



Washington State Transportation Commission

Bellingham Virtual Meeting Summary
June 16 & 17, 2020

Chair Jerry Litt opened the meeting at 1:30 pm with introductions by Commissioners.

Commission Business

Commissioner Restucci moved and Commissioner Jennings seconded the motion approving the May 19, 2020 meeting summary. The motion was approved unanimously.

ACTION: May meeting summary approved unanimously.

Chair Jerry Litt introduced new Commissioner Kelly Fukai. Commissioner Fukai introduced herself. Ms. Fukai gave a brief overview of her academic and professional background. She is excited about economic development and transportation.

Chair Litt discussed that with all the uncertainty related to COVID-19, the Commission would be dealing with issues at an unprecedented level. He suggested that to best position the Commission for this, they move forward with the current officer structure and delay leadership changes until July 2021. Commissioners agreed.

Chair Litt made a statement on COVID and the social justice movements. He stated the Commission's intent to improve equity within the transportation system. Commissioner Serebrin acknowledged the equity conversations currently happening around the country. She committed action to those impacted directly and indirectly by racism. She discussed a long history of systemic racism within transportation and the Commission's direct role in addressing this as the Commission moves forward with policies. Commissioner Serebrin asked that the Commission take a social equity training and that social equity be highlighted and prioritized in future plans.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: The Commission will seek equity training opportunities.

Regional Transportation Overview: The Big Picture

Hugh Conroy, Planning Director, Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG)

Mr. Conroy provided an overview of WCOG and provided a status update on their plan. WCOG is one of eleven metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in Washington. The plan was last completed in 2017. The next update is due in 2022. The 2017 plan shifted to an on-line product, which allows the plan to be more organic and accessible. The 2018 plan included a "household travel study" which included 1,200 households of 80,000 contacted.

[Whatcom Council of Governments](#)

For more detail on agenda item 2, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 00:15:44 on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

WSDOT Transportation Challenges and Successes

Jay Drye, Mt. Baker Assistant Region Administrator, Washington State Department of Transportation

Mr. Drye, provided an overview of WSDOT activities in Whatcom County including transportation facilities and projects that are essential to mobility, economic vitality and livability of Whatcom County. The region works with six counties, 10 tribes, four ports, seven transit agencies, and 73 incorporated cities and towns, within their regional area.

There are currently five fish passage projects addressing 13 of the 30 barriers needed to be addressed to comply with the court injunction: I-5/SR 548 - California Creek – 2020; SR 546 – 2021; SR 544 – 2021; I-5 & SR 11 Padden Creek – 2021; and SR 11 Hoag Creek.

Currently, there are four preservation projects in Whatcom County, noting several preservation projects have been deferred due to lack of funding. There are six Connecting Washington active projects in Whatcom County.

[WSDOT Virtual Tour of Bellingham](#)

For more detail on agenda item 3, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 00:33:38, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Tribal Transportation Challenges and Successes

Peter Frye, Senior Planner, Lummi Planning Department, Lummi Nation

Chair Litt extended condolences to the Lummi Nation for the loss of hereditary Chief Bill James.

Mr. Frye, stated the tribal nations face unique transportation challenges. Many nations have integrated transportation solutions in approaches to economic development and human services delivery.

The Lummi Nation operates its own transit system which is vital given many Lummi members do not have reliable transportation or a driver's license. Their transit system serves the reservation and connects to Ferndale for travel into Bellingham. Given there is no grocery store

on the reservation or other essential services, access to neighboring towns is critical. There is no fare charged to ride their buses, which is open to anyone, not just Lummi members.

The Lummi Nation is working with local government on a traffic congestion mitigation project at I-5 and Slater Road.

Some of the improvements this project will bring include widening the road, building a bridge, and creating two roundabouts. This project is the #1 project on the WCOGs list of improvements as the area is heavily used by commercial traffic and residential trips. This project is important to the Lummi Nation, City of Ferndale, and the oil refineries. The Lummi Nation is developing the southwest corner of the interchange, and other developers are expected to bring business to the interchange as well.

For more detail on agenda item 4, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 00:50:02, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Getting Around Without a Car: Whatcom Transit Authority **Pete Stark, General Manager, Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA)**

Mr. Stark, gave a status update on Whatcom Transit. Whatcom Transit provides fixed route, paratransit, zone service, and a vanpool program throughout Whatcom County, including a successful partnership with Western Washington University. WTA coordinates timing with Lummi Transit, so that the schedules align. The fare is \$1.00 each way.

WTA has taken unprecedented measures due to COVID. Of the ten systems that the Governor is tracking, WTA had the greatest drop in ridership. Key challenges tied to recovery: safety and trust; demand is hard to anticipate; primary revenue source is fragile; U.S.-Canadian border is closed; and impacts of declining sales tax and gas tax revenues.

The transit authority partners with four institutions of higher education to encourage and enable student use of the system, making up 50% of their ridership. However, due to COVID impacts, WTA has been greatly impacted by the schools closing in-person classes. The bus passes provided to students at Western Washington University and Whatcom Community College is embedded within student identification cards. WTA also services the Lummi Nation NW Indian College and Fairhaven.

WTA is partnering with the City of Bellingham to create complete streets in growing neighborhoods. Bellingham Station, WTA's central transit center in downtown Bellingham, is being expanded at a location where the primary street network and city grid merge.

[Whatcom Transit](#)

For more detail on agenda item 5, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 01:03:37, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Continued: Getting Around Without a Car

Gina Austin, Project Engineer, City of Bellingham

Hugh Conroy, Director of Planning, Whatcom Council of Governments

Melissa Fanucci, AICP, Principal Planner, Whatcom Council of Governments

Bellingham Parks and Recreation provided an overview of their planning, funding, building, and maintaining trails. The goal is to have everyone in Bellingham within a 10 minute walk of trails, and trails connected to other transportation systems. Bellingham parks have over 80 miles of trails. This has expanded from 28 miles of trail, in 1995.

The Greenway Program, designed to link Bellingham's trails, ridge tops, and shoreline corridors to a continuous series of parks, forests and greenbelts has been funded by four property tax levies, since 1990, to connect ridge tops, shoreline and stream corridors, and old rail lines for a linear system of parks, forests, and open spaces; for both people and wildlife, with 40 acres of trail corridors. Monthly trail counts show that these trails are heavily used: waterfront over 61,000 users and other trails 2,500 to over 6,000 users. The future goals are to finish connections, improve perception of safety, and shoreline habitat improvement. There are both many challenges and opportunities for continuing to expand the trail system. There are four needs to be balanced: recreation, habitat, transportation, and development.

[Greenways](#)

[North Sound Transportation Alliance](#)

[Whatcom Smart Trips](#)

For more detail on agenda item 6, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 01:25:46, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Regional Coordination of Cross-Border Transportation Planning

Hugh Conroy, Director of Planning, Whatcom Council of Governments

Melissa Fanucci, AICP, Principal Planner, Whatcom Council of Governments

Todd Carlson, Planning & Engineering Services Manager, Washington State Department of Transportation, Mt. Baker Region

The Commission received a briefing on the issue of traffic at the border crossing in Blaine. This crossing ranks in the top five busiest U.S.-Canada border crossings nationally. Over 50 organizations participate in the International Mobility and Trade Corridor (IMTC) Program. Led by the Whatcom County Council of Governments, the IMTC supports improvements to safety,

mobility, and security for the Cascade Gateway for the five-land border ports-of-entry connecting Western Washington and Lower Mainland British Columbia.

[International Trade Corridor](#)

For more detail on agenda item 7, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 02:26:02, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Chair Litt recessed the meeting.

June 17, 2020

Chair Litt opened the meeting at 9:00 am.

SR 20 Memorial Highway Naming - ACTION

Chad Clark, Undersheriff, Skagit County Sheriff

John Baptiste, Chief, Washington State Patrol

Chad Clark Undersheriff, presented a proposal to name two sections of SR 20: one section (Milepost 52 to 59) would be named for Trooper Thomas Hendrickson, who was killed in the line of duty on November 17, 1974; the other section (Milepost 90 to 105) would be named for Skagit County Deputy Alan Hultgren, who was killed in the line of duty on August 7, 1981. The naming proposals received a significant number of letters of support from throughout the community, elected officials, and public officials.

John Baptiste, Chief, Washington State Patrol, expressed his support of the naming and gratitude to the Skagit County Sheriff's Office for bringing this forward.

Chair Litt read Resolution 739. Commissioner Young moved and Commissioner Batra seconded the motion to approve Resolution 739. By roll call, Resolution 739 passed unanimously and the use of e-signatures authorized.

Commissioner Litt read Resolution 740. Commissioner Jennings moved and Commissioner Restucci seconded the motion to approve Resolution of 740. By roll call, Resolution 740 passed unanimously and the use of e-signatures authorized.

[Fallen Hero's Project](#)

For more detail on agenda item 9, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 00:05:30, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: Approved Resolutions 739 & 740.

Follow-Up: WSTC staff will notify WSDOT of the naming action for signage placement.

City of Bellingham Transportation Challenges and Successes

Seth Fleetwood, Mayor, City of Bellingham

Eric Johnston, Public Works Director, City of Bellingham

Chris Comeau, Transportation Planning, City of Bellingham

Bellingham is a regional center for employment, shopping, education, medical services, and more. Daily, there is a disproportionate number of trips in and out of the city. Out of town visitors generate significant sales tax revenue (15-20%), with a lot of visitors coming from lower mainland British Columbia, Canada. Pre-COVID, 20% of the daily vehicle trips in and out of Bellingham came from Canada. Transportation in Bellingham has been greatly impacted due to the “Stay at Home” Order. Vehicle traffic volumes are down by approximately 50% citywide. It is estimated that 25-30% of people are working from home. The US-Canada border is closed for non-essential trips, which has resulted in a reduction of 20% of daily vehicle trips in/out of Bellingham. Recreational walking and biking has increased across the City.

Since 2016, the City of Bellingham’s comprehensive plan included a multimodal transportation system, prioritizing all mobility needs from all modes is carefully considered, balanced, and implemented so that the citywide multimodal transportation system continues to work for everyone. Bellingham has multiple active transportation plans: multiuse greenway trails, 1st approved in 1990, has been reapproved four times; the Pedestrian Master Plan (2012); and the Bicycle Master Plan (2014).

The City of Bellingham has taken action to reduce transportation impacts on climate. In 2018, the City Council updated the 2007 Climate Protection Action Plan. The City Council has adopted the 2021-2026 Transportation Improvement Plan, which includes 20 multimodal projects scheduled for construction in 2020, and 30 multimodal projects planned for funding and construction between 2021 and 2026.

In 2010, Bellingham’s voters approved, by 58%, “Transportation Benefit District No. 1” (TBD) which was a sales tax increase of 2/10 of 1% (0.002) within city limits. This has resulted in approximately \$5,000,000 in TBD revenue each year for street resurfacing, non-motorized investments, and a 2011-2015 contract with WTA to bring back Sunday bus service. The TBD has a 10-year lifespan (2011-2020). It expires in December 31, 2020, unless renewed by voters in November 2020.

[Planning for Multimodal Transportation](#)

For more detail on agenda item 10, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 00:34:42, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Whatcom County Transportation Challenges and Successes

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive, Whatcom County

Jon Hutchings, Public Works Director, Whatcom County

There are three ways to come to Whatcom County from the North/Canada, but there are only two ways to come from the South. Highway 9 is in need of improvements, noting that 87% of county roads are good to excellent. Agriculture in Whatcom County is still very significant to the local economy and the transportation system is key to success. The current financial model is based on agriculture needs and does not meet today's need of safety, climate protection, fish passage, and ADA compliance. Meeting today's needs requires a different focus on public participation and partnership collaboration. While difficult to make this transition, the Birch Bay preservation project is an example of partnership, as a way to protect soft shoreline. The project had been discussed since originally developed in the 1970s. This project combines safety, cycling, ADA accessibility, waterfront preservation, and many other components. It will be completed this winter.

Whatcom County, is one of two counties that operates a ferry system. This system, established in the 1960s, is nearing end of life. Whatcom County needs approximately \$30 million dollars to update the ferries to meet current Coast Guard safety requirements and meet the County's climate preservation goals.

For more detail on agenda item 11, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 01:08:48, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Transportation and Economic Vitality

Eric Johnston, Public Works Director, City of Bellingham

Rob Fix, Executive Director, Port of Bellingham

Matt Mullett, CEO, All-American Marine

The city and the Port of Bellingham provided an overview of a long-term project to redevelop and revitalize its waterfront, following the departure of Georgia Pacific and a summary of other properties that the Port operates and the link to the areas economic vitality.

The Bellingham Cruise Terminal is the southern nexus of the Alaskan highway system. However, a few years ago, there were issues when the Alaska Governor cut funding to the system. Whatcom County worked with the Alaska legislature to restore funding but due to budget constraints, several vessels have been docked. The remaining mainline vessels (that service Bellingham) had major mechanical failures resulting in only one ferry operating for several months. COVID-19 issues have complicated the ability to adequately crew vessels, get shipyard work completed, and increased seasonal charter & event cancellations. Service is scheduled to resume at the end of June 2020.

The Whatcom County Rural Broadband Project has the goal of providing quality affordable broadband to businesses and residents in rural Whatcom County. The project will provide approximately 113 miles of fiber optics system, capable of transmitting large amounts of data, and could possibly be expanded to include last mile connections (Fiber to the Home). The

current project is estimated to cost \$10 to \$15 million. Permits and easements must be obtained from multiple organizations: WSDOT, Puget Sound Energy, county, city, Department of Natural Resources, and private property owners. Engineering is scheduled to begin in summer of 2020, with construction starting in 2020/2021.

In 2019, the Bellingham International Airport experienced a slight decline in traffic from 2018. 2020 will have a significant decline due to major reductions in travel due to COVID-19, with no flights in March or April. Horizon Airlines recently restarted flights to Seattle and Allegiant Airlines has re-started one flight a day to Vegas.

The Port of Bellingham acquired the Georgia Pacific Mill property in 2005, which is comprised of approximately 137 acres. There were three goals of the purchase: restore the health of the land and water, increase public access to water, and rebuild the waterfront economy. Most of the clean-up in the Georgia Pacific campus has been completed and approved by the Department of Ecology. The Granary Building, a mixed use building, is the first building to be redeveloped on the site. The restoration included: removing 110,000 cubic yards of contaminated soils; and rebuilding the shoreline for public access, marine trades and salmon recovery. This project has stimulated more than \$65 Million in investments, funded by the city, was the result of a close relationship between the Port and the City. No one entity could solely achieve the project.

A significant step in rebuilding the waterfront economy, All-American Marine, moved from Fairhaven to the waterfront in 2017. The new location allows for construction of bigger boats. All-American Marine (AAM) built all of the vessels operated by the King County Water Taxi and four vessels for Kitsap Transit. Also in 2017, Silfab Solar, the largest solar manufacturer in the US, moved to the waterfront. Both of these locations maintain over 100 jobs.

The redevelopment efforts along the Bellingham waterfront was dependent on: the necessary transportation infrastructure being in place; required partnerships for the funding, planning, and execution; strong vision for the community; and strong support from elected officials.

[Port of Bellingham](#) [Transportation Economic Vitality](#)

For more detail on agenda item 12, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording - June 16](#), which starts at 01:32:01, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Commission Business

Ms. Griffith discussed the upcoming Commission meetings.

Reflections and Recommendations

Commissioners offered their reflections and thoughts from the meeting.

- Always impressed with the level of coordination by the organizations in Whatcom County.

- Have attended the North Sound Transportation Commission meetings. Always impressed by a group that has no mandate, but came together ad hoc to address issues. WCOG does a great job facilitation. Their approach is so practical and does a great job of setting regional priorities.
- Impressive to hear how Bellingham has put an emphasis on non-motorized transportation and has been so successful in the advancement and transitioning existing systems.
- The budget shortfalls are frightening, especially knowing the small amount of money that will be available for addressing. Bellingham serves as a great example of how this can be done.
- Intrigued by the WCOG presentation and the similarities with the Yakima MPO, the various city/county partnerships.
- Impressed by Lummi Nation's I-5 bypass project.
- Bellingham parks and recreation and greenways, it was great to see elected officials, at all levels of local government, involved in the project.
- Great to learn about the Smart Trips program, appreciated the travel training program, was not aware of and will be bringing this back to Yakima County for exploration.
- Interested in the universal broadband initiative and want to see how this plays out.
- The border information was fascinating. Impressed by the IMTC communication. Great innovation and so many groups vying for limited transportation dollars, but has led to great innovation.
- Interesting to about the bicycle action plan, climate protection action plan, and learning how their using their TBD funding to improve multimodal transportation.
- The waterfront redevelopment and clean-up was great to hear about. Good to hear that there were state funds available
- Impressed to learn about the POF system, particularly hydrogen fuel cells that are emerging in this sector.
- Impressed to see how far Bellingham has advanced on their bicycle and pedestrian plans.
- Enjoyed learning about All American Marine, a world class facility, right here in Washington.
- Commend the commitment of the region to climate protection and multimodal investments.
- We need to be thinking about what we can do to undo systemic racism – a DEI training, etc. It is important to hold space for this on the agenda.
- This is truly inspiring work that is actively happening. There are a lot of similarities between communities at the local level. Really appreciate learning about best practices and how these could be adopted by other localities.
- Really appreciated the conversation about “flipping the system on its head” and think about the system as moving people instead of moving cars. The COVID-fueled changes will force this and other changes.
- We need to create systems of funding to properly fund how our transportation system will work in the future.

Next meeting: Special Virtual Meeting - July 7, 2020

Virtual Olympia Meeting – Held over two separate dates: July 15, 2020 & July 21, 2020

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

JERRY LITT, Chair

ROY JENNINGS, Vice-Chair

SHIV BATRA, Member

JAMES A. RESTUCCI, Member

HESTER SEREBRIN, Member

DEBBIE YOUNG, Member

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

Date of Approval