



Washington State Transportation Commission

Union Gap Meeting Summary

April 19 & 20, 2022

April 19, 2022

Chair Roy Jennings opened the meeting at 1:00 pm with introductions by commission members and staff.

Agenda Item 2: Mayor's Welcome

Presenter:

- John Hodkinson, Mayor, City of Union Gap

Mayor Hodkinson welcomed the Commission to Union Gap.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 2, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:05:16, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 3: City of Union Gap Transportation Issues, Challenges, and Successes

Presenter:

- Dennis Henne, Public Works Director, City of Union Gap

An overview was given on the City of Union Gap's transportation needs and successes. The City of Union Gap has been experiencing an economic revitalization sparked by an infusion of investment into the Valley Mall in the early 2000s. Increased federal and state investment in transportation projects has opened up land for expansion and further economic development which is continuing today. While Union Gap is a small community, they enjoy a sound revenue base in part because local businesses attract shoppers and commuters from the surrounding Yakima County region. The main roads also function as heavy freight routes, however, since much of the region's transportation funding is used to maintain those freight corridors, residents have expressed concern that less funding to support the maintenance of residential roads.

It was also noted that at-grade rail crossings, cause congestion and waste fuel. Future projects will look to incorporate under and overpasses to resolve these concerns.

Presentation:

[City of Union Gap](#)

For more detail on agenda item 3, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:15:07, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

**Agenda Item 4:
Transportation 101**

Presenters:

- Reema Griffith, Executive Director, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Carl See, Deputy Director, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Aaron Halbert, Financial Analyst, Washington State Transportation Commission

Commission staff provided an overview on the fiscal and policy framework of the statewide transportation system.

Presentation:

[Transportation 101](#)

For more detail on agenda item 4, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:39:54, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

**Agenda Item 5:
Washington State Department of Transportation Regional Overview**

Presenter:

- Todd Trepanier, Regional Administrator, South Central Region, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)

An overview was given on WSDOT's South Central Region, including planning and active transportation projects, maintenance, and preservation challenges in the surrounding area. The WSDOT's construction program for 2022 will be busy, including major improvements to I-90, I-82, retrofits of the SR 241 Moxee Bridges, and safe program improvements to SR 24 and SR 241, among others. Although several important projects will get under way or complete this year, much work remains unfunded. Over 43% (or 1,327 highway lane miles) in the South Central Region is due for rehabilitation, but the WSDOT region has funding to address only 99 miles in 2022. Several facilities were highlighted because they have reached a point of failure and present potential safety issues. The South Central Region maintenance team are also facing challenges associated with an aging office facility (the current WSDOT facility was built in 1918).

And the regional office is working with local partners to find compassionate ways of addressing homeless encampments on WSDOT rights of way.

The Regional Administrator was highly complementary of the collaborative nature of the region's the tribes and local transportation organizations. These successful partnerships have been instrumental in getting work accomplished in the region.

Presentation:

[WSDOT South Central Region](#)

For more detail on agenda item 5, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:14:47, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 6:

Yakima Valley Regional Transportation Issues: The Big Picture

Presenters:

- John Hodkinson, Vice Chair, Board of Directors, Yakima Valley Conference of Governments
- Christina Wickenhagen, Executive Director, Yakima Valley Conference of Governments

The Yakima Valley region has widely varying transportation needs that includes significant rural and urban priorities. A portion of the region is rural, in some cases with roads that lack bike lanes, sidewalks and residents require their own transportation as transit is not available. Other parts of the region are urbanized, with congestion concerns and safety issues associated with the convergence of residential, commuter and freight traffic. This creates challenges for the local transportation organizations that are responsible for sorting through competing priorities and finding ways to successfully compete for funding as they try to prioritize underserved communities. The Yakima Valley Conference of Government's experience suggests that customizing funding programs provides more equitable outcomes and allows similarly situated communities to compete for available funding, preferably within their own region. Creating competition between rural eastern Washington communities and major metropolitan cities in the Puget Sound, for example, make it difficult to achieve an equitable result.

Concerns were expressed that the Office of Management and Budget has explored possibly changing the definition of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA) by raising the threshold population from 50,000 to 100,000 residents. If this change is implemented in the future the region could lose its designation as an MSA which could impact the area's competitiveness when applying for federal funding.

Presentation:

[YVCOG - Regional Issues](#)

For more detail on agenda item 6, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:48:06, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 7: Yakima County Transportation Issues, Challenges, and Successes

Presenter:

- Matt Pietrusiewicz, P.E. County Engineer, Yakima County

An overview of Yakima County's transportation needs, and challenges was provided. Yakima, like other counties, is facing structural revenue challenges. The county is receiving a declining share of the gas tax allocation, and county road fund property tax receipts are not keeping pace with rising costs. The county road fund property tax increases are capped at 1% per year, which does not keep up with the growth. At the same time, county transportation costs are rising due to increasing deferred maintenance, increasing cost of gas, asphalt and environmental regulation, and costs to replace infrastructure that has reached end of life. In some areas of the county pedestrian safety has also become a significant issue and the county is strongly supportive of expanding existing trail systems to provide better pedestrian friendly options.

Presentation:

[Yakima County Transportation Issues](#)

For more detail on agenda item 7, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:12:10, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 8: Greater Yakima Valley Transportation Issues, Challenges, and Successes

Presenters:

- Bill Preston, City Engineer, City of Yakima
- Elizabeth Alba, Interim City Manager, City of Sunnyside
- Jose Trevino, Mayor, City of Granger

Cities in the greater Yakima Valley share many challenges. Lack of sufficient funding, inability to replace aging and deteriorating facilities and safety concerns caused by inadequate pedestrian infrastructure which leads to vehicle and pedestrian injuries and accidents. However, each city also faces unique challenges and needs. The city of Yakima is preparing for improving and expanding the airport's runway access and terminal capacity, as well as dealing with challenges to the transit system (COVID impacts, driver shortages, etc.); Mabton is considering how to cope with expected impacts to their economy when the Yakima River Bridge replacement project gets underway; Sunnyside is preparing their city's safety plan, and the city of Granger lacks resources to hire needed staff such as grant writers. Even in light of the challenges facing these communities, the cities are continuing to see successes in large part because of the strong partnerships and coordination in the region.

Presentation:

[Yakima Valley-Transportation Issues](#)

For more detail on agenda item 8, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:36:25, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 9:

Public Transportation Issues, Challenges, and Successes

Presenters:

- Madelyn Carlson, Executive Director, People for People
- Janna Lewis-Clark, Program Manager, Yakama Nation Tribal Transit
- Alan Adolf, Transportation Program Manager, Yakima Valley Conference of Governments

An overview was given of transit and special needs transportation services provided in Yakima County. The region is served by several public transit services, the most prominent of which is People for People (PFP) and Pahto Public Passage Tribal Transportation (Pahto.) PFP is a regional service provider that offers free fixed-route transportation services to the general public. They also offer door-to-door services to assist elderly, children, and others with special needs to access employment, healthcare, and a variety of other services. PFP's community connectors provide riders access services in other areas, such as chemotherapy or dialysis treatments offered in other counties.

Pahto provides safe, free, fair public transportation throughout the Yakama Reservation boundaries. Pahto runs fixed route services throughout the week and provides para-transit services.

Both organizations have experienced increased fuel and maintenance costs, increasing costs of insurance and COVID safety compliance. PFP noted their challenges with recruitment and retention of drivers as well.

Several areas in the region remain underserved, particularly the more rural communities. The initial phase of a Yakima Region Transit Feasibility Study is currently under way and will provide the region with data to develop a sound strategy for expanding services in the future.

Presentation:

[Public Transit - People for People](#)

[Yakama Nation Tribal Transportation](#)

[Public Transportation - Yakima Region](#)

For more detail on agenda item 9, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:59:10, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Chair Roy Jennings reminded the Commission that the meeting will continue Wednesday, April 20, 2022, and recessed the meeting at 5:00 pm.

DAY 2: April 20, 2022

Chair Roy Jennings opened the meeting at 9:00 am with introductions by commission members and staff.

Agenda Item 11: Economic Development and Transportation

Presenters:

- Jonathan Smith, Executive Director, Yakima County Development Association
- John Cooper, President and CEO, Yakima Valley Tourism

An overview was provided the Yakima Valley's economic development activities and tourism industry, with particular focus on the connection with mobility needs. Most developable land in the region is location near transit hubs. Economic development stakeholders are compiling GIS maps that compile seamless information in a single map that will allow potential investors to identify appropriate sites for future development. Several key transportation projects that support economic development were reviewed. Efforts are under way to spread growth out to rural areas to ease congestion and build up less populated areas.

Tourism is also key to the region's economy and is continuing to grow. Nearly two million tourists visit the region each year, generating approximately \$245 million annually. However, unlike more heavily urbanized areas where tourist attractions tend to be clustered together, tourism in the Yakima Valley is spread out. Transportation is, therefore, a key to successful tourist experiences and while numerous modes are available (air, train, bus, transit, etc.) each has challenges. Cost, timing and availability of connections, seasonality of demand are all issues that are being addressed. At this time personal vehicles remain the primary option and will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. Investments will need to be made, for example, in electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

Presentation:

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

For more detail on agenda item 11, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:02:30, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 12: Yakama Nation Transportation Issues, Challenges, and Successes

Presenters:

- Portia Shields, Data Coordinator, Yakama Nation

An overview of the transportation needs of the Yakama Nation was provided.

It was noted that many of the roads on the reservation are narrow and carry significant truck traffic, which creates some safety concerns. The Yakamas are considering ways to reduce these

concerns. For example, a turnout lane was added to a main roadway and additional turnout lanes are being considered. Other safety improvements are also being discussed such as safety signs and converting some stretches of key roadways to mandatory 24-hour headlight-on zones. Pedestrian safety was noted as a high priority. Mt Adams School District built a new school in January 2022, but there are no sidewalks along the road leading to the school. This is a concern that will need to be addressed. Other key priorities and projects were also reviewed including the on-going need to address fish passage culverts, the implementation of one or more roundabouts on US 97, and several other road projects currently under way.

Several successful projects have recently been completed. A tribal safety committee has been formed as a result of a collaborative “target zero” effort between the tribe and Eastern Washington University. The Yakama Nation has worked closely with WSDOT on several key transportation projects.

Presentation:

[Yakama Nation Transportation](#)

For more detail on agenda item 12, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:39:12 on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 13:

East-West Corridor and Cascade Mill Development

Presenters:

- Matt Pietrusewicz, P.E., County Engineer, Yakima County
- Bill Preston, P.E., City Engineer, City of Yakima
- Brian White, P.E., Assistant Regional Administrator, Washington State Department of Transportation

The East-West Corridor has been driven by a strong regional partnership, including the city, county and WSDOT. Beginning in 1994, the project has progressed in multiple phases that ultimately connected the urban and commercial areas of Yakima and Terrace Heights and have provided a much-needed alternate east-west route. The corridor has opened up opportunities for economic development that have been restricted by limited road capacity and freeway access. Phase 2 is under environmental review and Phase 3 is being redesigned to significantly reduce the cost to complete the project.

Presentation:

[East West Corridor](#)

For more detail on agenda item 14, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:58:55, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 14:

Naming a portion of US 97 the “World War II Veterans Memorial Highway”

– *ACTION*

Presenter:

- David Schwab, WWII Veteran and Douglas County Resident

Mr. Schwab provided background and support for his petition to name a portion of US 97 in Douglas County the “World War II Veterans Memorial Highway.” After receiving a brief overview of the petition, the Commission approved Resolution #745 adopting the name.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 14, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:25:27, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: Commissioner Restucci made a motion to adopt Resolution #745. Commissioner Litt seconded the motion. The Commission voted 7-0 to approve the motion.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 15:

Healthy, Safe, and Mobile Communities

Presenters:

- Kellie Connaughton, Executive Director, Yakima Greenway
- Portia Shields, Yakama Nation

Local communities are working together to improve and expand active transportation options that gives choices that can affect our health and environmental quality. The Yakima Greenway is a tremendous local resource, that has provided recreation, pedestrian, and bike paths across the valley from Naches to Union Gap for the last 45 years. The Greenway provides paths, lakes, parks, and access to public art. It is, however, an aging resource. The Yakima Greenway Foundation is preparing its master plan to provide an enduring focus on maintaining and refreshing the facilities and to provide a safe, open space. The Foundation partners, include public and private partners, WSDOT and others, will be key to helping to fund critical projects such as facility improvements and installing lighting to increase safety and reduce crime.

The Yakama Nation’s proposed Heritage Connectivity Trail network would provide 150 miles of access, incorporate cultural design, and provide mobility options for non-motorized travel. It would complement and expand active transportation options onto reservation lands. Pedestrian safety is a significant concern on reservation lands and the tribe would like to build out a trail system to provide a safe pedestrian system. The Yakamas are also working to provide interpretive signage along the trail to provide a more robust experience for users.

Presentation:

[Healthy, Safe, and Mobile Communities](#)

[Heritage Connectivity Trails](#)

For more detail on agenda item 15, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:49:22, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 16: Regional Transportation Advocacy

Presenters:

- Matt Pietrusewicz, Interim chair, Driving Rural Yakima Valley's, Economy (DRYVE)
- Jonathan Smith, Chair, TRANS-Action

Regional transportation organizations in the Yakima Valley have built relationships that allow them to coordinate and collaborate at a significant level that is not often seen in other jurisdictions. TRANS-Action, DRYVE, and a wide array of local and state governments, tribal organizations, business organizations work together throughout the region to plan and prioritize investments that will benefit citizens of the region. While many challenges lay ahead, this cooperative nature of the communities in Yakima Valley have contributed to the successes to date.

Presentation:

[Regional Transportation Advocacy](#)

For more detail on agenda item 16, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:20:57, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 17: Public Comment

Gary Wirt, All Aboard Washington (AAWA), noted intercity passenger rail is an important but overlooked transportation mode. The area had service, but the service was cancelled in 1981. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill provides new opportunities. Mr. Wirt asked for help obtaining the support of the Governor and the Legislature to restore that service to the valley by taking the next steps including funding a cost benefit analysis and an economic analysis. Commissioner Restucci expressed in interest in regional rail commissions and requested that the Commission stay involved in the discussions regarding regional rail compacts as referred to in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Mr. Wirt indicted AAWA would keep the Commission informed and welcomed further discussion around how Washington State could participate in a regional rail effort.

Portia Shields, Yakama Nation, spoke to support the need for rail service.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 17, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:43:20, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 18: Commission Business

Reflections and Recommendations:

- The Yakima Valley Conference of Government, the City of Union Gap leaders and staff have been fantastic in all the work they did to arrange this meeting. Thank you also to WSDOT and the Yakama Nation for participating and contributing to the content of this meeting. And finally, a thank you to all the participants and all the contributing organizations for the effort put forward to making this meeting very informative.
- The cooperation among these communities is impressive and instrumental in what has been accomplished in addressing transportation and multimodal issues. It is clear, however, the state still has a significant gap in preservation that must be addressed.
- It is striking how much safety comes to the forefront of these discussions not just related to roads, but also pedestrians.
- We were reminded through these presentations that our policies may not be working for all and as a state we may need to be more surgical to ensure that all parts of our state have access to funding that enables investments sorely needed in our rural communities, not just urban areas.
- It was helpful to hear how different grant requirements favor different areas and it would be interesting to explore the intersection of funding and equity.

March Meeting Summary: No modification or adjustments were made to the March meeting summary. The summary can be considered final and published.

Tolling Preparations for 2022: Substitute Senate Bill 5488 provides funding to adjust tolls on the Tacoma Narrows Bridge. We are planning a rate adjustment process and will be bringing options to you, with the goal of completing by early October.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 18, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:51:17, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Chair Jennings adjourned the meeting at 1:00 pm.

The next meeting will be held virtually on May 17 & 18, 2022.