

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Steering Committee Meeting Summary

Thursday, March 18, 2010

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/3-18-10scp.pdf>

Meeting Location

The meeting was held at the Hazelmere Country Club in Surrey, British Columbia.

Meeting Attendance

B.C. Ministry of Transportation (John Schnablegger, Abid Sivic); **Better Borders Northwest** (Roger Bull); **Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Administration** (Derek Collins); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **Cascadia Institute** (Charles Kelly); **Cascadia Project** (Bruce Agnew, Jason Heck, Barbara Ryan); **City of Blaine, WA** (Bill Bullock); **City of Surrey, B.C.** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (James Rector); **U.S. General Services Administration** (Wayton Lim); **Washington State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Miller, Gordon Rogers)

Current event updates

Melissa Miller alerted Steering Committee members to the current IMTC Objectives list (in the meeting packet), which includes two objectives that are now obsolete: “monitor the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative” and “Pursue IMTC objectives with specific attention to improvements that support efficient, predictable international travel to and from the 2010 Winter Olympic Games in British Columbia.” She suggested pulling both objectives from the list. The committee agreed.

Bill Bullock reported that the City of Blaine hopes to finish the Boblett Street connector shortly, weather-permitting. The city is also working with WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) on coordinating construction for the two roundabouts at the Exit 276 interchange.

Bill Bullock announced that the U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved the Interchange Justification Report for Exit 274.

David Davidson distributed copies of the Border Policy Research Institute’s (BPRI) Atlas of the Land Entry Ports on the Canada – U.S. Border, and the most recent Border Barometer, which will be available online. Gordon Rogers asked if the atlas ties in with the Transportation Border Working Group’s (TBWG) border compendium. David Davidson responded that BPRI made an atlas first, which was referenced by TBWG. This new atlas in turn references details from the TBWG border compendium.

Hugh Conroy noted a recent opportunity to discuss IMTC with Annette Gibbons, Director General of Surface Transportation Policy at Transport Canada. Ms. Gibbons was touring the region with Mimi Sukhdeo and Chris Hoff, who included a border visit and IMTC discussion on the itinerary.

Hugh Conroy provided an update on work of the binational, four-agency Border Wait Time working group. A bid meeting was held February 9 at Ft. Erie and numerous vendors attended. The project is on schedule to get equipment in the field at the Ft. Erie and Pacific Highway testing ports this spring/summer. Proposal packages will be mailed out to the project advisory team next week.

Hugh Conroy informed the group that the next TBWG meeting will be held April 13-14 in Boston. Several IMTC participants will be in attendance including Chris Hoff, Hugh Conroy, Todd Carlson, and David Davidson.

Todd Carlson reported that he will be attending a Greening the Border Conference in Arizona this May. He will discuss the advanced traveler information system (ATIS) in this region and how it is being used to balance demand between crossings, and also the B.C. anti-idling zone initiative at the Peace Arch port-of-entry.

Bruce Agnew added that the Commission on Environmental Cooperation out of Montreal is co-sponsoring this conference. As Co-Chair, Bruce Agnew will also be in attendance.

Wayton Lim provided an update on Peace Arch facility construction. On March 1 U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) began tearing down the east-side booths of the old port. In the process they found the old concrete foundation of the original port facility. They are working to get in the "return to Canada" lane and finalize steps needed by April 5 so that WSDOT can begin work on the roundabouts. Replacement loop detectors for the ATIS systems are also being installed. A new "Welcome to the United States of America" sign has also been installed. They are on target to move into the new building this July.

James Rector reported that five-year FAST renewals started in January. Currently they are renewing seven or so drivers each day, so it has been slow. They expect to see an increase of renewals in June or July. Drivers whose cards are expiring or have expired are being handed tear sheets at the booths to remind them to renew.

James Rector said that NEXUS enrollment is slow this time of the year. Blaine is the third busiest enrollment office but only seeing thirty or so people each day. The busiest center is in Toronto, which is seeing eighty people a day.

James Rector reported that he received a call from the San Ysidro port which is looking into how U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) managed the Peace Arch port during the Olympics. It was a good example of how to handle higher traffic volumes with limited capacity. The staggered booth and staffing assisted in reducing wait times during the games to almost nothing, except for the two busy Saturdays. Melissa Miller asked if CBP ever used their contingency plan of the additional primary booths during the course of the Olympics. James Rector replied that they only needed to use them a few times, and it went smoothly.

James Rector added that it also helped to have more staff available. All leave was cancelled, and the port received 20 percent more staff. He noted that, although these staff increases are permanent, the area will not be able to replace staff who retire.

Hugh Conroy asked about the status of moving the NEXUS office out of the port and into the City of Blaine. James Rector replied that they have solicited for office space and the move is planned and funded, and just pending a location.

Wayton Lim added that the move should happen this year.

Derek Collins reported that Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) successfully managed the port during the Olympics, with wait times over twenty minutes only on two Saturdays.

John Schnablegger asked if there were expectations to expect a jump in cross-border traffic volumes with a high Canadian dollar. Derek Collins responded that when parity hit eighteen months ago they saw a significant jump but the dollar and related traffic remained on a steady plateau, and while they could expect slight volume increases attributed to the parity, most of the jump could be related to time of year, spring break, and traditional seasonal increases in traffic.

Bruce Agnew summarized a recent PNWER meeting with David Jacobsen , Michele James (CBP) and Blake Delgaty (CBSA) which discussed borders.

David Davidson asked if anyone had current numbers for enrollment in the B.C. enhanced drivers license (EDL) program. WA State numbers continue to climb at almost 2,700 a week, with over 150,000 enrollees to date, but B.C. numbers have been elusive.

Abid Sivic noted that B.C. EDL numbers would increase if the limitation on being born in Canada was removed. Currently a person can have a Canadian passport, be a Canadian citizen, but still not be able to apply for either NEXUS or an EDL because that person was born in another country. This affects a large percentage of Canadians in B.C.

James Rector noted that their system can only track EDLs in general, not which state or province the EDL is from.

Charles Kelly suggested that the discrepancy in participants in the WA State program versus the B.C. program may also be due to the fact that a higher percentage of Canadians have passports. David Davidson responded that the 2008 Passenger Intercept Survey showed that over 90 percent of those interviewed, U.S. and Canadian alike, used a passport to cross the border. It seems though that many prefer the convenience of having acceptable ID in their wallets.

Funding update

Hugh Conroy said that he has been informed that the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) application to Transport Canada's BIFA Pilot Program, the Border Data Warehouse Upgrade and BIFA Integration, has been approved for award within Transport Canada, however an official announcement is pending. As part of that project, FHWA has contributed \$100,000 match as support under the Transportation Border Congestion Relief (TBCR) program that WSDOT was selected for by FHWA in 2008. An additional \$145,000 of U.S. CBI funding will be allocated to the project by WSDOT.

Hugh Conroy reported that, based on current versions of the WA state budget, it looks like unanticipated receipts from the SAFETEA-LU Coordinated Border Infrastructure (CBI) program will be available to fund IMTC coordination for the next two years. This will be finalized in coming days.

Also funded in the yet-to-be-approved budget is a study of cross-border rail and the possible use of diesel multiple units (DMUs) along the Seattle – Vancouver, BC route.

Hugh Conroy reported that WCOG did not receive IMTC-project related funding through the U.S. Department of Transportation TIGER program.

With regard to the most recent continuing resolution by the U.S. Congress, which extends the SAFETEA-LU transportation funding act through the calendar year, additional CBI program funding may be available which could be applied to projects on the IMTC project list.

Project updates

Aldergrove-Lynden assessment

Hugh Conroy summarized the January meeting of the Aldergrove-Lynden project assessment subcommittee. During this meeting the group reviewed a document prepared by WCOG on commodity and trade data for the crossing and the Cascade Gateway as a whole. The group also discussed the binational model and assessed the value of adding select link analyses to evaluate

various scenarios. A small contract with Halcrow Consulting provided matrices for developing an origin-destination network for each port.

Another meeting will be scheduled for the next few weeks and will have each participating agency lay out near-term objectives and needs for the port.

CBSA will be moving toward design this spring, with construction planned for next year.

John Schnablegger mentioned that he has heard from Ottawa that CBSA is evaluating a truck crossing at Aldergrove. He commented that the Lynden/Aldergrove port-of-entry serves as a contingency port should anything happen at Pacific Highway.

Derek Collins said that CBSA is evaluating a possible permit operation for commercial vehicles as a future option for Aldergrove but no decisions have been made.

Hugh Conroy noted that, during the Olympic Games, the port was open at 5 a.m. Kim Scoville reported that most of this early morning traffic was trades people working on the Port Mann bridge, but there was little other demand at that hour.

Derek Collins added that the motivation was to service travelers who needed to be at the Whistler departure venues very early, and would need to leave the United States very early. However the demand was not there.

James Rector reported that southbound, the only take-up of the early-hour opening time was trucks.

Border Circulation Analysis

Hugh Conroy noted that this project is of interest to the Governor/Premier's Executive Council. Phase I is wrapping up this spring. There will be a project advisory team meeting in April.

Transportation Border Congestion Relief

Hugh Conroy announced an upcoming meeting (April 9) in Washington DC with CBP headquarters staff, FHWA HQ, WCOG (Hugh), and WSDOT (Todd Carlson). The meeting is being supported by FHWA under WSDOT's TBCR selection. The purpose is to share the WA-BC experience with the FAST program and discuss, with national program managers, how the current policy environment might affect how IMTC agencies, at the regional level, proceed with the identification and evaluation of alternatives to maximizing cross-border freight capacity. While the upcoming meeting is only with U.S. agencies, the intention is to broaden this dialog as soon as possible to include CBSA HQ. The U.S.-Canada Transportation Border Working Group (TBWG) will likely be an effective framework for supporting this dialog.

John Schnablegger commented that it seems clear that solutions which may work for the Detroit/Windsor crossing don't necessarily work in this region. A better use of the capacity of the FAST lanes is needed.

Hugh Conroy added there are tricky issues to deal with when discussing the future of the FAST lane. Not only is it a binational program, but it has participants who invested resources, time, and money into being enrolled into the program as it currently exists and who may be angry about changing the program.

John Schnablegger suggested that the program could offer other benefits such as enrollment into related programs, like the weigh-to-go initiative, and that might increase participation in FAST.

Todd Carlson added that a peer exchange might be feasible down the line once two or three options have been discussed. He has been briefing the Governor/Premier executive group on this issue.

WA-BC joint working group

John Schnablegger provided background on the formation of this working group, which emerged from the annual Governor/Premier meetings between Gregoire and Campbell. The Executive Council is led by the B.C. Minister of Transport and the WA State Secretary of Transportation, with the working group developing work leading up to the higher-level cabinet meetings.

Todd Carlson summarized the four foci of the group: cross-border rail, harbor-to-harbor air, and two border-related issues: the TBCR program, and a collection of projects gathered under one initiative (including the FAST lane, Aldergrove issues, ATIS, greening of the border, the Weigh-to-Go program, etc.).

The next meeting will be Tuesday, March 23 of the working group. A tour of the border is tentatively planned for later this spring.

Hugh Conroy noted that in September the IMTC will be having a General Assembly meeting. Perhaps there is an opportunity to invite the working group or Executive Council to have a public dialogue about the border.

Todd Carlson agreed there may be an opportunity to have the Minister and Secretary be keynote speakers at such an event. Having congressional representatives there as well would benefit.

John Schnablegger cautioned that it is difficult to organize their calendars.

Passenger rail

Hugh Conroy mentioned that \$590 million was awarded to WA State for high speed rail initiatives.

Bruce Agnew added that this funding will be used for corridor improvements which will expand capacity of the rail system. New GPS tracking and software programs will improve capacity without building expensive siding.

John Schnablegger asked about the definition of high-speed rail. Bruce Agnew replied that of the states receiving \$8 billion distributed for high-speed rail nationally, only California and Florida have "true" high-speed rail. The northeast rail corridor also has sections where speeds exceed 110mph. However there is a lot of discussion about high-speed rail potential in Washington and Oregon. The future plans include speeds exceeding 125mph between Seattle and Portland. A third track would be required for this. Any speed over 110 requires separate track and grade separations.

Currently, north of Seattle, the speed limit is 79 mph. BNSF allows trains to go to 90 mph (UP allows up to 110 mph) but there are local restrictions.

For the segment of rail between Seattle and Vancouver, little of the \$590 million will be invested because the busiest freight corridor is between Seattle, Tacoma and Portland. The good news for this region is that there is less conflict with freight rail and so more opportunities for passenger rail.

Bruce Agnew also mentioned the possibilities of using diesel multiple units (DMUs) in this region. These are rail cars with an engine that are a third as loud, and cheaper to operate.

Hugh Conroy suggested reactivating the IMTC rail subcommittee since there are now specific projects funded and legislative discussions concerning a third train service to Vancouver B.C.

John Schnablegger reported that from the B.C. perspective, rail discussions involve a lot of reality checks given the costs associated with the mode. B.C. has greenhouse gas legislation and electrified rail is one of the best ways to reduce emissions.

Roger Bull commented that the new traffic control system for rail networks with the new DMU cars could provide for 4-5 trains a day along the line. Bruce Agnew added that a Talgo train set costs \$36 million, consisting of nine cars and requiring a crew of 5-6 people. In contrast, a DMU single car unit costs \$2-3 million and can be staffed by 1-2 people.

John Schnablegger added that they are also more flexible, can be integrated with other cars, and require shorter train station platforms.

Charles Kelly commented that it make sense to formally re-establish the IMTC rail subcommittee given the number of current issues, including the end of the second train in September, marketing to get greater ridership, investments in the system, and a framework for agreements on a third train.

Charles Kelly stated that a third train is not part of the current WSDOT plan, although more train service improves ridership. Todd Carlson noted that the long-range WSDOT plan includes four trains between Seattle and Vancouver in 2025.

Bruce Agnew noted the mid-range plan has been adopted based on incremental changes, but with almost \$600 million on the table, the long term plan may become more of a focus. Plus it is another opportunity to look at high-speed rail in this region.

John Schnablegger added that with the troubles affecting air travel it makes sense to look at rail as an alternative.

Charles Kelly discussed the Cascadia Institute proposal (attached in meeting packet) which is to prepare a discussion paper and background briefing book on approaches and opportunities to reduce travel times and enhance the on-time performance of the Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service from the Canada/US border to the Vancouver station. The goal is to present these documents to the IMTC rail subcommittee for discussion.

Gordon Rogers mentioned to newer members of the IMTC group that there was previously an IMTC rail subcommittee that completed a cross-border rail study in 2003. The subcommittee would build on the work previously done.

John Schnablegger commented that the Gateway group did an assessment of rail in the Lower Mainland five years ago and concluded it would cost around \$1.5 billion to improve the average speed through the region from 15 to 25 mph.

Charles Kelly acknowledged that some changes would need to be made at municipal levels to enhance train service.

Charles Kelly described the proposal as part of a dedicated two month effort done in conjunction with the Cascadia Project in Seattle. Purposefully left out of the scope were issues of a swing bridge in the Lower Mainland and the pre-clearance issue since the focus of the discussion paper is narrower.

Hugh Conroy said WCOG will circulate an open invitation to IMTC Core Group members to join the re-established rail subcommittee. He noted the rail subcommittee deals with both passenger and freight rail issues. A meeting could follow the IMTC Core Group on April 22nd. WCOG supports subcommittee activities through communication and hosting meetings, but the group would require a chair.

John Schnablegger asked how stuck everyone is on using BNSF track. Charles Kelly responded that the railway companies guard their right-of-way strongly. Bruce Agnew answered that there are instances of deviating from BNSF track, such as the light-rail line south of Tacoma which follows the interstate.

John Schnablegger suggested taking the work from the Cascadia proposal to the executive council this fall. Charles Kelly agreed, and asked WCOG to forward the proposal to the group for their briefing file.

Bruce Agnew notified the group that there will be an annual rail conference in Vancouver June 6-9 complete with a show case which may include DMUs.

Kevin Cook asked how much of the track between Seattle and Vancouver has double track. Bruce Agnew responded that the rail line is single track with siding located along the route for passing. BNSF is not motivated to double track the route given that their primary business is south and on east-west routes.

IMTC project list discussion

The Steering Committee reviewed the existing IMTC project list and made changes to present to the Core Group next month.

Hugh Conroy reviewed WCOG suggested changes and additions (in blue – project list included in meeting packet).

The following changes were recommended:

- It was recommended that funded projects that are currently underway be listed in a separate IMTC Work Plan document.
- Project P-1 is pulled since it looks like IMTC facilitation will be funded this year. It will be added instead to the Work Plan.
- Project C-7 (Peace Arch/Douglas Errant Truck Warning System) is moved to the number one priority position given the frequency of the problem (about ten trucks a day).
- Project C-3 (SR 539 improvements) is moved to 9th position given that is currently a placeholder for the project and unlikely to be funded in the near term.
- Project C-9 (I-5 Slater Road to Grandview Master Plan) is pulled from the list.
- Project C-4 (Swift Customs Facility) is moved to second from last position given that it is a placeholder, as the project status is currently unknown, and may be partially or fully funded. If funded by ARRA then it will be pulled entirely from the list.

Other points from the discussion:

Regarding NEXUS marketing, James Rector notified the group that CBP now has variable message signs above each primary lane and they could use this to advertise NEXUS.

Hugh Conroy suggested the new NEXUS enrollment center, when open in Blaine, could be an opportunity for a new marketing campaign, pending funding.

Bill Bullock described reasoning behind breaking out the Exit 274 project into two phases, which allows for using the remaining \$80-100,000 as match for preliminary design. Then the project would be “shovel ready” for any opportunity for final design and construction.

Regarding the errant truck warning system, Abid Sivic mentioned that vehicle classifiers can identify thirteen classifications of vehicles ranging from motorcycle to all sorts of truck, and could be used to separate out a warning system for trucks from the RVs. The signal could then be sent to a messaging system.

Hugh Conroy suggested this project be divided into two-parts, a feasibility study and then implementation once costs have been identified. Ed McCormack from WA's Advanced Technology Branch suggested that this type of project may qualify for IDEA program federal funds.

Bruce Agnew discussed the West Coast Corridor Coalition and a greening of the corridor initiative advanced by this group. There will be a WCCC meeting at Stanford University May 3-4.

Bruce Agnew suggested looking at diesel engine idling reductions at the border, such as powered parking locations. Gordon Rogers responded that a similar project is part of a plan at the Port of Long Beach. Hugh Conroy noted that this is more difficult in a border environment where trucks are constantly rolling.

Todd Carlson added that adding green projects to the list would be a good step.

Cross-border travel volumes

Recently completed 2009 volumes review

Melissa Miller briefed the committee on the latest 2009 travel volumes and their comparison to the last few years. Charts are included in the meeting packet. More detailed data will be made available in the new 2010 IMTC Resource Manual, which should be published next month.

Olympics related cross-border travel volumes

Hugh Conroy provided a chart (included in packet) that compares northbound traffic volumes prior to and during the Vancouver Olympic Games. He will discuss the data and show the presentation in greater detail at next month's Core Group meeting.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:05pm.