

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Steering Committee Meeting Summary

Thursday, May 20, 2010

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/5-20-10scp.pdf>

Meeting Location

The meeting was held at the Occasions at the Pond café at Surrey City Hall in Surrey, British Columbia.

Meeting Attendance

B.C. Ministry of Transportation (Ashok Bhatti, Abid Sivic); **Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University** (David Davidson, Mark Springer); **Cascadia Center, Discovery Institute** (Liz Churchill); **City of Blaine, WA** (Bill Bullock); **City of Surrey, B.C.** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Beau Fancher, G. Kathleen Hill); **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

Abid Sivic reported that the expansion of the B.C. Ministry of Transportation (MOT) advanced traveler information system (ATIS) border wait time system to B.C. Highway 13 and Highway 11 is going ahead. They have a preliminary functional design developed which includes full and hybrid variable message signs. One issue is the possibility of environmental issues delaying the project. The plan is to be done with the entire project by March 31 of next year with construction lasting four to five months. The project includes loop detectors and MOT will meet with U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to discuss installing loop detectors in front of U.S. port-of-entry primary booths at Lynden and Sumas. MOT is looking at using pre-formed loops which go underneath the pavement and require a lot less maintenance.

Mark Springer asked if an audit of the existing system accuracy is ever done. Abid Sivic replied that IBI Group evaluates the system annually and recalibrates the system if errors are found. The system has been, excluding construction-related errors, accurate.

Gordon Rogers asked if a printout of the errata sheet from the audit is available. Abid Sivic will look into it. He added that the Duty Free often claims there are issues with the system but they've never been able to confirm this while checking the data. The only time the data seems off is when construction affects several loops and the system has less information to base its calculations on.

Gordon Rogers summarized current funding opportunities under a possible reauthorization scenarios of the SAFETEA-LU transportation act. The current continuing resolution expires December 31. Reauthorization of the act is still pending, as is whether or not there will be a Coordinated Border Infrastructure program within the act.

Wayton Lim reported that construction at Peace Arch continues on schedule. The new canopy over primary's east wing is now up and four booths are in place. The administrative building is almost complete. They are finishing wiring and other things before U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP)

moves into the new building this July. Once they move, the demolition of the old building will begin. There will be a corresponding traffic shift in July. A press release will be issued beforehand to illustrate the shift. Project completion is still expected for December 2010. The ribbon cutting ceremony is tentatively planned for March 2011.

David Davidson briefed the group on a new IMTC-like group being led by the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) to address transboundary water issues between the Fraser Valley of the Lower Mainland and Whatcom County. IMTC is the model and participants include local municipalities, B.C. ministries, state representatives, and federal level agencies. Issues emerging include storm water drainage, species recovery, and freshwater creeks that cross the border. BPRI has funding to provide continuity as the lead agency for the first year or two to launch the forum, with the hopes that future funding will be project based, similar to IMTC.

David Davidson added that BPRI funding has been requested in the form of a \$300,000 earmark put forward by Senator Patty Murray. If the funding request is successful then next year there may be enough funds available to accomplish another regional border-related study similar to what BPRI has been able to offer the last two years.

Chris Hoff announced that Transport Canada has funding available to enhance commercial vehicle modeling and forecasting. This is their contribution to the Cascade Gateway Border Circulation Analysis project.

Hugh Conroy noted that the Transport Canada BIFA pilot project is still pending an official announcement.

Bill Bullock announced the opening of the two new roundabouts in Blaine at the I-5 on and off ramps and D Street. D Street was opened six days ahead of schedule. They are now moving into phase II work which includes a bicycle and pedestrian connection to the border. An access road is being converted into a ten foot wide bike and pedestrian path which connects with a pedestrian inspection window at the new facility. There is no specific connection through Peace Arch Park.

Hugh Conroy suggested doing a field trip after the June 17 IMTC meeting which could tour the area, the new roundabouts and the new path.

Liz Churchill informed the group that there will be a high-speed rail meeting June 9 in Vancouver, jointly sponsored by the Vancouver Economic Development council and the Mayor of Vancouver, Gregor Roberts, who will be a speaker at the event. A copy of the agenda was distributed, and invitations will be sent to IMTC Steering Committee members.

They are expecting 50-60 people to discuss lessons learned from other regions such as the Midwest and the California high-speed rail initiative and see what can be applied to our own corridor.

Gordon Rogers asked if the meeting will focus on true, high-speed rail. Liz Churchill said no, they are looking at rail speeds of 100-150mph, which is what could be accomplished on the current track.

Todd Carlson noted that recent studies (?) showed a benefit in truck fuel efficiency, and therefore cost savings, to trucks that are improved for less emissions. Ashok Bhatti replied that this is still a challenge in B.C., where a large proportion of trucks are owned by owner/operators who find emissions improvements cost prohibitive since they are not operating a fleet of vehicles.

Ashok Bhatti reported that a recent analysis of collisions at two MOT roundabouts shows an increase of collision frequency, although severity is reduced. The majority of crashes involve navigation errors, rear-enders of cars exiting the roundabout and side impacts by cars expecting those in the roundabout to yield. Trucks are also a concern since they track on or over the center line. They are

reviewing two roundabouts to see if voiced concerns are legitimate. The policy is now to audit safety of new intersections.

Mira Petrovic noted that the sample size is not significant enough to state they lead to increased accident counts. Feedback in Surrey has been positive, and those who don't like them at first often accept them and prefer them to traffic signals. The missing piece with roundabouts is education. Driving schools are not educating drivers and older drivers are unfamiliar with the rules.

Todd Carlson added that there have been non-injury accidents at WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) roundabouts but the count of injury accidents is way down.

Ashok commented that MOT is simply doing due diligence by evaluating the interchange for safety. The results of these two roundabouts have not been as positive as they had originally hoped.

Hugh Conroy reported that a meeting will be held in Blaine May 25 by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Infrastructure Protection. Several IMTC participants have been invited. He noted that the agenda sounds very familiar to business-resumption incident communication planning that CBP and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) conducted jointly over two years ago.

G. Kathleen Hill added the meeting will look at how to minimize impacts of incidences.

Jim Kohnke announced that the general meeting of the B.C. Chamber of Commerce will be held next week. He will report back to the group next month on results.

Project updates

Cascade Gateway Cross-Border Circulation Analysis

Hugh Conroy shared the draft Cross-Border Road Network defined by the circulation analysis project advisory team. The routes were identified by analyzing route assignments of the 2009 IMTC Commercial Vehicle Operations Evaluation Survey (CVO Survey) origins and destinations. The assignments did not account for congestion or Lynden's permit-port status. Certain route selections were modified by the technical committee..

Next steps include looking at underlying traffic volumes on the identified network as an initial step for identifying problem spots.

The network will be discussed with agencies who were unable to attend the meeting and then shared with the larger group later.

Jim Kohnke suggested extending 16th Avenue past Hwy 13 to connect down with 8th Avenue later.

David Davidson noted the base map does not have the new SR 9 alignment.

Ashok Bhatti recommended adding 8th Avenue between Hwy 99 and Hwy 15.

Aldergrove-Lynden Border Assessment

Hugh Conroy summarized the meeting of the Aldergrove-Lynden Border Assessment Subcommittee on May 19. The group reviewed a data compilation draft report and outputs from the cross-border model. The report looks at the regional economy and the impacts the crossing has on the system. It will be available to IMTC participants who can share it within their respective agencies to inform planning and pending decisions.

The next step was to gather technical memos from primary operating agencies on their mid-long term needs for the crossing, but they are all dependant on what CBSA is planning to do. The group will get

back with CBSA and see what other information is available, and then potentially draw up technical memos based on scenarios.

IMTC Rail Subcommittee review

Hugh Conroy reported the rail subcommittee met on May 6. The group is chaired by Andrew Wood from the WSDOT Rail Office. Topics included the WA State rail plan; application and award of federal funding; language in the WA State legislative budget on a study of freight and passenger rail movement and the use of diesel multiple units (DMUs); the Auburn to Black Diamond DMU Study; BC's draft rail framework; and the Cascadia Institute's project to develop a rail briefing book.

Gordon Rogers added that Transport Canada is providing funds to the Cascadia Institute for their work on the B.C. rail briefing book. The \$500,000 noted in the state budget for IMTC and for rail is separate from the \$590 million awarded to the state for high-speed rail funding.

Report of FAST meeting with CBP in Washington DC

Hugh Conroy summarized a meeting held in Washington, DC with CBP headquarters staff regarding possible options for the FAST lanes at Pacific Highway. The meeting was part of the Transportation Border Congestion Relief (TBCR) award given to WSDOT from U.S. Federal Highway Administration to look at improving transportation through the region's crossings. Scenarios were presented for use of the existing infrastructure, as part of the TBCR objective to evaluate alternatives for the underutilized lanes. Alternatives mentioned included reverting the FAST lane to a third standard lane, keeping the system the same, aligning program elements between the U.S. and Canada (being discussed at the national level), and regional operational flexibility.

The issues will also be brought forward to CBSA.

Todd Carlson added that one deliverable for the BC-WA Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC) is documentation on this issue. This will always be a binational issue.

Presentation: Modeling FAST lane usage at Pacific Highway

Mark Springer from Western Washington University presented his initial findings modeling various scenarios for alternative uses of the southbound FAST lane at Pacific Highway.

The scenarios modeled included keeping the lane as is, changing the FAST lane to a standard lane, providing a "FAST-Lite" alternative where FAST approved carriers and drivers could use the lane (removing the shipper requirement), removing passenger vehicles from the lane, and congestion pricing for the lane. The scenarios were run to show the impacts on wait times for both standard traffic and for FAST users. It also estimated wait times with 25 percent and 50 percent higher commercial volumes than what we saw during the 2009 CVO study.

Ashok Bhatti commented that it would be interesting to break out the port utilization percentage by time of day rather than the average for all 24 days of data inputs.

Gordon Rogers noted that expected versus unexpected delay is a big issue for trucking companies. Expected delays can be accommodated for by passing on the cost ahead of time.

Hugh Conroy asked where the optimal distribution was given the current volumes of traffic. With 2009 traffic volumes, Mark Springer noted that opening the FAST lane to all traffic only slightly increases FAST user wait times and substantially decreases wait times for all regular traffic.

Mark Springer noted that this is only looking at transportation through put in the lane, and not any of the other benefits that may be associated with FAST participation, such as expedited inspection at the border or other factors.

Todd Carlson noted that a boiled down version of this information would be beneficial to the JTEC group.

Hugh Conroy reminded the group that the study findings are not transferable to northbound traffic, as there are very different FAST participation levels northbound.

Mark Springer asked attendees to submit other scenarios if needed.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:15pm.