



Washington State Transportation Commission

Leavenworth Meeting Summary
June 20, 2017

Chairman Jerry Litt called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. He then asked Commissioners and staff to introduce themselves.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Young requested a correction to the meeting summary.

Action: Commissioner Jennings moved and Commissioner Young seconded the motion approving the amended May 16 & 17 meeting summary. The motion was approved unanimously.

CHELAN-DOUGLAS REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES: THE BIG PICTURE

Jeff Wilkens, Executive Director, Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council, explained that the RTPOs focus on both short-term and long-term planning. Two examples: road-rail conflicts and complete streets. The regional role is all about cooperation and collaboration.

There are about 75,000 people in the Wenatchee urban area. While small, it is an economic center for a much larger geographic area, extending all the way into Canada. In the Pacific Northwest there are four small metro areas not connected to the Interstate, including the Wenatchee area, which is connected closely to the Puget Sound without direct interstate access. While this is not a front burner issue, it is always there. The FAST Act includes a Transportation Research Board (TRB) study on maintaining and expanding Interstate system.

Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council (CDTC) invested \$24,000 in Inrix origin-destination data to examine travel patterns. There are three primary gateways:

- SR 28 handles 50% of the import/export freight
- US 97 west gateway, 40%
- US 97 north to Canada, 10%

Wenatchee is the fifth busiest Amtrak station in Washington. What is the potential for daylight train service?

- 10 year average of 15,000 passengers/year
- High in 2008 at 19,000

Growing the capacity and use of Pangborn Airport is very important. The Sonoran Institute identified three items for growth:

- Proximity to urban center
- Recreational opportunities
- Commercial air service

The community is very engaged in topic. About \$30 million is invested in Pangborn improvements. Alaska fills three planes a day and is ready to test a direct connection to the bay area.

Confluence Parkway is the proposed third access on and off the Wenatchee Island. Building a third corridor is more effective than widening and adding lanes to SR 285. Practical solutions means doing everything you can before adding capacity, but there are ways to add capacity that:

- Improve regional connectivity
- Redundancy for public safety
- Supports infill and development
- Supports better transit, walking and bicycling on North Wenatchee Avenue

The river crossing is about \$30-35 million and the total cost of the project is around \$100 million, give or take \$30 million.

[Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND SUCCESSES

Cheri Kelley Farivar, Mayor, City of Leavenworth, noted that Leavenworth has a population of only 2000 people. Revenue distribution based on population is insufficient. The city's sales tax Transportation Benefit District (TBD) brings about \$280,000. The money is spent on street rehabilitation and as match for other projects.

Leavenworth welcomes 2 million visitors a year. Its main street is US 2. Leavenworth is a complete streets city and has received funding. Pavement rating was 48 prior to TBD implementation in 2012 and today it is 65.

ITS (Intelligent Transportation System) messaging is an issue when WSDOT is not quick to say the problem is over when passes are closed, fires occur, or construction is underway. A few years ago, a WSDOT reader board in Monroe said, "Leavenworth closed." Additional directional signs also would be helpful.

Challenges:

- Congestion on US 2
- Messaging
- Funding

The City is conducting a parking study with Port of Chelan, and Chamber of Commerce. Traffic flow also is critical. The city is working with WSDOT to synchronize lights. Congestion gets worse every year; Leavenworth will never be able to handle all the cars.

Jeff Gomes, Mayor, City of Cashmere, shared the success story of the Sunset Highway rebuild. This was done through partnerships with CERB, WSDOT, Port of Chelan, and Chelan County. The 2017-19 budget includes an additional \$2 million for replacement of the West Cashmere Bridge (Goodwin Bridge).

Frank Kuntz, Mayor, City of Wenatchee, reported that Wenatchee's TBD, funded by \$20 license fee, brings in about \$500,000 a year. Streets receive an additional \$1 million from the Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) and general fund. The city is working to get property tax dedicated fully to streets. Currently about 75% goes to streets. It also is considering using its banked capacity and is looking at adopting a B & O tax to apply to nonprofit hospitals exempt from property tax.

Allison Williams, Executive Services Director, City of Wenatchee, talked about leveraging infrastructure. Wenatchee wants to redevelop N Wenatchee Avenue as a better gateway into the city and more accommodating for multimodal use. WSDOT has \$23 million to use for SR 285 corridor improvements.

Mike Cooney, Mayor, City of Chelan, talked about restoring and reconfiguring the 80-year old bridge that connects two state routes. The city needs \$1 million to mitigate impacts of the bridge on intersections. Transportation on the lake could benefit from a water taxi between Chelan and Manson.

[City of Wenatchee](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND SUCCESSES

Richard DeRock, General Manager, Link Transit, reported that Link Transit has been aggressive at moving riders from paratransit to fixed route. Link has half the paratransit riders today compared to 10 years ago. Changes included 100 shelters that are lit when dark; benches and shelters are sited at locations for known paratransit users.

Link fares are \$1.00 in urban area and \$2.50 for longer routes.

There are multiple ridership incentives:

- Student pass programs
 - Wenatchee Valley College – 1700 full-time students
 - Local school – Student Freedom passes
- Disabled persons pass – Fare free for Link Plus eligible on regular buses
- Employer Pass Programs
 - Confluence health – 1600 employees

- Crunch Pack – 1100 employees
- Wenatchee Valley College – 300 employees

Sixty-one percent of the current fleet is alternatively powered – electric and propane. LINK has received three federal grants for electric buses. Its 35’ BYD transit bus with Lithium-Ion Iron Phosphate batteries has a 165-mile range. Next year LINK will potentially accept delivery of a Momentum Dynamics 200Kw magnetic inductive charger, which will have a five-minute charge period.

Monthly energy cost comparisons for LINK Transit

Electric 2530kw @\$0.11/kwh	Diesel 429 gallons@ \$3.22/gal
\$285/month	\$1381/mo

Long-distance commutes are expensive to serve, and there is no state assistance or incentives.

[Link Electric Buses](#)

[Link Public Transit](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

COUNTY ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND SUCCESSES

Eric Pierson, Director, Public Works, Chelan County, emphasized problems with preservation of the road system. In Chelan County, the countywide average for pavement system condition is PSC 70 (fair to good). It will require \$800,000 more per year needed to maintain this average. There is very limited grant funding with no grants available for local access roads.

Chris Branch, Commissioner, Okanogan County, reported that Okanogan County has over 5200 square miles, and is roughly the size of Connecticut, with a population of 41,730. The 2017 road budget is \$13.3 million for 1339 miles of road, half of which is paved. About \$1.5 million for snow removal.

Fire, flooding, and landslides are major hazards to Okanogan County infrastructure. Josh Thompson, Okanogan County engineer, reported that 265,000 acres burned in 2014 305,000 in 2015. FEMA assistance provided money to repair damage to roads. Flooding has caused extensive damage in 2017. From March 13 to April 13, Okanogan County suffered \$1 million in road damage, but because the state total did not trigger the FEMA threshold, no federal funding was available.

Jay Weber, Executive Director, County Road Administration Board (CRAB), indicated that we can all expect emergencies and disasters, but they are difficult to predict and schedule. CRAB suggests creating a revolving fund for emergency repairs.

[Okanogan County](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

REVISITING WASHINGTON

Chris Moore, Executive Director, Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, presented *Revisiting Washington*, the new, online resource patterned after the WPA Washington Guidebook. Since the state does not have a funded tourism agency, the *Revisiting Washington* website can help to fill the gap. Over time, the website will add community profile pages, hopefully managed by local communities.

Roger Millar, Secretary, WSDOT, suggested adding a link to the WSDOT website might help people know current travel conditions.

[Revisiting Washington](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

TOURISM AND TRANSPORTATION

- Annette Pitts, Executive Director, Cascade Loop Association, reported that the Cascade Loop formed in 1978. It was created as a way to generate economic health in the rural and unincorporated areas of the state by utilizing existing transportation infrastructure. From a tourism perspective, the Cascade Loop is a solid sample of the things travelers love about Washington State– Seattle access, hiking/mountaineering, climbing, rafting, fishing, wine tasting, paddle boarding, farmland and locally sourced foods, the arts, and friendly, colorful local culture
- From a transportation perspective, the Cascade Loop highlights the state’s diversity as well– Interstate freeways, state highways, county and city roadways, state ferries, privately owned ferries, international and county airports, rail and bus systems, traditional and electric vehicles
- The Cascade Loop is fully accessible to EV travelers with charging stations all along the roadway

Typically transportation is what links travelers to their destination and attractions. In the case of the Cascade Loop and other scenic byways, transportation is a key part of the destination and takes on a more significant role-- when the transportation infrastructure fails the traveler’s vacation fails.

Current Infrastructure Strengths

- Most roadways are in great condition compared to other scenic byways in the US
- Most roadways are easy to access and depart
- Current buildout of EV Charging Stations make tourism possible for a growing sector of in-market travelers
- While maintenance projects can be cumbersome for travelers and residents, they are essential in the long term and appreciated
- Mix of International and Regional Airports is healthy for long-haul and in-market travel

High impact Successes

- Ongoing build-out of cruise terminals and marina access
- WSDOT support in manufacturing and installing Cascade Loop byway signage making the roadway easier to follow
- WSDOT addition of the Rice roundabout in Sultan—a start in easing US 2 congestion
- WSDOT chip-seal, striping and guardrail replacement projects keep road travel safer
- WSDOT replacement of Skagit River Bridge
- WSDOT speedy repairs to roadway washouts and landslides in Chelan, the Methow Valley and the North Cascades

Capacity Deficits

- US 2—Monroe to Sultan
 - Daily significant traffic slowdowns and backups 3 p.m. – 7 p.m.
 - Traffic significantly backed up from 11 am to 7 pm every Sunday
- Approaching and departing Leavenworth
 - Traffic backs up significantly during weekends
 - Peak season is now really year-round, so what used to be a seasonal inconvenience is now a regular reality
- Wenatchee—north end access from highway
 - Daily slowdowns
- Skagit Valley
 - During the months of April and May during peak festival seasons—Tulip and Daffodil seasons, traffic is backed up through Mt. Vernon, La Conner, county roads and I-5
- Whidbey Island
 - Ferry traffic slowdowns daily—Clinton
 - Daily slowdowns due to residential and Naval Air Station traffic—Oak Harbor, Banta Road, Deception Pass

Weather Impacts

- North Cascades Highway (SR 20)
 - Winter closure has massive financial ramifications for the Methow Valley and businesses approaching and in the North Cascades
 - Each additional day that the highway is closed represents thousands of dollars of lost tourism revenue and ultimately, millions of dollars lost when closures are extended
- Stevens Pass (US 2)
 - Intermittent pass closures have significant financial ramifications for Leavenworth during the winter months when key events are scheduled
 - Each day the Pass remains closed represents thousands of dollars of lost tourism revenue and ultimately, millions of dollars lost each season when closures are extended

Wildfires, mudslides, landslides, flooding and roadway washouts represent huge impacts to traffic flow during summer and fall months in

- Leavenworth, Wenatchee, Chelan, Pateros, Twisp, Winthrop, Mazama and the North Cascades
- In some communities access may be fully obscured during these events
- Coordinated information and outreach from a public safety and tourism perspective could be built out and formalized

Signage

- While we want to maintain the natural beauty of our state and do not want to see roadways cluttered with unnecessary signage, wayfinding and safety signage is lacking in many areas and can be cumbersome to have approved and implemented

Hopes for the Future

- Tourism continues to grow and support our state and local economies
- WSDOT works with us and partner agencies to:
 - Increase roadway capacity through the addition of roundabouts, coordinated stoplights, and the addition of frontage roads and/or new bypass roadways
 - Decrease the number of highway closures on US 2 and decrease the amount of time SR 20 is closed during the winter due to snowfall and avalanche danger through increased staffing and snow removal/management equipment

Nancy Smith, Executive Director, Leavenworth Chamber of Commerce, agreed with the kudos to WSDOT. “If they say the pass is open, then it is open and safe.” She asked WSDOT to improve signage to Leavenworth on US 97 NB. She added that population-based funding and policy decisions do not take into account cities like Leavenworth whose resident population is small, but that have thousands of visitors.

Mike Steele, Executive Director, Chelan Chamber of Commerce, noted that Chelan is more of a destination than Leavenworth, which many people also drive through on their way to somewhere else. Steele said that Chelan County generates more tourism spending per capita than any other county in the state. Road construction, detours, and delays all impact tourism.

Shiloh Schauer, Executive Director, Wenatchee Valley Chamber of Commerce, and a board member of the Washington Tourism Alliance, reported that the Alliance is focused on national and international travelers. Its goal is to re-establish a state tourism effort. We also need to print state maps.

One of the benefits of living in a tourism community is that visitors help to pay for the infrastructure.

Ms. Pitts suggested the Cascade Loop Association could be a conduit to its members for travel messages and ideas.

[The Cascade Loop](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

AGRICULTURE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TRANSPORTATION

Lisa Parks, Executive Director, Port of Douglas County, spoke about *Our Valley, Our Future* -- a values-based vision for the Valley that is intended to be a living, dynamic plan. Its 28 strategies and 149 action items include a regional trails organization and collaboration among communities as two of seven major “game changer” projects. Eighty-one public, private, and non-profit entities are identified as players.

Big Challenges Facing the Valley

- Restructuring economy
- One-third of households in poverty
- Wages, workforce skills, education levels are low
- Rising home prices
- Catastrophic wildfires
- Many governmental jurisdictions

The Confluence Parkway, highlighted earlier by the Chelan-Douglas Transportation Council, is one of the *Our Valley, Our Future* action items.

Jon DeVaney, President, Washington State Tree Fruit Association, told the Commission “This is the Place” for growing tree fruit.

- Ideal growing conditions
- More than 60% of U.S. apples are grown in Washington State
- Over 30% of our crop is exported overseas, where our quality is in high demand
- Even in apple producing nations like China, which is number one at nine times the U.S. production

Organics:

- 93% of US organic apples are grown in WA
- 79% of US organic pears are grown in WA
- 94% of US organic cherries are grown in WA
- Tree fruit is more than 60% of WA organic farm gate value and 23% of organic acreage
- Organic yields per acre are increasing as higher densities planted to organic, more acres being planted as well
- 11% of apple acreage is organic, about 7% of fresh sales

Production trends indicate that as crop production grows, the transportation needs also grow. Apple production is growing. Cherry production has more than doubled in 15 years. Pears production is steady today, but poised to grow. There is greater fruit produced from smaller trees; predominant varieties also change over time.

Apple Varieties in 1999:

51% Red Delicious
17% Golden Delicious
10% Fuji

2015 Crop:

25% Red Delicious
7% Golden Delicious
13% Fuji

8% Gala
8% Granny Smith
6% Other Varieties

21% Gala
15% Granny Smith
13% Other Varieties
6% Honeycrisp

Mr. DeVaney add that apples and pears are now shipped year-round. There are conflicts between tourism and agricultural shipments. In addition, there are challenges with shipping in the winter. Fruit must move from storage to packing and then to market in all weather, year-round, on rural roads.

- Wenatchee Valley access to I-90 is single-lane in each direction over Blewett Pass or through Quincy
- New varieties mean more movement of product within the production area prior to packing
- Growing crop sizes will mean more trucks on the roads in this region

About 1/3 of tree fruit crops are exported. Asia is top market for cherries

Pat Jones, Executive Director, Port of Chelan, reported that the Port of Chelan jointly manages Pangborn Field with Port of Douglas. It also is the ADO for Chelan County and manages business parks.

Mr. Jones noted that transportation infrastructure is the fundamental building block for economic development. The Wenatchee community is subsidizing air service at about \$1 million annually. Although Alaska Air flights are at 85% capacity, they are not yet considering adding flights. When does the state see a state role in funding connectivity through air service?

The region needs a community diversification strategy. Key challenges:

- Cost of developing buildings for new employers
- High cost of land and high cost of construction
- We have identified people who are e-commuters, who can live here and work everywhere

Lloyd Flem, Executive Director, All Aboard Washington (AAW), for 33 years, notified the Commission that the Trump Administration has proposed eliminating the Empire Builder service between Chicago and Seattle. The budget also proposes elimination of the Essential Air Service program. He suggests the Commission communicate the need to preserve Empire Builder to Reps. Newhouse and Reichert. AAW also is working with Central Washington University and others to return train service to Yakima Valley, through Stampede Pass.

[Tree Fruit Association](#)
[City of Wenatchee](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

WSDOT REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Dan Sarles, Region Administrator, North Central Region, WSDOT, emphasized the need for improved infrastructure resiliency. North Central Region (NCR) addressed nearly 3000 nonscheduled maintenance issues in 2016-17.

Beginning April 1, water over the road and mudslides began to occur in Okanogan County. On April 7, Loup Loup Pass was closed on SR 20; it has not re-opened. WSDOT crews also are trying to save SR 153. Eleven bridges on SR 153 are in dangerous condition. Work will require 25 4-hour closings this summer.

Winter operations were especially challenging in 2017:

- Stevens, White, and White, and Snoqualmie passes were all closed Feb 9 - 10th (3rd time ever)
- Stevens Pass had a record 40 avalanche control missions
- North Cascades Highway had 4th latest opening ever (tied with 1975)

SR 20 is part of the Colville Indian Reservation Road (IRR) system, therefore the Summit Creek repair will be 100% federally funded.

The agricultural and food processing system demands continue to grow. North Central Washington now has 89 active wineries, numerous packing sheds and cold storage facilities, and housing has a 1% vacancy rate.

Community investments include:

- Rocky Reach Trail
- MacDougall Roundabout on US 2/97

Mr. Sarles is pleased that WSDOT will soon have a new office to replace the current Wenatchee Avenue building that dates to 1934. Some project engineers work in trailers today. The new North Central Region offices are scheduled for completion in 2018.

[Regional Perspectives](#)

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

REFLECTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Chairman Litt said that his biggest takeaway from the meeting is that coordination and collaboration has improved and is working.

Eralee Sawtell remarked that with retirement, this is her last opportunity to see all the Commissioners together. She said that Aubrey Davis and Dick Ford were her heroes, and noted that she has had some great mentors. She thanked Bobbie Garver, her co-worker for many years.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

JERRY LITT, Chairman

ROY JENNINGS, Vice-Chairman

SHIV BATRA, Member

ABSENT
HESTER SEREBRIN, Member

JOE TORTORELLI, Member

DEBBIE YOUNG, Member

VACANT

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL