



# Washington State Transportation Commission

## Vancouver Meeting Summary September 14, 2023

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Chair Debbie Young opened the meeting at 12:30 pm with introductions by Commission members and staff, an overview of the agenda, and meeting protocols.

### **Agenda Item 2: Commission Business**

#### **Presenter:**

- Paula Reeves, Senior Policy Analyst, Washington State Transportation Commission

Commissioners approved the July Meeting Summary and the August Ferry Fare Hearing Meeting Summary for website posting and distribution.

Paula Reeves gave an overview of the production schedule and major themes of the Commission's 2023 Annual Report.

Ms. Reeves said the final report on two route jurisdiction transfer requests currently before the Commission (from the City of Ridgefield and the City of Snoqualmie) are ready for Commission review. Action by the Commission on the final findings will be requested in October.

Public notice was given that the Commission will consider House Joint Memorial 4001, a bill to rename State Route 411 the "Cowlitz County Deputy Sheriff Justin DeRosier Memorial Highway," on Oct. 18.

**Presentation:** There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 2, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:05:22, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

## **Agenda Item 3: Mayor's Welcome**

### **Presenter:**

- Mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle, City of Vancouver

Mayor Anne McEnery-Ogle discussed the challenges and opportunities Vancouver faces as one of the fastest-growing cities in the region, with 35,000 new residents added between the 2010 and 2020 U.S. Census. Additionally, Clark County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the state.

The cost of homeownership and rising rents are a challenge for city residents, with a housing deficit estimated at 14,000 homes. The city has responded by crafting a Housing Action Plan and instituting a tax levy will raise \$100 million over the next decade to build affordable homes. Improved mobility and transportation are tied in with the city's housing plans and are focus areas, along with the goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2040. The city is working with C-TRAN on bus rapid transit and other routes to provide efficient, equitable and climate-friendly travel that will intersect at a new transit mall. It will link into regional light rail that will connect to the city via a new Interstate Bridge across the Columbia River. An \$8 million investment in "complete streets" allows the city to leverage state and federal funding for projects that accommodate a variety of users.

Quality transportation networks are also important for businesses in the region. A new Interstate Bridge connecting I-5 across the Columbia River is critical to the mobility of the region and moving freight throughout the West Coast, with over \$130 million worth of commodities moving across the bridge each day.

**Presentation:** There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 3, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:12:25, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None.

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

## **Agenda Item 4: Southwest Washington Transportation Issues: The Big Picture**

### **Presenter:**

- Matt Ransom, Executive Director, Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council

The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (RTC) serves as both the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Clark County and as the Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO) for Clark, Skamania, and Klickitat counties. The region, with both urban and rural areas, is growing and becoming more diverse racially, ethnically, and linguistically through in-migration. In the city of Vancouver, the

market for commercial and industrial space remains competitive, though 2021 data shows more people are working from home than pre-pandemic (a broader study of commute trends is underway). Priorities for the RTC include investing in core transportation assets and multimodal/transit strategies, optimizing investments already in place (such as adding shoulder-authorized buses, for example), and building assets and infrastructure that continue to attract businesses and new residents.

Strategic issues include three major aging bridges in the region (the Interstate Bridge, built in 1917 and 1958), the Bridge of the Gods (1926) and the Hood River-White Salmon Bridge (1924). Navigating bi-state regionalism is also a delicate balance, with studies showing the importance of the I-5 and I-205 corridors for residents of the metropolitan area as well as freight traffic, which connects with distribution centers in the region as well as ports. While advocating for investment in a safer Interstate Bridge, RTC is balancing the need for a replacement with the economic impact of tolls for the interconnected Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan area.

The RTC is also keeping an eye toward the evolution of mobility and changes to distribution channels and freight flows; changes to the Growth Management Act dealing with climate change (including greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled target-setting); and how Southwest Washington will be affected by Oregon's proposed regional tolling system.

**Presentation:** [Southwest Washington Transportation Issues](#)

For more detail on agenda item 4, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:27:22, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None.

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

## **Agenda Item 5: Economic Vitality in the Greater Vancouver Area**

**Presenters:**

- Scott Bailey, Regional Economist, Washington Department of Employment Security
- Patrick Quinton, Director, Economic Prosperity & Housing, City of Vancouver
- Jennifer Baker, President, Columbia River Economic Development Council

Scott Bailey shared how local economic indicators have been affected by the national trends of declining life expectancy and fertility rates, rising corporate profits and consolidation, climate change, and the competitive housing market. Clark County indicators show its economy outperforming the state and the nation's when it comes to changes in employment, wages, and growth in several professional sectors. But concerns include a widening gap between top and bottom income earners, a rise in the median rent, and a large percentage of "cost-burdened renters," which is defined as those who pay more

than 30 percent of their income on rent. About half of Clark County renters are “cost-burdened renters,” and a quarter are paying 50 percent or more of their income on rent.

Patrick Quinton discussed how the city is working to spur economic development by facilitating private investment through long-range planning and infrastructure improvement. Ensuring adequate housing to support a robust workforce is also a priority. Though 6,800 multi-family units have come online in the past six years and more than 12,000 units are in the pipeline, more are needed. The city is transforming downtown and Central Vancouver into communities where people can live and work. Ensuring new housing aligns with current and future transit routes is a priority.

Jennifer Baker talked about the Columbia River Economic Development Council’s role of partnering with the state in interacting with current businesses and recruiting new industries. The region’s growth – 190,000 additional residents are forecasted to move to the region by 2045 – has implications for companies already located in the area and those thinking of coming. Some don’t want to be flanked by residential development, while others have interest in their workforce living nearby. The state has seen its competitiveness level fall in attracting companies compared with other states because of challenges such as a shortage of viable land with established infrastructure as well as limits to the power grid. Ms. Baker said that the council also has a role in discussions on a new Interstate Bridge and is working with companies interested being vendors or participating in procurement processes during construction.

**Presentations:** [Clark County Economy](#)  
[Vancouver Economic Landscape](#)  
[Columbia River Economic Development Council](#)

For more detail on agenda item 5, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:29:34, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None.

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

## **Agenda Item 6:**

### **Port of Vancouver, Washington – The Convergence of Opportunity and Potential**

**Presenter:**

- Julianna Marler, Chief Executive Officer, Port of Vancouver

Julianna Marler gave an overview of the Port of Vancouver, a deep-water port that specializes in bulk cargo. It is known primarily as an export port, shipping 6.4 million metric tons of goods out of its facility in 2022. Top export items are grains, copper, scrap metal and Bentonite clay. Import cargo totaled 931,000 metric tons in 2022, and top items were wind turbines, steel, and vehicles. Marine highway routes are an extension of surface

routes, and the port continues to advocate for marine shipping as the safest and most efficient way to move cargo. It is working with its partners to create a “High, Wide and Heavy” transportation corridor to safely move large items from the waters of the port and across highways to their destinations in the U.S. and Canada. Also critical to the movement of goods from the port is an Interstate Bridge that can safely accommodate the growing amount of freight tonnage expected by 2040. The port is also working with transportation partners for road connections that will ease the movement of trucks and prevent diversions onto neighborhood streets.

The port continues to expand and has increased its internal rail track and capacity, adding rail cars and new grain elevators. It is also developing its Terminal 1, which sits on 10 acres of highly visible, riverfront land that also accommodates river tourism. As part of the project, an old dock will be rehabilitated, and a new public market will be constructed.

**Presentation:** [Port of Vancouver](#)

For more detail on agenda item 6, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:14:14, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

**Agenda Item 7:**  
**Cowlitz Tribe Update – Transportation Challenges and Successes**

**Presenters:**

- Steve Barnett, Tribal Council Chair, Cowlitz Indian Tribe
- Dean Reynolds, Public Works Director, Cowlitz Indian Tribe
- Amanda Lomasney, Public Works Program Manager, Cowlitz Indian Tribe

Steve Barnett shared that the Cowlitz Indian Tribe has been federally recognized since 2000. The tribe currently employs 1,700 people and has established health services and a public works department. The growth of the northern part of Clark County is due in large part to economic development by the tribe, and it’s grateful for the partnership with the state on a \$40 million interchange at Exit 16 to the tribe’s casino. The tribe is concerned about tolling across the Columbia River. It does not think tolling its members is appropriate given its status in Washington state, and the tribe hopes to engage with the Commission on that point.

Dean Reynolds discussed success stories on the transportation front for the tribe, to include a memorandum of understanding signed with surrounding municipalities to add roads that lead to the tribe’s reservation to the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ inventory, aiding in road maintenance and improvements. A new partnership with C-TRAN led to the first bus stop for the tribe. The tribe has applied for grants for solar power, EV charging stations and an electric transit bus and hopes to be a player in building vehicle charging infrastructure.

**Presentation:** There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 7, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:44:39, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None.

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

## **Agenda Item 8:**

### **Washington State Department of Transportation Regional Overview**

#### **Presenters:**

- Carley Francis, Southwest Regional Administrator, Washington State Department of Transportation
- Scott Langer, Southwest Assistant Regional Administrator, Washington State Department of Transportation

Carley Francis gave an overview of WSDOT's Southwest Region, putting it in the context of previous presentations on the extraordinary growth of the Vancouver and Clark County region. She highlighted that six of the seven state-owned border bridges are in the Southwest Region, and that population growth has put a lot of pressure on the I-5 and I-205 bridges. Over 300,000 vehicles cross both bridges daily, versus the 182,000 vehicles that cross the I-90 and State Route 520 bridges in Puget Sound. The region continues to face workforce challenges with retirements exceeding new hires, and it also struggles to keep up with aging infrastructure, equipment and facilities, a reality with the state spending 40 percent of what is needed to keep roads and infrastructure in good repair.

Scott Langer talked about the success of adaptive ramp metering when it comes to traffic management, allowing the most traffic throughput during peak hours. Active Traffic Management, Lane Control, and a Video Messaging System help drivers navigate hazards and has led to a reduction in crashes and increased throughput on busy roads.

Ms. Francis gave an overview of the 2023 summer construction season, which included concrete panel replacement and joint rehabilitation, ramp meter installation, the construction of auxiliary lanes, bridge repairs and emergency repair work following a debris slide on SR 504 leading to the Johnston Ridge Observatory.

**Presentation:** [Southwest Region Overview](#)

For more detail on agenda item 8, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 03:05:16, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None.

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

## **Agenda Item 9: Public Comment**

**Dave Rowe, Battle Ground** — California has proven that more highways do not reduce congestion. The Interstate Bridge Replacement program will add more cars to Southwest Washington. There are three rail corridors in Southwest Washington, and those assets could be upgraded to improve rail freight movement and add passengers, reducing the number of vehicles traveling on the interstate as well as greenhouse gas emissions. Mr. Rowe said the state does not need to build more freeways in Clark County.

**John Ley, Hazel Dell** — Urged a pause on the Interstate Bridge Replacement program due to cost, a lack of congestion reduction, and the height of the bridge in relation to marine vessels. Mr. Ley said the option of building an immersed tube tunnel underneath the Columbia River was dismissed by the IBR program based on incorrect data. He said projections for the number of transit riders on light rail over the bridge are inaccurate.

**Bob Ortblad, Seattle** — Says an above-water bridge to replace the current Interstate Bridge has dangerous design elements and advocated an immersed tube tunnel as a safer option. Mr. Ortblad challenged the Interstate Bridge Replacement program's proposed design, and he said the dismissal of an immersed tube tunnel was based on faulty calculations for dredging. He would like a new evaluation for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Study (EIS) and said the money invested so far on pursuing the replacement bridge is being spent on the wrong solution.

**Presentation:** There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 9, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 03:25:55, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None.

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

## **Agenda Item 10: Commission Business**

Commissioners shared the following reflections and recommendations from the meeting:

- It was good to hear from Cowlitz Indian Tribe representatives about the work they hope to do to expand the EV charging network in the state and the success of the \$40 million interchange that was a partnership between the tribe and the state. The Commission looks forward to more conversation with the tribe on future tolling.
- As we continue to hear reports of traffic accidents and safety issues, it is hoped that traffic cameras in work zones and other measures will be implemented, and that we can get an update on that effort.
- Fundamental changes to the transportation system are in store, and it's important for leaders to collaborate across state lines and have tough conversations that lead to solving problems. The example of Clark County leaders working across state lines is encouraging. Residents don't see borders when they travel.

- After seeing the Interstate Bridge up close, it's obvious that it needs to be replaced and that we're moving in the right direction in doing that. Our role will be to see how it comes to fruition and to collaborate with Oregon on the tolling aspects of the new bridge.
- The takeaway from the Tri-State Meeting with the Washington, California and Oregon commissions and this local meeting is that there are a lot of transportation challenges, but we're seeing those challenges turned into opportunities.

**Presentation:** There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 11, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 03:36:16, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

**Action:** None.

**Follow-Up:** None at this time.

**Chair Young adjourned the meeting at 5 p.m.**

The next meeting will be a hybrid in-person virtual meeting in Olympia on Oct. 17-18, 2023.