

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Steering Committee Meeting Summary

October 20, 2011

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/10-20-11scp.pdf>

Meeting Location

The meeting was held at the Whatcom Council of Governments office in Bellingham, Washington.

Meeting Attendance

B.C. Ministry of Transportation (Simon Leung, John Schnablegger, Abid Sivic); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Greg Kolesniak*); **Better Borders Northwest** (Roger Bull); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Dan Desai, Tammy Rathgeber); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **City of Sumas, WA** (Rod Fadden); **City of Surrey, B.C.** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **SmartRail Inc.** (Kenneth Jones); **U.S. Border Patrol** (John Bates); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Lynn Gardner, Patricia Hinchey*, Michael Shekot*); **U.S. Federal Highway Administration** (Sid Stecker); **Unaffiliated** (Jay Brandt); **Washington State Department of Licensing** (Doron Maniece); **Washington State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Miller, Gordon Rogers)

* Joined by telephone

Current event updates

Melissa Miller informed the group that Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) is working with the developers of the Border Data Warehouse archive, U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP), and those agencies that participate in the binational Border Wait Time working group (Transport Canada, U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), CBP, and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)) to discuss ways to incorporate booth status data into the regional advanced traveler information systems (ATIS) to improve accuracy.

John Bates noted his more frequent attendance over the last several months and communicated his sense that IMTC is an effective forum for communication and that when U.S. Border Patrol has projects relevant to this group he hopes to share them.

Lynn Gardner reported that the U.S. Pacific Highway port-of-entry commercial booth 1 re-opened at 9:00am on Monday. This should reduce delay back to normal. During construction of the high-low booth at the port, commercial wait times regularly exceeded two hours.

John Schnablegger announced that B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT) recently allocated \$5 million allocation to improve border infrastructure. The funds must be spent by March 31, 2012. Projects under this work include an expanded ATIS system which will provide total travel time to the border from various locations around the Lower Mainland. The regional model logic will need to be completed for this. They will also be enhancing the existing ATIS system, and adding additional westbound signage for travellers from Alberta. Other ATIS Improvements include systems on the South Fraser Perimeter road and from the ferry terminal, also the Alex Fraser Bridge vs. the tunnel. to the approach at Lynden/Aldergrove, the new FAST lane at Pacific Highway, and the Sumas NEXUS lane are also included.

Abid Sivic added that the expanded ATIS system will also include NEXUS lane wait times.

Simon Leung added that the trip logic for the regional traffic data system model is at least six months away.

John Schnablegger reported that both the cities of Surrey and Abbotsford are interested in improved interchanges with 16th Avenue (which becomes 8th in Abbotsford). BCMOT is beginning work on that project.

John Schnablegger discussed the weigh-to-go program for trucks. He noted that there is a high rate of non-compliant trucks in the region (30-40 percent) and the project is working on this issue.

John Schnablegger noted that many of the concerns that are expected to be raised by the Beyond the Border plan may require a long-term look at future border planning.

Rod Fadden announced that the City of Sumas is now officially a golf cart zone. Golf carts are licensed to be used on city streets. This is to assist those who cross the border on foot and need to get around town for mail and other smaller tasks.

Dan Desai suggested having a meeting between CBSA, CBP, and the City to discuss possible safety concerns regarding the golf cart users.

Michael Shekot clarified that they would most likely be staged at the border, not crossing it, and owned by shipping companies.

Michael Shekot noted that Sumas saw an increase in cargo numbers last month due to the construction on the first booth at Pacific Highway, but they were able to handle the additional volume. They are working to prepare the facility for a NEXUS lane by next Easter.

Todd Carlson informed the group that WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is working on a letter to the Beyond the Border working group to discuss objectives outlined as part of the Premier/Governor Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC). B.C. has already submitted a letter. They are unsure if their letter will be received in time prior to the announcement of the work plan.

Todd Carlson mentioned that truck parking in Sumas is still an issue of concern. Some trucks park because paperwork is not completed.

Greg Kolesniak clarified that CBSA proposed to release goods at the first port of arrival, thereby doing away with in-bond shipments. Since that time the Canadian Trucking Alliance has gotten involved to discuss implications of what impact that might have on communities south of the border.

Kevin Cook commented on the Beyond the Border discussion, noting that the government of Canada has had an open comment period. Meetings with B.C. and Alberta provincial representatives occurred in July.

Kevin Cook reported that the Canadian Consulate worked with CBSA and CBP to provide a border security tour to seventeen state legislators and government officials. Topics discussed with the group included IMTC, Amtrak Cascades, the Cascadia Center, ATIS, and other regional initiatives. A meeting of state government representatives will be held this week in Bellevue and he has once again been asked to help organize a border tour.

Jim Kohnke told the group that former Presidents Bush and Clinton are at the Surrey Economic Summit today.

Tammy Rathgeber announced that Kim Scoville has been promoted to regional Executive Director and will be moving to the downtown Vancouver office. He will share his transition plan with IMTC.

Tammy Rathgeber reported that improvements to the Pacific Highway and Huntingdon facilities are on schedule and due to complete by March 31, 2012. They are also looking at adding four additional booths to the Pacific Highway port-of-entry. In spring, 2012 (on the lawn area west of the current building).

Hugh Conroy informed the group that a binational cross-border rail session is being organized under the Transportation Border Working Group (TBWG) and plans to meet next month in Niagara as part of the TBWG meeting. It is getting attention at the Transport Canada ministry level and from U.S. Federal Railroad Administration. Their focus includes pre-clearance, as well as U.S. investments into a new Detroit-Toronto rail corridor.

John Schnablegger asked about Amtrak cutbacks. Todd Carlson responded that if the federal government slashes funding to Amtrak then the Amtrak Cascades service would cease.

Hugh Conroy told the Steering Committee that Terry Schulze at CBP informed him striping at Peace Arch should take place in November.

Mira Petrovic reported that there have been complaints from business owners along B.C. Highway 15 due to the long commercial backups and the fact that trucks are not respecting the cross-hatched "Do not block" section and trapping patrons in the stores' parking lots. John Schnablegger responded that the City of Surrey's RCMP has enforcement power over that section and can issue tickets. In addition B.C. weigh station inspection area will also keep an eye on the problem and issue warnings. However this may be moot since the booth under construction at Pacific Highway is now completed and queues should be shorter.

Lynn Gardner added the only time commercial lineups should again go as far back as 8th Avenue would be if a truck breaks down at the border.

Sumas/Abbotsford-Huntingdon NEXUS planning

Hugh Conroy reviewed a discussion held via conference call on October 3 between participating stakeholders to develop an estimate of agency timelines. The goal is to have NEXUS lanes open in both directions by Easter 2012, although an exact date is requested by CBSA. Currently they are aiming for March 8, a full month prior to Easter, but this is dependent on WSDOT's schedule.

The group reviewed the timeline.

Todd Carlson noted that WSDOT has two major issues, trimming the parking and building a sign bridge for the project. Since they have design standards for both projects they have to go through several steps to accomplish this.

Hugh Conroy reported that funding for the project is also linked to a variable message sign project that will re-route trucks when passenger vehicle queues at the border block their access to the truck route. The benefit is that this funding can be used for the NEXUS project but additional requirements exist for using federal money in construction and will take more time.

John Schnablegger informed the group that for the southbound lane, BCMOT hopes to have the design and contract ready to go mid-November and will construct based on weather. There is some work on the U.S. side of the border so a U.S. contractor will need to be hired for that work.

Dan Desai expressed concern about marketing the program in January. That would be too late given how long it takes for people to be processed and approved to use the lane. The commitment date is needed to market the program at least 90 days prior to opening the lane.

John Schnablegger suggested that BCMOT could put up signs as part of the construction stating "NEXUS lane coming Spring 2012" to help advertise the program.

Kevin Cook asked if the NEXUS enrollment center in Blaine was moving. Lynn Gardner replied that it would be moving to the new CBP-rented facility at the old Blaine airport. More details will follow.

Kevin Cook asked if iris scanning would be possible at the Blaine enrollment center. Tammy Rathgeber confirmed that the iris scanning only takes place at the Vancouver airport enrollment center.

Douglas and Pacific Highway northbound NEXUS traffic management

Todd Carlson provided slides showing suggested improvements to improve traffic flow in the northbound NEXUS lanes on I-5 at Peace Arch and on State Route 543 at Pacific Highway.

At Peace Arch, options being evaluated to keep the NEXUS lane clear include blocking out a clear zone where D Street's on-ramp meets the queue. Blaine police are willing to help patrol the area and issue tickets for traffic offenders. A longer term solution would involve a lighting system similar to ramp metering that would control the flow of traffic from the ramp and the highway. However that requires additional funding. WSDOT is looking into grant options, especially if an anti-idling system could be incorporated into the project.

John Bates commented that Border Patrol will help as much as possible.

At Pacific Highway improvements would move the NEXUS lane to the west, make the D Street northbound on-ramp NEXUS only, and provide for a bus lane on the east.

Southbound FAST program – truck routing alternatives evaluation and design

Hugh Conroy summarized a meeting held two weeks ago to discuss alternative designs to create a FAST bypass lane on Hwy 15 southbound to allow FAST participants to jump the queue of commercial vehicle at the Pacific Highway port-of-entry. This is different than the original layout, where a FAST lane fed into a specific FAST booth. There will not be a specific FAST booth – all three booths will service all trucks. But the FAST bypass lane would return some benefit to FAST enrollees.

John Schnablegger reviewed the preferred design schematic, which creates an additional lane north of 2nd Avenue on Highway 15 where general commercial trucks may be held back with a light to allow FAST trucks access to turn behind the Duty Free into their own lane.

Lynn Gardner praised the project, and especially the potential for a re-designed truck parking area to allow for additional truck storage off the highway.

Hugh Conroy added that video feeds would be available to the inspection booths so that CBP could monitor who is using the FAST bypass and check for compliance.

John Schnablegger informed the group that the project needs to be completed by March 31. It is less complex than the Sumas project. They hope to have it completed early next year. \$1 million has been allocated to the project.

Greg Kolesniak thanked the group for moving the concept forward, and expressed gratitude for those in the FAST program.

Lynn Gardner said he would hold a carrier meeting in the near future to discuss the project.

Improving passenger vehicle lane-booth distribution at southbound Pacific Highway

Hugh Conroy shared a presentation showing a discrepancy between wait times of passenger vehicles in the two southbound approach lanes to the Pacific Highway port-of-entry. The east lane is typically

served by one booth, while vehicles in the west lane have access to two or more booths. Because the ATIS system averages wait times, this results in an estimated wait time that is often different than the time experienced by individual travelers – under-estimating for those in the east lane, and over-estimating for those in the west.

To address this issue, he suggested improving lane delineation to more equitably split available primary booths amongst all lanes of traffic. One option may be using movable barriers or candlesticks which inspection officers could position as needed to feed the appropriate booths.

John Schnablegger suggested this may be another location where a lighted solution could assist in delegating traffic. If a light held all traffic back before the decision point and allowed cars to fill wherever there was a free booth it would resolve the issue.

Lynn Gardner said he would speak about the issue with GSA.

John Schnablegger suggested that if there is any funding left over from the FAST lane bypass project they may be able to assist in a solution.

Hugh Conroy said he would follow up on the issue with Marc Rowley and Terry Schulze at CBP.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 11:45 am.