



Washington State Transportation Commission

Cheney Meeting Summary

June 26 & 27, 2024

June 26, 2024

Chair Debbie Young opened the meeting at 1 p.m. with introductions by Commission members and staff, an overview of the agenda, and meeting protocols.

Agenda Item 2:

Local Welcome

Presenter:

- Chris Grover, Mayor, City of Cheney

Mayor Grover gave an overview of the City of Cheney, its population, and its revenue base. Unique transportation challenges for the city include the presence of Eastern Washington University, a K-12 school district that covers more square miles than any other in the state, and a high number of residents who commute outside of the city for work. The city's elected officials and staff collaborate on transportation issues with other West Plains communities and are engaged in the Spokane Transit Authority Board, Spokane Regional Transportation Council, and the Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board.

Presentation: [Mayor's Welcome](#)

For more detail on agenda item 2, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:04:34, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 3:

Transportation Update

Presenters:

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

The Washington State Transportation Commission staff provided an overview of the state transportation system, funding structure, and key Commission roles.

Presentation: [Transportation Update](#)

For more detail on agenda item 3, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:12:41, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 4:

Regional Transportation: The Big Picture

Presenter:

- Lois Bollenback, Executive Director, Spokane Regional Transportation Council

Spokane County and the West Plains communities serve as a “gateway” to the inland Northwest, and many of the transportation needs and challenges stem from the region’s service to the larger area. Cheney and the West Plains are strategically located for manufacturing and freight activities, with rail, interstate highway and aviation access. The region is poised for both residential and economic growth in the next 30 years, and demand for transportation is going to increase. SRTC is undertaking research and studies and engaging in various forms of community engagement to provide resources and prompt conversations to help form solutions to regional transportation challenges. The top priorities for SRTC in 2024 are safety, preservation and maintenance, and education on the need for more funding from the state for transportation planning organizations.

Presentation: [Spokane Regional Transportation Council](#)

For more detail on agenda item 4, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:41:16, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 5:

Cities of the West Plains: Transportation Challenges and Successes

Presenters:

- Mark Schuller, City Administrator, City of Cheney
- Bill White, Consulting Engineer, Ardurra, Airway Heights
- Sonny Weathers, City Administrator, Medical Lake

Panelists shared the transportation issues unique to cities of the West Plains. In Cheney, a 4 percent voter-approved tax paid by residents on electrical and natural gas services provides a crucial source of funding to repair and maintain city streets, with that funding stretched as the cost of preservation outpaces revenues. The city works to address

vulnerabilities linked to the limited number of routes into the city, demonstrated during the 2023 Gray Fire. At-grade railroad crossings on major routes compound challenges.

Airway Heights, one of the fastest-growing cities in Eastern Washington, is split by two regional corridors: Highway 2 and Hayford Road, which struggle with levels of service, capacity and safety issues. Work is underway to create a broader network outside the two corridors through multimodal and complete streets routes, alternate routes for freight, emergency services, and more.

Medical Lake has secured \$5 million of transportation investments in 2023-2025 through the Transportation Improvement Board and Spokane Regional Transportation Council grants. The city has undertaken the reconstruction of major roadways to accommodate active transportation but notes that doing such projects with a small staff and no manual guiding design standards for small city roads is a challenge.

Presentations: [City of Cheney](#)
[City of Airway Heights](#)
[City of Medical Lake](#)

For more detail on agenda item 5, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:23:42, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 6: The Future of Regional Transit

Presenter:

- Karl Otterstrom, Chief Planning and Development Officer, Spokane Transit Authority

Karl Otterstrom gave an overview of the Spokane Transit Authority and the vision realized since the transit authority adopted the “STA Moving Forward” strategic plan in 2014. Key to West Plains riders was the opening of STA’s first new transit center in over 20 years, the West Plains Transit Center, which allowed riders to connect to other West Plains communities without requiring a transfer to downtown Spokane. In 2022, STA completed Eagle Station, which connects Eastern Washington University to Spokane. STA launched City Line in 2023, Eastern Washington’s first bus rapid transit line. Today, the transit authority has the most robust network in the region’s history, is working to improve regional connectivity along Interstate 90, and is transitioning its fleet to zero-emission buses. In the West Plains, it’s working to expand its reach and transit frequency in Airway Heights and will introduce double-decker buses in Cheney in 2025. STA is now looking to its next strategic plan, “Connect 2035.”

Presentation: [Spokane Transit Authority](#)

For more detail on agenda item 6, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:32:49, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 7: Spokane County Transportation Needs

Presenters:

- Kyle Twohig, Director, Public Works, Spokane County
- Matt Zarecor, County Engineer, Spokane County

Spokane County is responsible for 55 percent of the county's lane miles, and the reduction in buying power as labor and fuel costs rise faster than revenue is a challenge. The county works to save costs by using its own crews instead of contractors when possible, which increases efficiency and decreases the time of delivery for projects. It has developed an innovative partnership with the small cities within the county to perform work funded by state preservation grants through the Transportation Improvement Board. The county uses county crews at a fraction of the cost of using contractors. Spokane County has a \$425 million backlog in preservation projects, and an additional \$21 million per year is needed to keep its road network in good condition. Hundreds of short span bridges are in the county's portfolio, which require local funds for repair and replacement.

Presentation: [Spokane County](#)

For more detail on agenda item 7, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 03:04:08, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Chair Debbie Young reminded the Commission that the meeting will continue Thursday, June 27, 2024, and recessed the meeting.

DAY 2: June 27, 2024

Chair Debbie Young opened the meeting at 9 a.m. with introductions by commission members and staff, an overview of the agenda, and meeting protocols.

Agenda Item 9: Commission Business

- May Meeting Summary
- Tolling Streamlining Study
- September 2024 meeting plans

Presenters:

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

Aaron Halbert gave an overview of the Commission's Tolling Streamlining Study, due to the Legislature on July 31, 2024. The study resulted in two possible approaches to present to the Legislature in the final report:

- (Option A) Implementing changes to the toll-rate setting process within the existing Administrative Procedures Act (APA).
- (Option B) Creating a new toll-rate setting process outside of the APA structure.

Commissioners discussed the options to include in the final report to the Legislature.

Reema Griffith discussed a proposal for the September 2024 meeting following the cancellation of the Tri-State Meeting in California.

Presentation: [Toll Rate Setting Process Streamlining Study](#)

For more detail on agenda item 9, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:02:33, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: Commissioners approved the May meeting summary for posting and distribution.

Commissioner Shiv Batra moved to make Option B the Commission's preferred option in the Tolling Streamlining Study report, with Option A as an alternate option, and to delegate approval of the final report to the chair and the vice-chair; Commissioner Roy Jennings seconded the motion. The motion passed 6-0, with Commissioner Nicole Grant excused.

Commissioner Jennings moved to approve a virtual meeting on Sept. 11, 2024, for a Washington/Oregon/California Commission Work Session from 9 to 11 a.m. and regular Commission meeting from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Vice-Chair Jim Restucci seconded the motion. The motion passed 6-0, with Commissioner Grant excused.

Follow-Up: The Chair and Vice-Chair will approve the final report.

Agenda Item 10:

Spokane and Kalispel Tribal Transportation Challenges and Successes

Presenters:

- James Best, Acting Planning and Economic Director, Spokane Tribe of Indians
- Cecilia Evans, Senior Planner, Spokane Tribe of Indians
- Margo Hill, Associate Professor, Eastern Washington University and Board Member, Northwest Tribal Transportation Program
- Brandon Haugen, Executive Director of Real Estate, Kalispel Development Company

Transportation projects in progress and on the drawing board for the Spokane Tribe include frontage roads and roundabouts to tribal casino properties that are necessary to improve safety and meet traffic demands that come with tribal economic development. Smaller rural tribes have difficulty securing the same federal funding for on-reservation projects that larger tribes and municipalities do. The tribe is encouraging equity as it works with state and federal partners to secure funds for crucial safety projects.

Margo Hill discussed her research focusing on tribal transportation issues and shared the challenges rural tribes face in improving safety. Jurisdictional issues and the challenging landscape of reservations are two key issues. Training partnerships have been formed with personnel from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) that work at rest areas as part of an initiative to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

The Kalispel Tribe shared the long-term economic development vision for its properties in Airway Heights, which includes housing, manufacturing, retail and entertainment, and the transportation projects associated with it. The goal of the projects is economic diversification and building a land and tax base that allows for greater self-sufficiency.

Presentations: [Spokane Tribe of Indians](#)

[Kalispel Tribe Economic Impact](#)

For more detail on agenda item 10, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:38:04, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 11:

Economic Development in Cheney and Spokane Presenter:

- Chris Pengra, Executive Director, S3R3 – West Plains

The West Plains region is uniquely positioned to attract new industrial and manufacturing businesses thanks to the availability and affordability of land, wage levels, and the strength of the labor force. The Spokane International Airport and its new truck-rail transload facility along with I-90 are prized regional assets that together allow a business to move freight anywhere in the world conveniently and economically. The American Aerospace Materials Tech Hub brings exciting collaboration among the area's universities and colleges. Collaboration is ongoing among regional stakeholders on planning and

infrastructure investments to support commercial growth plans, particularly for the Highway 2 area.

Presentation: [Economic Development on the West Plains](#)

For more detail on agenda item 11, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:20:29, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 12: Regional Airport Growth and Development

Presenters:

- Lisa Corcoran, Director, Planning and Development Department, Spokane International Airport
- Colin Hayden, Project Manager, Spokane International Airport
- Jeffrey Johnson, Deputy Director for Installation Support, 92nd Mission Support Group, Fairchild Air Force Base

Spokane International Airport recorded its busiest year for passengers in 2023 and the third-highest cargo tonnage on record. The first phase of terminal expansion was recently completed, and expansions of ramps, operations facilities, and parking facilities are also ongoing. Commercial development, particularly in aerospace manufacturing and other light industrial, is growing around the airport, and it's working to accommodate the needs of logistics-based businesses through a rail-truck transload facility, with the first phase completed in 2023. The facility improves freight capacity and reduces truck congestion on I-90. A \$22.8 million federal RAISE grant was awarded in 2023 for the Spotted Road Realignment and Airport Drive interchange to improve safety.

Development has grown significantly around Fairchild Air Force Base, the largest tanker base in the world. As a result, Highways 2 and 902 – the main access points to the base – have seen increasing congestion, making it difficult for personnel to quickly access the base and delaying emergency response. Base officials are working with local, regional, and federal partners to improve the roads feeding the base and take other actions to reduce commuter traffic on Highway 2.

Presentations: [Spokane International Airport](#)
[Fairchild Air Force Base](#)

For more detail on agenda item 12, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:52:31, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 13: **Eastern Washington University Transportation Safety and Needs**

Presenter:

- Mary Voves, Vice President for Business & Finance, Eastern Washington University

Priorities for Eastern Washington University include decarbonization, focusing growth on density vs. expansion, and broadening its partnership with the Spokane Transit Authority. While enrollment has grown overall through online programs and satellite campuses, a smaller number of students live on campus post-pandemic. The university is striving to make its campuses walkable and transit-accessible, with free bus passes offered to all employees and students.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 13, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:31:15, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 14: **Washington State Department of Transportation Regional Overview**

Presenter:

- Mike Frucci, Regional Administrator, Eastern Region, Washington State Department of Transportation

An overview of the Palouse River Coulee City (PCC) Rail System was shared. The short-line railroad is owned by WSDOT and leased to railroad operators who provide freight services. It serves five counties and is part of the supply chain delivering Eastern Washington grain to domestic and international markets. The Eastern Region continues to be engaged in efforts to reduce congestion in the face of intense development along Highway 2 through the West Plains Subarea Transportation Plan. Traffic operations along I-90, including ramp meters, help manage congestion and reduce collisions. Of the 3,700 lane miles Eastern Region manages, about 2,335 are due or far past due for work to keep the pavement in a state of good repair. Progress on the North Spokane Corridor continues, with construction on schedule for final completion in 2030.

Presentation: [WSDOT Regional Overview](#)

For more detail on agenda item 14, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 02:38:20, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 15: **Public Comment**

No public comment was provided.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 15, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 03:32:12, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 16: Commission Business

Commissioners shared the following reflections and recommendations from the meeting:

- There is an impressive amount of collaboration going on among all the jurisdictions and private partners to solve the transportation challenges the West Plains communities face.
- City and regional leaders are upbeat about growth and development and seem ready to face the accompanying challenges.
- The strength and size of the area's workforce are impressive.
- The Spokane Transit Authority is doing a great job of improving transit throughout the region.
- Seeing the current plans for expansion at the Spokane International Airport executed is exciting, as is seeing what's on tap for the years ahead.
- Fairchild Air Force Base faces a big challenge as the area surrounding it develops, and it's engaging with local, regional and federal partners to find solutions.
- It's nice to see the work the Spokane Regional Transportation Council is doing for its members.
- Learning more about The Kalispel and Spokane tribes' plans for economic development was educational, as well learning about tribal transportation needs.
- It was great to hear about all the different angles of work going on at Eastern Region of WSDOT.
- One of the notable quotes from the meeting (Lois Bollenback) was "We don't have enough money to make bad decisions." All the governments and agencies that shared at the meeting are making the most of the resources they have through planning, collaboration, strategic thinking and action.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 16, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 03:32:45, 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 12:45 p.m.

The next meeting will be held a virtual final hearing on State Route 520 Bridge toll rates on July 10, 2024.