

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Steering Committee Meeting Summary

May 19, 2011

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/5-19-11scp.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); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Greg Kolesniak); **Canada Border Services Agency** (John Linde, Kim Scoville, Holly Stoner); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **Cascadia Center** (Bruce Agnew); **City of Blaine, WA** (Bill Bullock); **City of Sumas, WA** (Rod Fadden); **City of Surrey, BC** (Mirjana Petrovic); **City of White Rock, BC** (Peggy Clark); **IBI Group** (Homayoun Vahidi); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Lynn Gardner, Pat Hinchey, Kimbra Miller, Terry Schulze, Shelley Wise); **U.S. Federal Highway Administration** (Sid Stecker); **Washington State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Melissa Miller, Gordon Rogers)

Current event updates

Bill Bullock reported that the City of Blaine is continuing construction on H Street. The City is still looking to identify funding to move forward on the Exit 274 interchange project.

Kevin Cook told the group that B.C. Premier Christy Clark is meeting today with WA State Governor Chris Gregoire.

Sid Stecker described a discretionary grant announcement through U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) with \$430 million in eleven programs. More information is at: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/discretionary>.

Chris Hoff updated everyone on progress on the cross-border travel demand model, which is now complete. He will review the model at the next IMTC Steering Committee meeting.

Kim Scoville announced the appointment of Roslyn MacVicar as the new Regional Director General for Canada Border Services Agency's (CBSA) Pacific Region. She recently toured the ports-of-entry.

Kim Scoville reported that this region is leading the country in increased traffic volumes. There was a 70 percent increase in volumes this Easter weekend compared to last year. They are averaging 30-50 percent increases in volume monthly. CBSA is preparing for the long Victoria Day weekend by having every lane open from noon on.

Kim Scoville informed the group that they will also be changing the NEXUS hours at Pacific Highway to be the same as Peace Arch, 7:00am to midnight.

Kim Scoville introduced Holly Stoner who will be overseeing the Abbotsford-Huntingdon Port-of-Entry.

John Linde reported that improvements to the Pacific Highway Port-of-Entry facility continue on schedule.

John Schnablegger informed the group that B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT) is looking at future changes at B.C. Highways 13 and 11, and considerations for future NEXUS lanes at those locations.

Bruce Agnew summarized the recent Canadian/American Border Trade Alliance meeting. Rail pre-clearance was discussed. There continue to be numerous important rail issues needing attention, including pressure for a Montreal/NY train, and CBSA cost recovery for the second Amtrak Cascades service between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.

Bruce Agnew noted that Amtrak Cascades ridership is up 23 percent from last year despite the problems of mud slides this year and the limitations in service.

Bruce Agnew said that Cascadia Center is finalizing its rail report, which was reviewed by WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) Rail office.

Bruce Agnew handed out rail material including recent Amtrak ridership information, a map, and some other details. The IMTC Rail Subcommittee will be meeting in the near future and will have a lot of work to do, especially in insuring the continuation of the second train and looking toward making it possible for a third round-trip train. In order to do this, siding will need to be expanded in Blaine and Everett. More details will follow.

Terry Schulze reported that there was a 40 percent increase in traffic at Peace Arch southbound on Easter weekend. The majority of these travelers were Canadians. In preparation for Victoria Day U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is planning to also open all lanes, including all lanes at Sumas and Pacific Highway from 5:00am on.

Terry Schulze provided an update on the Ready Lane at Peace Arch, which is going well. Approximately 0.9 percent of border crossers have RFID-enhanced identification (not including NEXUS cards) they can use to access the lane. Predominantly it is NEXUS users using the Ready Lane. Wait times at that booth are less than at other booths. The lane is currently open Monday through Friday, 8:00am – 1:00pm. They are looking to increase the times and expand to the weekend as well, but have to wait until RFID enrollment increases. The plan is to consistently use Lane 8 for the Ready Lane.

John Schnablegger commented that the Ready Lane is often faster than the NEXUS lane, which is why so many NEXUS users use it.

Lynn Gardner reported that CBP continues to operate the FAST pilot lane scenario southbound at Pacific Highway with averages of 12-15 minutes wait time for all trucks. The only time the lines have backed up to 8th Avenue have been whenever an interruption closes an inspection booth – there have been three vehicle breakdowns which have led to backups.

Lynn Gardner said he will be meeting with FAST participants through B.C. Trucking Association to discuss the new alignment and see what can be done to assist them and provide expedited service.

Lynn Gardner mentioned that they will have to close one truck booth/lane in October to replace that booth with a high-low booth—able to process both cars and trucks. They are now considering strategies for this period, including directing empties to Lynden for that construction time.

Lynn Gardner added that there is a lot of national interest in this region and what is being tested at Cascade Gateway ports-of-entry.

Lynn Gardner discussed a new centralized examination station which will be open June 6. This will expedite inspections where trucks need to off-load their cargo. There will no longer be trucks backing into the port docks – instead they will go to a bonded facility where more high-risk cargo can be off-loaded safely. Officers will be at the site and can do inspections efficiently and get the truck back

moving. The reason to move this is to provide more inspection space, and also to have a more secure location. Plus there is a concern with off-loading dangerous or contraband goods at the port itself. If the goods are designated low risk the driver is given a map to the location; if medium risk they will be escorted. High-risk loads will be driven to the facility by CBP officials.

Jim Kohnke told the group that the B.C. Chamber of Commerce annual meeting will be held at the end of the month. Transportation issues will be discussed. He'll report on the findings at the next IMTC meeting.

Todd Carlson passed on concerns that the new reauthorization act that is being circulated, coming out of the President's office, does not include a border program like the Coordinated Border Infrastructure in SAFETEA-LU, which has provided \$10-15 million a year to Washington State. WSDOT will be participating on a conference call with all thirteen border states to discuss ways to spread the word about the importance of the border program.

Gordon Rogers added the full text of the proposed reauthorization text can be found on AASHTO's website (<http://www.transportation.org>).

Melissa Miller reported recent NEXUS enrollment numbers for the region. Current binational NEXUS enrollment is at 536,817. The Cascade Gateway has 220,535 active enrollees (combining Blaine, Vancouver Airport, downtown Vancouver, and downtown Seattle enrollment center locations), representing 41 percent of all national NEXUS participants.

Lynn Gardner summarized the recent roundtable discussion with CBP Senior Advisor for Trade Relations Maria Luisa O'Connell. She was impressed with this region's partnership with other agencies. Her focus is on making border crossing easier for trade, and had an open-type discussion to gather ideas and input.

Gordon Rogers described an upcoming Cross-Border Rail Peer Exchange being held May 25 in Burlington, Vermont. This will be a high-level meeting to discuss both freight and passenger rail issues specific to the border.

Terry Schulze commented that he will be having a meeting with Rocky Mountaineer rail this afternoon to discuss their initiative to have a train cross the border starting in August. They will be discussing clearance procedures. Originally they hoped to lock with Amtrak to Seattle but that hasn't gone forward. The service is intended to serve cruise ship charters. Kim Scoville noted that they will need to get in touch with CBSA at some point.

John Schnablegger told the group that the B.C./WA Governor/Premier working group is looking to touch base with the trucking industry. The new Minister of Transportation is keen on staying abreast of emerging issues, and would like to discuss specifics of the industry. More details will follow.

Gordon Rogers shared an image from the planned new micro-simulation model that the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) will be developing as an addition to the existing model. Halcrow and Caliper will be developing the model, and will be gathering a lot of data over the next few weeks to develop it. The tool will be able to model traffic and turning movements. There's hope that a similar model could be developed in the future on the north side of the border as well.

Project updates

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

Homayoun Vahidi and Melissa Miller provided an update on the Cascade Gateway Border Data Warehouse website and recent modifications. The site will still be located at the original URL (www.cascadegatewaydata.com) and should be up in the next month.

Southbound FAST lane pilot study

Melissa Miller reported that David Davidson at the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) at Western Washington University has completed data cleansing and the database will be available within the week, together with the final report and Mark Springer's first report. Both reports can be found at: www.wwu.edu/bpri.

BPRI is now moving to the second phase of the study, which involved modeling to develop more accurate comparisons of the baseline and pilot configurations (noting that the traffic volume and inspection times vary between both time periods).

Marketing the border

Todd Carlson described the six elements of the Joint Transportation Executive Council (JTEC) between BC and WA state, one of which is NEXUS marketing. They waited until the completion of the Peace Arch facility, but now is a good time to consider how to get the message to travelers about their options, both in terms of crossings and programs. This could also tie into any future efforts to market NEXUS at Sumas. He asked if the inspection agencies are doing any marketing or have plans for getting the word out about Sumas/Huntingdon.

Kim Scoville expressed his concerns regarding the Sumas/Huntingdon NEXUS issue. While CBSA is committed to moving forward with this initiative there is concern that statements are already out in the media before anything has been agreed upon. Before any discussion is taken to the press there needs to be a cohesive strategy with all agencies to agree what is being said.

That said, Kim Scoville added, CBSA is in favor of promoting NEXUS and it's a front and center program for the agency.

Todd Carlson noted that the topic was discussed at the Sumas City Council, which is a public meeting. When WSDOT is asked if they are working on a NEXUS lane at Sumas, they will say yes. Kim Scoville acknowledged that there will be information out, but that there shouldn't be any concrete claims of "NEXUS lane opening at Sumas" until all details have been agreed upon by stakeholders.

Kim Scoville commented that agreements and the infrastructure must come first before the communication piece. Once all those agreements are in place, marketing will be key. But there is little information to share at this point.

Todd Carlson noted that the next Sumas City Council meeting which will discuss the project will be May 25.

Topic Focus: Sumas

Impacts of the border to the City of Sumas

Rod Fadden from the City of Sumas reported that there have been long lineups of trucks northbound due to the construction on the Canadian facility. The construction has exacerbated the existing problem of the truck inspection booths being open only from 8:00am to 4:00pm. There's a lineup of trucks just before 8 and after 4 which creates a mess for that neighborhood.

They have had police out to help manage traffic and staging.

Southbound, the construction at the exit of the facility is complete, and the city is now just waiting for U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to complete their part. This will be a big improvement to the movement of southbound trucks through the city.

During holidays, passenger lineups have been extensive through the city center.

Abbotsford-Huntingdon facility improvements update

John Linde presented an update on the improvements being constructed at the Abbotsford-Huntingdon port-of-Entry. The modernization and expansion effort will improve processing and efficiencies. Scheduled completion is early 2012.

Improvements include a new two-story addition, various interior renovations, a new PIL booth, and a new PIL lane for oversized vehicles.

There are challenges to the project, including the confined site location, volumes continuing after hours, and a recent increase in commercial volumes specifically outside of operational hours. Therefore several mitigation efforts are underway. The project is being phased to accommodate traffic flow, and construction that may impact northbound traffic is scheduled during non-peak hours. Coordination with the contractor will ensure traffic impacts are identified and mitigated in advance. They are implementing a traffic management plan including signage and a traffic control person when required; and the CBSA Regional Communications office will issue Traffic Advisories.

In addition, the Chief of Commercial Operations is in weekly contact with B.C. Trucking Association so they can advise clients accordingly. CBSA will extend the PIL operation from 6:00am – 7:00pm started by May 23. Frequent site visits by the project manager will monitor activities and will work to ensure any delays caused by construction are mitigated as soon as possible.

Kim Scoville added that the Vice President of Operations for CBSA has this project on his radar and is developing an ongoing strategy.

Todd Carlson asked if there is an expectation that the approach truck spur on State Route 9 would be expanded to have two truck lanes instead of one. Currently what could serve as a right truck lane is used for truck parking. Kim Scoville replied that if that works better for WSDOT then they have no problems with it, but there are no expectations.

Update on southbound Advanced Traveler Information System (ATIS) at Sumas/Huntingdon

Abid Sivic reported that BCMOT has completed construction on the new southbound border delay system on B.C. Highway 13 and 11 in April. Hybrid signs have also been installed on Highways 91, 99, and 10. The signs show delays at all four Cascade Gateway crossings.

Abid Sivic thanked CBP and CBSA for their excellent partnership during construction.

Next steps include calibration through June to test the system, with plans to turn the system on and have it go live on the website and signs at the middle/end of the month.

Update on northbound ATIS at Sumas/Huntingdon

Melissa Miller provided an update on behalf of Paul Neel from WSDOT, who was unable to attend the meeting.

The northbound ATIS system displays and collects wait time information for the Sumas/Huntingdon crossing, but WSDOT is looking to expand and improve the system. They have asked for \$520,000 to add a camera, install fiber optics between Front Street and the border, and add a data station and additional loops to the system. The license plate readers which currently feed wait time information to the system would be taken down, as they have not provided great reads. He added that it would be important to add a loop detector in any NEXUS lane for the wait time system as well.

Gordon Rogers adjourned the meeting at 10:45am.