

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Local Meeting Summary

Sunnyside WA

September 9, 2015

Chairman Anne Haley opened the meeting with introductions of Commissioners and staff.

COMMISSION BUSINESS

Commissioner Tortorelli moved adoption of the July 21 & 22, 2015 meeting summary. Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion, and the meeting summary was adopted unanimously.

Commissioner Brogan moved adoption of the August 4, 2015 ferry fare hearing transcript. Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion, and the hearing transcript was adopted unanimously.

Commissioners also adopted a meeting schedule for 2016, including meetings in Moses Lake (April), Vancouver (June), Kennewick (September) and Marysville (November).

Senator Jim Honeyford welcomed the Commission to Sunnyside and talked about the importance of efficiently improving the Mabton Bridge over the Yakima River and removing the reduced weight limits currently on it.

TRANSPORTATION 101 – A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF TRANSPORTATION IN WASHINGTON STATE

Staff presented the updated Transportation 101 briefing, including information about the *Connecting Washington* transportation package.

Representative Brad Klippert asked whether the gas tax revenue will actually decrease with the projected population increase. He cautioned that a road usage charge could impact rural drivers more than drivers in urban areas.

Joe Henne, from Selah, asked why there isn't just one simple way to raise money for transportation, such as a gas tax increase. He said that the tolling system can be rather complex and advocated for a transportation revenue system that is simple to implement and collect.

[Transportation 101](#)

Action/Follow-Up: None

CITY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Mayor Jim Restucci, City of Sunnyside, welcomed the Transportation Commission to Sunnyside. He said that although he personally supports Transportation Benefit Districts (TBDs), his constituents in Sunnyside do not support creating one. Speaking as vice-president of AWC, he renewed the request for a greater share of statewide revenue to cities. Small cities, such as Mabton, lack the population and tax base to effectively use local options.

Mr. Restucci also urged that the state build roads for the future that incorporate intelligent transportation systems (ITS) and include autonomous vehicles.

Don Day, City Manager of Sunnyside, stressed that cities in the lower valley have low value, low salaries and growing needs. He suggests relaxing regulations on local street construction. Streets built in the 30s and 40s are long past their lifespan. Curbs, gutters and sidewalks are needed.

Sunnyside also would like to preserve the 84-year old concrete pavement that remains from the Yellowstone Trail as a park. The City also recently completed a downtown revitalization with some state revenue.

Mayor Norm Childress, City of Grandview, retired recently as a transportation engineer for Benton County. Grandview, with a population of 12,000, is in the top-third of cities in the state, based on population. Grandview has about 50 miles of road and a lot of truck traffic. The street budget is about \$1.35 million. In 2011, Grandview implemented a TBD, which generates about \$150,000 a year. Its TBD leverages other matching funds. They match the money up with other projects that need to be done, such as a water main repair.

Mayor Childress agreed that it is hard to raise money, but emphasized that it is important to show people what they are getting for their money. Local streets and sidewalks need to be in good repair for people to support revenue for the system as a whole. There should be dedicated money for maintenance and preservation. He also indicated that roads in agricultural communities need different geometrics to handle large trucks.

Commissioner Litt noted that most TBDs he has seen are focused on residential streets.

Ardelle Steele, Planning and Community Development director for Zillah, described Zillah as a bedroom community that also is a focus for wine tourism. Zillah did adopt a TBD, which brings in about \$30,000, and which helps leverage TIB funding. Zillah has been linked with Toppenish and Buena by WSDOT for funding purposes.

Dennis Henne, reported that Union Gap has a high sales tax revenue, due to its commercial success. Its resident population of 6200 compares to a daytime workforce population of about 30,000. Union Gap is building a beltway to connect its south interchange with a major big box and auto dealership retail area.

Action/Follow-up: None

COUNTY TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Gary Ekstedt, Yakima County Engineer, talked about the long history of Yakima County. The transformation of agriculture from family farms to industrial agriculture has created new burdens for the county transportation system, including 105 lb ton trucks and heavy traffic in food processing centers. There also are conflicts between wine tourism and agricultural production.

Of the 1645 miles in Yakima County's road system, only 223 miles are classified as urban. Short-span bridges, under 20' in length, are not eligible for federal funds. Many in the rural area were built in the 1940s and showing their age; built with timber, they are quite resilient.

Safety is a challenge. Mr. Ekstedt explained that the difference between state roads and county roads is longer trips are made on state highways, so there is more driver fatigue. Yakima County does add center line rumble strips where fatigue appears to be a cause of crash or fatality.

The Capitol Press has reported that a person is 2.5 times more likely to die on a rural road. So far, eight fatalities have occurred on Yakima County roads this year. In 2013, there were 12 fatalities on rural roads. Two major problems are alcohol and failure to stop at stop signs. Yakima County has dedicated additional sheriff's patrol to policing rural roads with revenue from the road fund.

The county's Gravel Road Aggregate Surface Stabilization (GRASS) program is a success that has saved time and money. The county has traditionally used a contractor to apply a lignin product to reduce dust on county roads. It now uses county forces and magnesium chloride to hold moisture and reduce dust. It reduces the need for multiple road gradings through the summer. Factors used to prioritize GRASS program include traffic volume, number of trucks, adjacent crops and homes.

The County BST program is on a 10-year cycle; we prefer a 7-year cycle. Yakima County shares equipment with Kittitas and Franklin, and also has agreements with Adams, Douglas and Benton. These agreements better utilize costly equipment and encourage teamwork with neighboring counties.

Another Yakima County success is funding for the east-west corridor connecting the Boise Cascade Mill site and Terrace Heights. Yakima County has designated routes that receive a lot of bicycle traffic and considers bicycle needs when doing capital improvements. Many county roads have evolved from dirt to gravel to paved and have a 20-22' width that is difficult and expensive to widen more. Commissioner Rand Elliott emphasized the importance of transportation and good roads for the farm-to-market and tourism economies in Yakima County.

Action/Follow-up: None

THE UPPER VALLEY: REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Joe Henne, Public Works Director, City of Selah, partners with the county and city on road projects. The Yakima Valley Council of Governments (YVCOG) has always assured smaller communities of a \$10,000 share of federal funds, even if the municipal population wouldn't generate that share.

Joan Davenport, Director of Community Development, City of Yakima, briefed the Commission on the many challenges facing the City of Yakima. Cities believe in complete street networks; but not every street can be a complete street. Big trucks have trouble turning at some city intersections and are hard on pavement.

The Cascade Mill redevelopment project involves conversion of 225 acres from industrial to multiple uses. The Connecting Washington package includes \$120 million for ramps, widening, bridges and the east-west corridor. The City of Yakima will use LIFT funds to match state contribution for \$50 million investment.

Other successes include completion of two rail underpasses by the City of Yakima. Yakima Airport now has four Alaska Air flights a day, starting in October.

A challenge is that only about half of the city streets have sidewalks. Interest in bicycling is growing. Helpfully, the state budget also provides \$2 million each for the Greenway path extension and the Cowiche Canyon path extension.

[Upper Valley Focus](#)

Action/Follow-up: None

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION REGIONAL PROJECTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Troy Suing, Assistant Regional Administrator, WSDOT South Central Region, told the Commission that the Connecting Washington package has funded completion of the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass Project, among many projects in the South Central Region.

WSDOT also is involved with the Yakima east-west corridor, seeking increased capacity, access and safety improvements. New ramps will be added at the South Union Gap interchange to make it a complete interchange.

About 15% of the traffic on US-12 is truck traffic. The new budget includes \$12 million to replace the Wildcat Creek Bridge. There also is \$31.5 million for I-82 Red Mountain improvements at the Benton City interchange and a new interchange improving access to West Richland and Benton City.

The US 395/Ridgeline Drive interchange in south Kennewick requires about \$6 million in city funds, in addition to state funds.

Safety is the main impetus for US 12 improvements in Walla Walla County. Phase 7 is funded with \$140 million and \$34 million funding is provided for design and right of way on Phase 8.

On the Mabton Bridges, WSDOT plans an interim fix to strengthen the bridge over the Yakima River, along with a rebuild of the slough bridge.

[South Central Region Projects](#)

Action/Follow-up: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Paul W. Locke expressed concern about the new ferry transportation system King County is looking into. He thinks the state needs to reduce ferry routes. He said that ferry crews are paid the same wages and fringe benefits as crews sailing to the Hawaiian Islands.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Larry Mattson, Executive Director, YVCOG, talked about the history of public transportation efforts in the Yakima Valley. About 20 years ago, Yakima County tried to pass a measure creating a Public Transportation Benefit Area (PTBA); another attempt to create a PTBA a few years ago also failed. Valley cities are interested in working together to study the feasibility of building the transit system.

The valley tax base is not positioned well to finance regional improvements from within;

- ▶ 60% of land mass: Yakama Nation and federal lands
- ▶ Median Home Value: \$155,000 [state: \$283,000]
- ▶ Median family income: \$49,500 [state: \$71,250]

- ▶ Per capita income: \$19,730 [state: \$30,500]
- ▶ Families in poverty: 16% [state: 8%]

Yet the need is there...

- ▶ Did not graduate high school: 17% [state: 4%]
- ▶ Unemployment: 6.5% [state: 5.4%]

All Aboard Washington is interested in improving passenger rail between Yakima and Seattle, Spokane and Vancouver.

Alan Adolf is Treasurer for two nonprofit organizations that combine public and private interests in transportation improvements: Trans-Action and Driving our Rural Yakima Valley Economy (DRYVE.) He said that Senator Patty Murray provided an impetus for the community to create the Trans-Action and DRYVE coalitions to focus on regional projects that benefit multiple jurisdictions. Trans-Action has public and private membership; it has a booth at the county fair and makes presentations to community groups to highlight and educate the public about transportation.

Santos Trevino, Chairman of DRYVE and Public Works Director for the city of Grandview, emphasized the importance of working together and being regional partners.

Larry Mattson said that the challenge with corridor planning is insuring that WSDOT works well with other players. It should be bottom-up, not top-down. Santos said that it is challenging to compete with Western Washington for funding. Mr. Adolf said that knowledge and consistency for the future are challenges to address.

[Yakima Valley Conference of Governments](#)

Action/Follow-up: None

TRAVEL AND TOURISM IN THE YAKIMA VALLEY

John Cooper, President and CEO, Yakima Valley Tourism, talked about his organization's mission to stimulate economic development by marketing the Yakima Valley for conventions, groups & leisure travel. Tourism is a \$320 million business. About 40 different crops grow in the valley, but one sector of agriculture that has taken off is the wine industry. Nearly 100 wineries and in excess of 12,000 acres of vineyards planted

Starting in 2009, the Economic Development Association and Yakima County took the lead in developing winery signage. This project eliminated distracting signs in the right-of-way. Signs were erected beginning in 2012.

Lessons learned:

- It takes time.
- Budget accordingly – for actual and after costs. The signs cost up to \$3500 each. Yakima County paid for the initial signs and the wineries maintain them.
- Line up advocates.
- Be flexible.
- Enforcement.
- Plan for 10 years later.

Since 78% of hops nationally and globally come from Lower Yakima Valley, Yakima Valley Tourism has created a digital brew trail, a map for all craft beverages, and a map for fresh farm produce.

Deb Heintz, Prosser Economic Development, talked about the economy and transportation network in Prosser. The City has worked with businesses and the port to develop uniform signage. Wayfinding is a spur to economic development. Exit 80 in Prosser needs ramp improvements. Chairman Haley suggested a roundabout could help. Ms. Heintz responded that there is resistance to the idea.

Brad Smith, Yakima Valley Community College Teaching Winery, works at a winery with a tasting room, but their tasting room is not open enough to be part of the Yakima Valley signage project. They are a gateway to other tasting rooms in the region. Prosser has worked with Ben Franklin Transit to shuttle tourists from exit to exit and wine tasting areas.

The Yellowstone Trail is another potential tourism draw to the area. Grandview has created a rest area using a marker from the Yellowstone Trail.

One of the big challenges for tourism is the lack of a state tourism program. Washington is losing market share, and losing tax revenue.

[Yakima Valley Tourism](#)
[Prosser Economic Development](#)

Action/Follow-up: None

TRANSPORTATION AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

Jean Brown, Business Development Director, New Vision, Yakima Development Association, reported that location and transportation are key to attracting and retaining business.

Tim Kelly, Chief Operation Officer, Central Washington Rail Road (CWRR), talked about the railroads serving central Washington. There are 22 small railroads in Washington. The Temple Family has been involved since 1986.

- Started Washington Central RR in 1986
- Sold Washington Central RR in 1996
- Formed Columbia Basin RR in 1996
- Formed Central Washington RR in 2005

Fertilizer, French fries, and cardboard are carried in the Yakima portion of the railroad, which CWRR owns. The lower valley track is leased from the BNSF. It is driven by cattle feed.

In the last three years, the cost of railroad ties has gone from \$48 to \$72. There are about 3200/mile. The state provides a disproportionate subsidy to other short line railroads. CWRR questions the long-term economic viability of those investments. They prefer that Yakima's Cascade Mill site continue as heavy industrial. It's probably the only industrial land that can be rail served.

Jon DeVaney, Washington Tree Fruit Association, said that tree fruit represents about 30% of the value of the state's agricultural industry. Tree fruit is grown to sell fresh. Fall 2014 was largest crop ever – an estimated 150 million 40 lb boxes of apples. By this summer, that estimate had dropped by 10 million boxes to 140 million. The losses correlated with exports.

The reason for the losses: the 2014-15 Port strike, which began just as apple harvest completed and peak Asian exports usually take place. India is now third largest export market. Freshness means customers will cancel orders even if shipment is delayed, but can still take place.

Packers had to find an alternative when orders cancelled or not deliverable. Surplus was sold to processors, some for animal feed, and the rest was donated to food banks until they ran out of capacity. Much of the rest spoiled for want of anywhere to send it, and became compost.

Lessons:

- Prices do fall during years with unusually large supply, but this is exacerbated by limited transportation to markets.
- This effect is more visible in the case of the port strike, but similar reductions in sales and price effects can be caused by shortages of truck and rail capacity.
- A reliable transportation system sustains the 60,000 jobs and more than \$7.5 billion in economic impact of the apple industry in WA.

Carl Singleton, Manager, R.E. Powell, which is based in the lower valley, told the Commission that RE Powell has delivered fuel products for 35 years. It is the 15th largest family owned business in the NW. Fuel delivery to gas stations accounts for 60 -70% of their business. It is a reliable, fundamental supplier to every business in Washington. While safety is at the forefront of their operation, RE Powell operates 24-7 regardless of weather conditions. Product comes from pipeline, rail and barge. Keeping the roads open is a key priority.

Jim Sewell, President, Port of Grandview, was formerly City Manager for the City of Grandview. It is the youngest port in the state, primarily focused on economic development. Food processing is the focus: Welch's has two plants and FruitSmart is located there. Greater Pacific Cold Storage and Bleyhl Farm Products also are headquartered in Grandview. Transportation is critical.

Much of the product goes by rail; trucks bring the produce into Grandview. The dairy industry also is growing significantly in the lower valley. YV dairies produce 42% of milk statewide. Dairy will continue to grow; it depends on trucks bringing feed.

Grandview is 185 miles from Seattle, Spokane, and Portland. Its location is one of the reasons Walmart located in Grandview. Gary Christianson, owner of RE Powell, helped to persuade Walmart to locate there.

Tammy Elliott, General Transportation Manager, Wal-Mart, said that the main challenges her truckers face are Seattle, I-405, I-90 and Snoqualmie Pass. The Sunnyside distribution center serves 127 stores; the majority Washington stores are west of the cascades. Their drivers need safe places to chain up. She gives a shout out to the crews that keep White Pass open.

Their route to Portland travels US 97, I-84 and avoids SR 14 and I-5. Walmart does not route to avoid tolls. It chooses the safest, most direct, cheapest route to its stores. Cathlin Foster, general manager of the Grandview distribution center said that there is no distribution from the supercenters, except occasionally a little to supermarkets.

[Importance of Transportation to Washington's Apple Growers](#)
[Central Washington Railroad](#)

Action/Follow-up: None

MEETING PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION NEEDS

Madelyn Carlson, CEO for People for People, noted that the nonprofit is celebrating its 50th year. It provides employment and training and transportation services. It began providing transportation services 32 years ago in Yakima County, later expanding to Grant, Adams and Lincoln counties.

Southern Yakima County has the two largest cities in the lower valley. It is an agricultural area and home to the Yakama Nation, which has about 10,000 enrolled members. People for People operates the Community Connector, which is funded by WSDOT and connects Yakima Valley communities and Prosser three times a day. It is often difficult and dangerous for individuals to get to a fixed route stop. People for People also provides door-to-door service and provides Non-emergency Medicaid Transportation for Medicaid eligible clients in 14 counties.

As a Medicaid Broker, People for People gets an administrative fee and reimbursement for the cost of each trip. The 211 service is frequently used by people in YV to identify transportation options available to them.

David Morales, Commissioner, Commission on Hispanic Affairs, and lawyer with the Northwest Justice Project talked about the human impact of not having adequate public transportation. He talked with a farmworker last year who came to Washington on a bus from California. He worked in Omak, was fired and kicked out of farmworker housing. He gave most of his last paycheck to a co-worker who took him to Brewster, where he thought he could find public transportation. There was none and he stayed in a homeless shelter for a few weeks until he could make money to travel south to Oregon, where he lives now.

Many farmworkers rely on walking or bicycling to get around. When a worker is injured, there often is no transportation to health care until the end of the day. Irregular hours are the norm for farmworkers. There are 375,000 drivers with suspended licenses (DWSL) in the state, about 16% due to unpaid fines. People of color are stopped more often and fined more often than others for traffic offenses, leading to suspended licenses. Mr. Morales suggests a driver's relicensing program to help reduce the DWSL problem. There is a long-term practice of transporting farmworkers from one state to another for work. People for People and YVCOG are interested in establishing ride sharing services, including an agricultural vanpool program, but were advised that the Farm Labor Contractor Act prevents that. There are successful programs in Oregon and Northern California.

Dina Ibarra, Director, College Assistant Migrant Program, Heritage University, told the Commission that Heritage University has operated since 1984. It is focused on Hispanic and Native American students. Sometimes, students come from a family with only one car, and are dropped off early and picked up late. Their students from the lower valley need transportation options. Student surveys indicate that transportation is their highest need. Gas money also is a barrier to higher education.

Action/Follow-Up: None

PUBLIC COMMENT

Martina Charvet, a farmer in the Lower Valley, stressed the need to repair and rebuild the Mabton Bridge. The Grandview pavement is very nice, but the speed limit should be increased from 35 mph to 40 or 45 mph.

Sonny Putter noted that the Commission has heard some very good information about public transportation. The ADA requirements for Dial-a-Ride are very expensive. Is it reasonable for Puget Sound transit agencies to recover only 15-20 of operating costs? In Canada, some transit agencies recover much more. Maybe wealthier areas should pay more for transit.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

ANNE E. HALEY, Chairman

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RITA BROGAN, Member

VACANT, Member

ROY JENNINGS, Member

VACANT, Member

JERRY LITT, Member

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL