port has been involved in dialog with FEMA about formalizing an agreement with GCIA. There is a lot of fallow acreage to the north and west of the airport that can handle recovery operations. The biggest concern is fuel capacity.

[Port of Moses Lake](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: *Highlight GCIA activity in the 2016 Annual Report.*

TRANSPORTATION AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

Linda Martin, Executive Director of Grant County EDC, commented that transportation is the nexus between economic development and economic prosperity. A stable and dependable transportation system is important to companies when making their investment decisions.

Brian Radke, Vice President of Operations, SGL Automotive Carbon Fibers told the Commission that his company relies on goods coming from Japan to the Port of Tacoma to Moses Lake and back to the Port for shipment to BMW in Germany. If Snoqualmie Pass is not open, operations come to a screeching halt. There are 13 trucks weekly incoming and 5 outgoing.

Their carbon fibers are industrially manufactured fibers consisting of 95% carbon. One ACF carbon fiber bundle contains 50,000 individual filaments. A filament has a diameter of around 7 micrometer.

Tim Kelly, Chief Operating Officer for Columbia Basin Railroad, told the Commission the railroad is adapting to the growth in the Columbia Basin. It is moving 10,000 carloads a year of inbound and outbound product, and serving 5 different Port Districts hauling commodities including frozen french fries; canola seed, canola oil, and canola meal; fertilizer; paper industry processing material; cattle feed; wheat; and container manufacturing (plastics and paper).

Most site selections for industry ask for rail access. Columbia Basin Railroad is working with the Port Districts and Economic Development agencies to offer the best sites for potential industrial development.

Tim Boyd, Government Affairs Consultant for the Washington Potato Commission said that Grant County is the largest potato-producing county in the nation. In Washington, 99% of potato farms are family farms. Potatoes contribute \$4.6 billion to state economy and 23,500 jobs through the state.

Transportation is critical to the potato industry. About 1/3 of all US potato exports are from Washington State and 90% of Washington potatoes marketed outside state. For that reason, the Potato Commission supported the transportation funding package for badly needed infrastructure investments, including I-90 East of Snoqualmie Summit and the Gateway Project improving connections to the Port of Tacoma (SR-167) and Port of Seattle (surface congestion).

Policy requests of the Potato Commission would include:

- New generation wide-based Singles (HB 1486)
- Ag vehicles – Overweight exemptions (SSB 6265)

Patric Connelly, Port of Quincy Commissioner, told the Commission the Port of Quincy has worked to take advantage of its location on the BNSF mainline. The Port of Quincy Intermodal Terminal is a state-of-the-art rail cargo handling facility on the BNSF mainline, which runs from Seattle to Chicago. The Intermodal Terminal includes:

- 10,000 feet of track and container maintenance and cleaning facility.
- Nearly 1 million square feet of cold storage warehousing in close proximity to provide perishable shippers with distribution, cross-dock and storage capacity in and out of the Washington State.

From early 2010 to mid-2014, the Port of Quincy had collaborated with an intermodal operator and BNSF Railway to provide expedited temperature controlled door-to-door intermodal service for perishable products between Washington State and Midwest/East Coast markets. Thousands of containers (3,600 in 2011, 6,000 in 2012, and 8,400 in 2013) of Washington state apples, potatoes, onions, cherries, frozen french fries, frozen vegetables, frozen juice concentrates, and other perishable products were shipped to/from Quincy to various Midwest and East Coast markets. In late 2014, the intermodal service from/to Quincy was halted as a result of rail congestion issues on the Seattle to Chicago (Northern Corridor) rail mainline.

The intermodal modal terminal is not a competitor to Railex, which fills boxcars, not refrigerated containers. Railex is now for sale.

[SGL Automotive](#)
[Columbia Basin Railroad](#)
[Washington State Potato Commission](#)
[Port of Quincy](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

ELECTRIC VEHICLES: EXPANDING THE PATHWAYS

Tonia Buell, Project Development Manager, WSDOT reported that over 16,500 plug-in electric vehicles are registered in Washington as of December 31, 2015. The West Coast Electric Highway provides a unique EV driving experience from BC (British Columbia) to BC (Baja California). Fast-charging site criteria include:

- Within ½ mile of highway interchange
- Safe and convenient access
- Parking spaces
- Restrooms and drinking water

- Shelter and lighting
- 480V 3-phase electric power supply
- Customer amenities (food, traveler info)

WSDOT is beginning rulemaking on a pilot program to expand public EV charging with \$1 million from the new \$50 annual EV registration fee. Priority corridors include I-5, I-90, U.S. 2 and US 101. Bidders must have private sector partners contributing to the project such as motor vehicle manufacturers, retail stores, or tourism stakeholders

After rules are adopted, WSDOT will request proposals in the summer and plan to award grants and start projects in the fall. Projects must be valuable to EV drivers, address gaps in the state's network, and be profitable and sustainable for the owner-operator and private sector partner.

Mr. Johnston-Rodriguez, of Plug-In North Central Washington, talked about building on WSDOT's charging investment strategy.

- EV Tourism strategy launched on Scenic Byways
- 568 electrified miles
- 24 locally funded L2 charge stations (approx. \$85k)
- EV registrations in NCW increased 400% since 2013

Beginning with electrification on US 2 between Everett and Wenatchee, the effort expanded to the Cascade Loop. The next efforts will focus on US 97.

[Electric Vehicles](#)

[Expanding Pathways for Electric Vehicles](#)

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

PUBLIC COMMENT

Senator Warnick said that that the biggest transportation need she sees is keeping Puget Sound ports open for export products.

Randy Zelten, Moses Lake, urged preservation of our rail beds. At some time in the future, the Milwaukee Road may be very useful. We may be hydroelectric-rich, but we need to look at solar.

Action: None

Follow-up: None at this time

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

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ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL