

# International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

## Steering Committee Meeting Summary

February 17, 2011

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/2-17-11scp.pdf>

### Meeting Location

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The meeting was held at the Canadian Douglas Port-of-Entry in Surrey, British Columbia.

### Meeting Attendance

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**B.C. Ministry of Tourism, Trade & Investment** (Colleen McCormick, Angela Xiu); **B.C. Ministry of Transportation** (John Schnablegger, Abid Sivic); **Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce** (Ken Oplinger); **Better Borders Northwest** (Roger Bull); **Border Policy Research Institute, WWU** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Dan Desai, John Linde, Kim Scoville); **Cascadia Center** (Bruce Agnew); **City of Blaine, WA** (Bill Bullock); **City of Surrey, BC** (Mary Ann Smith); **City of White Rock, BC** (Peggy Clark, Grant Meyer); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **Township of Langley, B.C.** (Richard Welfing); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Christopher Fancher); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Greg Alvarez, Lynn Gardner, Terry Schulze, Michael Shekot); **U.S. Federal Highway Administration** (Sid Stecker); **U.S. General Services Administration** (Wayton Lim); **U.S. Representative Rick Larsen** (Rafeeka Gafoor); **U.S. Senator Patty Murray** (Uriel Ybarra); **Washington State Department of Transportation** (Elizabeth Sjostrom, Andrew Wood); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Melissa Miller, Gordon Rogers)

### Current event updates

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Gordon Rogers reminded the group that Hugh Conroy is away until June.

David Davidson announced that the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) and Western Washington University (WWU) has a new Border Policy Brief titled "Cross-Border Freight Flows at the Two Land Borders." It and previous publications are available on their website: [www.wwu.edu/bpri](http://www.wwu.edu/bpri). He noted that they have also updated the border atlases.

David Davidson informed the group that the Center for Canadian-American Studies at WWU will be hosting its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary party April 28 and 29 with a conference and dinner. More information is on their website: <http://www.wwu.edu/canam/40thHome.shtml>

Abid Sivic reported that construction continues on B.C. Highways 13 and 11 to install the new southbound advanced traveler information system (ATIS) which will report border delay at the Lynden and Sumas ports-of-entry. The electrical will not be completed by the end of March but otherwise the project is progressing well.

Dan Desai from Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) introduced himself to the group and will be working on efforts to bring a northbound NEXUS lane to the Huntingdon/Sumas crossing.

Grant Meyer reported that the City of White Rock has developed a Terms of Reference for an Amtrak Task Force, which will look at ways to develop an Amtrak stop in the city. A meeting of the Task Force will be held soon.

Ken Oplinger mentioned the withdrawal of the \$5.50 fee waiver for Canadian citizens entering the United States. This will affect Canadians entering the United States by air and sea, not land. He recommended a good article about the issue on the blog [The Bilateralist](http://www.bilateralist.com/2011/02/16/obama-proposes-travel-fee-canada-2/): <http://www.bilateralist.com/2011/02/16/obama-proposes-travel-fee-canada-2/>

Ken Oplinger commented that he has been called to testify at a hearing in Olympia regarding the HST-related WA State sales tax issue.

Wayton Lim announced that construction on the Peace Arch facility is complete. A dedication ceremony will be held March 23 at 10:30am.

John Linde reported that the bids for the construction of the Pacific Highway Examination Warehouse are under review and the contract award is expected shortly. Project completion is still expected for Winter 2011.

John Linde also reported that the bids for the Abbotsford-Huntingdon Commercial Expansion project are also being reviewed, with contract award expected soon. Project completion is expected for Winter 2011.

Bill Bullock told the committee that the City of Blaine is looking into developing a commuter rail stop in the city. The concept is in its infancy and will be further explored in an upcoming commuter rail study and discussed with stakeholders.

Bill Bullock said that funding is left from the Exit 274 Interchange Justification Report (IJR) project, and they are looking to use those funds to start wetlands mitigation for any future interchange development. They need to develop an idea of how much environmental assessment will be required for the future project.

Bill Bullock said that Blaine is coordinating with U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP), WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG), and other agencies to improve pedestrian and bicyclist signage through the Peace Arch park. There are some challenges to the new layout of the pedestrian system. Efforts are underway to extend a sidewalk from the new Canadian facility down past the arch field to connect to the new U.S. facility. However wayfinding and signage for routing pedestrians are still needed. An ongoing effort is looking into the issue.

Bill Bullock reported that Blaine has advertised its Marine Drive Gateway project and will develop the area on its turn-of-the-century standards.

Terry Schulze introduced himself as James Rector's replacement. He has worked in the Blaine district before and comes from the Seattle office.

Sid Stecker noted the new proposed budget, sections of which are included in the meeting packet (see packet). U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) continues to operate under a continuing resolution.

Sid Stecker mentioned that Washington is a leading state in the State Smart Transportation Initiative which helps states identify better ways to deal with operations and sustainability.

Kim Scoville announced that CBSA's Regional Director General Blake Delgaty is retiring.

Andrew Wood summarized a meeting held January 27 at the U.S. Consul General's house in Vancouver, B.C. on cross-border rail issues. Meeting attendees included CBP, CBSA, and Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) and discussed preclearance for the southbound train, and how to mitigate CBSA's costs for long-term operation of the second and future Amtrak train inspections. A Member of Parliament (MP) is needed to champion the issue to move expanding the Canadian air pre-clearance act to rail.

Andrew Wood warned that \$1.3 million is needed to pay for CBSA's inspection costs after October 31 to continue the second train. A CBSA rail service review is underway. WSDOT's rail office hopes to determine from this review what passenger numbers are needed to cover the cost.

Bruce Agnew summarized a regional rail study Cascadia Center is leading to look at challenges and opportunities for expanding freight and passenger rail along the corridor.

Jim Kohnke announced that a coalition of B.C. Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade are planning a transportation summit. More details will be discussed later.

Gordon Rogers reviewed President Obama's request for FHWA funding as proposed in the U.S. Department of Transportation's Surface Transportation Reauthorization proposal. The \$70.5 billion request for FY 2012 includes an "Up=Front" \$50 Billion Economic Boost, in which is \$2.2 billion for "significant improvements at land ports of entry facilities, which link directly to the transportation infrastructure at border crossing locations" (see packet).

Melissa Miller briefly reviewed the full 2010 traffic volume data (see packet). Passenger vehicle volumes through the Cascade Gateway are now up to year 2000 volumes, and commercial vehicle volumes have increased over last year. A full review of the data will be at a subsequent IMTC meeting.

## **Project updates**

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### **Border Data Warehouse Upgrade & Border Information Flow Architecture (BIFA) Integration**

Melissa Miller reported that IBI Group has developed an initial test website for the new online archive. The beta site will be reviewed by the advisory team in the next two weeks. The project is still underway to be completed by the end of March.

Work to incorporate additional data sets into the archive is also underway. Discussions have been held with U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics regarding data sharing. Initial discussions have also been held with B.C. and WA State weigh-in-motion detector managing agencies to determine what kind of data can be collected and stored from these systems.

Melissa Miller informed the group that a draft project architecture has been developed and is under review by architecture experts. Once comments are returned changes will be incorporated and the draft will be distributed to the project team for feedback.

### **NEXUS marketing**

Elizabeth Sjostrom informed the group that this is a topic of interest for the B.C. Premier/ WA Governor's group. However before additional efforts are made to promote the program some discussions between WSDOT and B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT) have raised the issue of how current NEXUS volumes are being processed and make sure the current number of participants using the lane can be accommodated without delay before marketing to others. One question is whether or not two NEXUS lanes can be opened to mitigate delays in the NEXUS lane.

Greg Alvarez replied that CBP already opens a second NEXUS lane once lines are longer than fifteen minutes. Sometimes there is no queue in the general lanes but when officers wave over NEXUS cars to be processed there they refuse, staying in the lineup instead.

Greg Alvarez cautioned that a NEXUS second lane cannot open immediately – officers have to log off as a general purpose lane and log back on as NEXUS, but that once a lineup occurs they can begin the process.

Kim Scoville asked if this truly is a big concern. He suspects that these queues in NEXUS do occur but not frequently enough to make major changes to worry about them. For the most part the lane has little to no queue.

John Schnablegger commented that the lane itself is the best marketing tool when it is free-flowing and other cars are stuck in the line. However right now there is the opposite effect, with long lines in NEXUS and the rest of the cars moving faster.

Ken Oplinger noted that once again there is the issue of cars trying to use the northbound NEXUS lane from the Blaine on-ramp find their access blocked by non-NEXUS cars. He wondered if the candlesticks separating the NEXUS lane could be extended.

Abid Sivic replied that the candlesticks extend to the U.S. border. Extending them further would require WSDOT to extend them further.

John Schnablegger suggested that another easy way to market NEXUS is on the variable message signs (VMS), where if it were to list the general lane wait times and "NEXUS: > 5 Minutes" it would illustrate the time savings.

Abid Sivic replied the sign doesn't currently report NEXUS waits but it could.

Greg Alvarez reported that over the last few Saturdays he monitored the two lane NEXUS scenario. He added that if he can run all ten booths waits are dramatically reduced, but staffing has been reduced and this has become an issue.

Kim Scoville commented that CBSA had committed to having one NEXUS lane open. There has not been a need for more, because the only time there are volume issues is during events-related surges.

### **Southbound FAST lane pilot study**

Lynn Gardner summarized the reasoning behind studying the effects of opening the currently-designated Free and Secure Trade Program (FAST) lane to all traffic as a way to expedite truck processing for the entire system. The pilot test will last thirty days, and will compare truck, bus, and NEXUS delays with a baseline data collection starting next week.

David Davidson described work to date in training the survey crew and establishing the baseline. Modeling will also be part of the project. BCMOT and WSDOT are jointly doing the road changes and signage alterations needed for the duration of the pilot.

Lynn Gardner noted the cooperation of all the various participating agencies in facilitating this study.

Lynn Gardner reminded the group that CBP is not getting rid of the FAST program. All of the program benefits are still there in terms of expedited processing once the goods arrive at the crossing. The only change will be the lane itself.

Greg Alvarez added that several land ports-of-entry are FAST ports but few have a designated lane.

CBP will be hosting a briefing with industry tomorrow. They have already met with numerous carriers and most have responded to the idea positively.

### **CBSA's Aldergrove study update**

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John Linde reported that CBSA has hired a consultant to create the site plan for replacing the existing Aldergrove port-of-entry facility. They have already met with the Province and the Township of Langley to discuss Highway 13 and issues with 0 Avenue. Meetings with WSDOT, U.S. General Services Administration, and CBP will be held in March and April. CBSA is seeking to use a template port design and deliver the project through a controlled design build approach. They plan to wrap up planning this spring and continue moving forward as quickly as possible.

Jim Kohnke asked about whether a commercial component is being considered in the plan. John Linde replied that at this point the plans are based on replacing the current infrastructure, which is a travelers facility. However, the intention in planning the site is to provide as much flexibility as possible, within the constraints, for any future development.

Kim Scoville added that agencies and organizations interested in seeing that position altered need to work with their representatives, as CBSA only has the ability to replace the existing facility at present.

Kim Scoville commented that an analysis of the commercial traffic through the port shows that 84 percent of the clients who used the port prior to the permit-only process continue to use the port. Only 16 percent of the carrier companies using the port prior are no longer using the port, and they were destined for locations outside the local communities. Many of them were headed straight through the community to Trans-Canada Highway 1, where they were headed to the railhead and to warehouses in Vancouver. A smaller percent were destined to Highway 1 and then east. This 16 percent of truck traffic that was not destined to, nor servicing local communities represented 70 percent of the overall business prior to permit status. CBSA has tried to meet the needs of the local community, specifically transportation businesses who resituated their businesses specifically to use that port.

CBSA has not seen a noticeable increase in Border Wait times at Pacific Highway since the permit-only status was initiated last summer. There were some small spikes in border wait times at Abbotsford - Huntingdon.

## **CBP passenger operations updates**

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### **NEXUS Sumas**

Greg Alvarez reported that he is pursuing authorization to pilot a NEXUS lane southbound at the Sumas port-of-entry. A conference call will be held this Tuesday with headquarters and the Seattle office to confirm whether or not this will go forward. If so, the plan would be to start the lane in April or May for a short period of time, and then evaluate the impacts.

Infrastructure-wise, few changes will be needed because an additional primary booth was installed as part of the 2010 Vancouver Olympics volume mitigation strategy. If the pilot is successful and there is enough interest in the program, then they will work with CBSA to establish on-site enrollment. Until then, there may be an opportunity to have a mobile NEXUS enrollment unit at or near the port for processing enrollments.

Greg Alvarez added that once they get the green light to go ahead with the project they will start a media effort thirty days prior, and run the pilot for 60 days.

Melissa Miller asked if there would be a designated NEXUS lane. Mike Shekot replied that lane one is an oversized vehicle lane and goes past the Duty Free, leading into the first booth. If the program is made permanent then some changes to the approach would need to be made.

Mike Shekot noted that there is a signage issue southbound, where one sign in Canada instructs oversized vehicles (RVs) to use the left lane, and then they have to then cross all lanes and go to the other side. A sign change is needed.

Melissa Miller asked for details on the signage issue to be pursued.

Melissa Miller asked about the second commercial lane that approaches the port behind the Duty Free. Mike Shekot replied that although there are officially two commercial lanes on that road they are too narrow, and so trucks travel down the center of them both. Therefore this lane can't be used for NEXUS.

Melissa Miller asked when the southbound border delay system at B.C. Highway 11 will be up and running. Abid Sivic responded that construction should be complete the end of March, but then there will be some time to test the system, so it won't be until the end of April before it is functioning.

Melissa Miller added that once this system is in place, CBP would be able to use the delay system to monitor the overall system wait times prior to and after any NEXUS pilot, although it sounds as though timing won't be appropriate.

Kim Scoville announced that CBSA has been looking at this issue as well and has previously approached headquarters with some of the data collected in the 2009 study which had the NEXUS surveys of passengers at the Sumas/Huntingdon and Lynden/Aldergrove crossings. There is interest but northbound does have some infrastructure challenges to overcome.

Dan Desai developed the CBSA plan for the Olympics and is now working on the Sumas NEXUS lane project and determining what the infrastructure needs are to make this happen.

The current proposal for the northbound NEXUS lane would be to divert NEXUS traffic along Garfield and left onto Boundary, the same diversion that commercial vehicles take off SR 9. It would then lead into the port's sixth primary lane.

Jim Kohnke asked about whether NEXUS at Aldergrove/Lynden has been considered.

Greg Alvarez replied that he has considered a possible Ready Lane for the port, to be detailed in the next section.

David Davidson remarked that the impetus for the survey of potential NEXUS at Sumas came from a discussion at an IMTC meeting like this in early 2009. He noted that with a lot of changes in specialized lanes at the border on its way this summer, it may be good to do another survey of passenger traffic a year out to see how the changes have impacted passenger travel.

## **Ready lanes**

Greg Alvarez described "ready lanes" as lanes that are open for primary processing of travelers carrying any radio frequency identification (RFID)-enhanced document (enhanced drivers license, Passcard, NEXUS, legal permanent resident card, FAST card, etc.).

In October Ready lanes were tested in El Paso and other southern border ports. In November a ready lane pilot started for testing in Detroit.

Greg Alvarez hopes to set up a Ready Lane test next month with the goal of having it open mid-March at Peace Arch southbound. CBP will be meeting with the WA State Department of Licensing to see if this can be incorporated with efforts to promote the EDL program.

It is important to note that this is not a trusted traveler lane. These travelers have not been vetted. However for all those who get rejected from the NEXUS program, or don't apply, this is an opportunity to provide some times savings. RFID-enhanced documents show a 25-30 percent decrease in processing times.

Greg Alvarez is hoping to be able to run up to two NEXUS lanes, and a Ready Lane, in the middle, along with general purpose lanes at Peace Arch this spring. They want to keep the trusted traveler and ready lane further from the secondary inspection area since less cars will be turning in for further examination.

They hope to do local promotion of the ready lane.

Once they see how the ready lane works at Peace Arch, they can consider whether or not such a lane may benefit travelers at the Lynden Port-of-Entry. The idea would be to pilot the program there from

8am – 1pm on weekends, using the new split-level commercial processing booth (commercial volumes are very low on weekends).

David Davidson noted that most EDLs are issued in Washington State, and so the hours of operation of the ready lane at Peace Arch may be opposite to the travel times of those heading south in the afternoons. BC EDL participation is much lower.

Greg Alvarez commented that Detroit saw such interest in the program that the state department of licensing opened an EDL enrollment center at the port-of-entry itself. If WA State is interested in this it may be an option here as well.

David Davidson asked if, like NEXUS, every person in the car has to be RFID-compliant. Greg Alvarez replied that it will be informed compliance. They will want everyone in the car to have the proper documentation but won't be sending those who don't to secondary.

Greg Alvarez noted that when CBP has ten lanes open at Peace Arch they end up overwhelming themselves inside, with 120-130 people waiting in the lobby, almost exclusively for I-94s.

Greg Alvarez mentioned that CBP uses three methods for determining wait times for measuring performance; using a visual landmark with an established average wait time; polling travelers crossing the border; and the BCMOT ATIS system. He noted that the last two weekends the public reported 40 minutes while the ATIS system reported only 20 minutes.

Abid Sivic asked that when such discrepancies are noted he is given a call since BCMOT is very interested in maintaining the accuracy of the system reporting. The system has been recalibrated after the anti-idling system was put in place a few years ago and they will do a system-wide calibration once they've finished installing the B.C. Highway 13 and 11 ATIS systems.

### **Expedited bus clearance**

Greg Alvarez told the group that CBP also plans to meet with bus companies to discuss expedited processing of locked-down buses (buses where the passenger list is established prior to departure and it isn't opened again until it crosses the border). Cruise line buses could fit in this group and since passengers have already been inspected at the airport there is no need to re-inspect them, and they are low-risk travelers. Starting in April they hope to offer pre-cleared buses an option to cross through lane 10 at Peace Arch. Other bus lines could also possibly cross at Lynden using the dual-height booth on Saturdays, when there is little commercial traffic there.

They will continue to plan options for summer and keep the group posted.

Greg Alvarez informed the group he will be going on an extended leave until this Summer to work at CBP headquarters on northern border projects including land ports-of-entry, ferry clearance, and rail clearance issues. He will be briefing the Deputy Commissioner.

## **Topic Focus: Cross-border tourism**

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### **B.C. tourism trends and cross-border tourism**

Colleen McCormick and Angela Xu from the B.C. Ministry of Tourism, Trade and Investment gave a presentation on B.C. tourism trends, cross-border tourism trends, challenges and opportunities, and the impact of the 2010 Olympic Games. The presentation is available in the presentation packet (<http://resources.wcog.org/border/2-17-11scpres.pdf> )

Colleen McCormack noted that perceptions about the border continue to be an issue for cross-border tourism.

### **Bellingham/Whatcom tourism perspectives**

Ken Oplinger reported that WA State budget deficits have severely cut back funding for tourism initiatives. Local efforts for marketing continue, however, and the region is always looking for opportunities to reach out and promote tourism.

Retail numbers for Whatcom County have increased substantially due to the positive change in exchange rates for Canadian shoppers and local businesses are benefiting.

The airport has also seen a huge increase in traffic. 400,000 passengers used the airport in 2010 and this is remarkable considering the entire month of September the airport was closed for repaving the runway. 2011 is on track to be a record-breaking year. The airport is now open every day, twenty-four hours and now offers flights directly to Honolulu. Allegiant Air is also offering more destinations. The estimates are for 450,000-460,000 passengers next year.

Of those airline passengers, 70 percent are from the Lower Mainland of B.C.

Northern Whatcom County real estate trends are being driven by Canadian buyers, especially in the Birch Bay/Semiahmoo areas of Blaine.

Ken Oplinger noted that the private passenger ferry service between Bellingham and Victoria was cancelled last year by the owners, and so now there is no direct service between Victoria and Whatcom County, which has affected tourism numbers. The area also lost the Bellingham marina as a designated port-of-entry. All travel is through Friday Harbor now.

John Schnablegger asked if there is increased hotel development in response to the airport's growing numbers. Ken Oplinger replied that there has been sizable increases in occupancy at the Hampton Inn hotel near the airport, and with airport shuttle services at other area hotels. A new hotel with 300 rooms is being built a mile from the airport.

### **Two Nation Vacation initiatives**

Bruce Agnew summarized the work of the Two Nation Vacation initiative that began in 1998, driven by a number of tourism agencies and interested organizations. Several publications and promotional materials were developed to promote the "Cascadia" region as a destination.

Bruce Agnew presented an overview of past and future Two-Nation Vacation initiatives (see presentation packet).

### **Amtrak Cascades tourism marketing initiatives**

Andrew Wood provided a brief summary of statewide rail funding, informing the group that WA State was awarded \$590 million for high-speed rail. \$161 million was also awarded to WA out of the funding returned from Ohio and Wisconsin, although that funding has yet to be obligated. Florida recently gave up \$2.4 billion of rail funding and WA's governor is seeking some of those funds for state rail plans.

Rafeeka Gafoor added that Congressman Rick Larsen is also working to help obtain some of the rail funding for the state.

Bill Bullock asked if the funding requested is for previously established projects on the original project list or if it will be made available for new projects. Andrew Wood responded that the intention is to allocate funds to unfunded projects on the original list. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has taken the view that newly available funds should only be applied to the original 2009 application. Some of the projects put forward from 2010, including the Skagit River bridge, are not eligible.

Andrew Wood summarized recent marketing efforts in a presentation, including images from the new state lottery campaign (see presentation material).

Andrew Wood noted that mudslides have been a big concern this year, with a loss of over 50 train trips.

The next marketing meeting for Amtrak Cascades is April 8 in Olympia, and anyone is welcome to attend who has an interest in marketing the program. Contact Andrew Wood for more information.

Greg Alvarez announced that there will be a trade symposium in April that will focus on clients crossing the border. Lynn Gardner will be in attendance and giving a speech. Once information is available he will forward it to Melissa Miller, who will then distribute to the rest of the Steering Committee.

In regards to cross-border tourism and proper documentation, Greg Alvarez noted that many tourists crossing the border are legitimate but require I-94s, which slows down the crossing process. He would like to target legal permanent residents in Canada for some sort of border crossing card to avoid having to send everyone into the lobby for I-94s. This causes the bulk of weekend delays. Perhaps surveying at a later date could capture some of this data and incorporate results into opportunities for new ideas.

Bruce Agnew informed the group that Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) will be having a meeting March 4 and 5 with Commissioner Bersin.

Gordon Rogers adjourned the meeting at 12:10pm.