

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Steering Committee Meeting Summary

Thursday, May 21, 2009

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/5-21-09scsp.pdf>

Meeting Location

The meeting was held at Bob's Burger & Brew in Sumas, Washington.

Meeting Attendance

B.C. Ministry of Transportation (Ashok Bhatti, Abid Sivic); **Better Borders Northwest** (Roger Bull); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Jan Brock); **Canadian Consulate of Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **City of Abbotsford, B.C.** (Russ Mammel); **City of Sumas, WA** (Bob Bromley, Rod Fadden); **City of Surrey, B.C.** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **Transport Canada** (Jim Wang); **U.S. Congressman Rick Larsen** (Cherie Little); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (G. Kathleen Hill); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Lynn Gardner, Pat Hinchey, James Rector, Tom Schreiber); **U.S. Federal Highway Administration** (Sid Stecker); **U.S. General Services Administration** (Wayton Lim); **University of Washington** (Daniel Dailey, Matt Dunbar, Ed McCormack, Kirsten Wieben); **Washington State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Miller, Gordon Rogers)

Review of Sumas/Huntingdon data

Hugh Conroy presented an overview of data regarding the Sumas/Huntingdon border crossing and transportation systems. The presentation is available on the IMTC website at: www.wcog.org/border/5-21-09scspres.pdf.

Current event updates

Gordon Rogers described the current problem of City of Sumas roadways being damaged by the re-routing of commercial vehicles due to the VACIS machine. Since the installation of the VACIS machine at U.S. Customs & Border Protections (CBP) port-of-entry at Sumas, trucks can no longer make the turn necessary to exit the inspection facility onto SR 9 (Cherry Street). Instead they traverse city streets not designed for heavy loads. As a result the pavement is being broken on Cleveland (which has had to be closed) and Railroad streets. Sumas is also working with the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) to re-classify Bob Mitchell Way (a heavy-haul road used by a lot of Canadian forest-product exports) to allow federal funding to be used for repairs on this route.

Wayton Lim reported that the Peace Arch port-of-entry reconstruction project continues on schedule. He also reported that the U.S. Sumas port-of-entry is under construction to extend the canopy and add an additional primary booth. Similar work is underway at the Lynden port-of-entry to install a new bi-level inspection booth that can inspect passenger or commercial vehicles depending on conditions.

Rod Fadden told the group that the City of Sumas experienced the worst border lineups since 1990 on Monday, May 18. There was over a four hour wait for cars. Trucks were backed up as well. The

sign along I-5 reported 90 minutes waits at Sumas and so many people re-routed and were surprised by the long lines.

Rod Fadden added that due to queuing from trucks, a queuing area is needed in Sumas.

Rod Fadden announced that the city will be getting a federal ID number to allow for work to move ahead on its roadway improvement as part of the stimulus package funding. The project will go to bid next week.

Abid Sivic reported that B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BC MOT) is designing the expanded Advanced Traveler Information System (ATIS) for the southbound Lynden/Aldergrove and Sumas/Huntingdon border wait time systems. The project is in design stage now and will culminate with a system for collecting delay information for all four Cascade Gateway ports-of-entry.

Abid Sivic summarized a conference call with WCOG, CBP, and BCMOT regarding the use of commercial vehicle lanes at the Pacific Highway port-of-entry for processing passenger vehicles during periods of high congestion. The existing ATIS system cannot separate passenger vehicles from commercial vehicles using the lanes and so there may be inaccuracies in the displayed border wait times as a result of this. Abid Sivic will work with IBI Group to better define the problem and discuss with the group possible solutions and costs to accommodate the changing nature of the lane.

Hugh Conroy added that this presents an ongoing issue of dynamic lane changes at all Cascade Gateway ports-of-entry (also to be considered southbound at Lynden/Aldergrove, and with a movable NEXUS lane at the future Peace Arch port-of-entry). The future ATIS systems will need to be able to accommodate dynamic lane designations.

Jim Wang informed the group that Chris Hoff is on paternity leave and he will be representing Transport Canada for the next month or so.

Ashok Bhatti described his research into advancing cross-border transit for the region. He studied the existing papers from the 2001 IMTC Cross-Border Transit Study and he spoke with TransLink about their approach. The current challenge for TransLink is the cost of adding an additional service. It is not a current priority.

Ashok Bhatti reported that John Schnablegger has been involved in discussions regarding the closure of Aldergrove to commercial vehicles. He has also spoken with Todd Carlson at WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and Hugh Conroy at WCOG. BCMOT will be developing a formal statement on the issue and how it will impact B.C. Highway 13.

Kevin Cook asked about the annual port volumes, showing much higher volumes of trucks southbound at Sumas than northbound at Sumas. Hugh Conroy replied that because Lynden southbound is a permit port only, a greater number of trucks cross southbound at Sumas.

Lyn Gardner answered a question raised at the last meeting, given the adoption of e-manifest, about whether or not a truck shipment that is filed to cross at one port can alter its route and cross at another port-of-entry. This was originally discussed as a feature of e-manifests, that would eliminate the restriction of a truck crossing where its broker was. Lynn Gardner informed the group that a truck may re-route to a different crossing except for a few circumstances. There are four reasons a port change would not be allowed: 1) the merchandise is covered by the FDA Bio Terror Act, and is required to File a Prior Notice with FDA. Those cannot change from the original port without a new Prior Notice being filed, and a minimum of a two hour wait for processing; 2) The Cargo Release information was filed from an Entry Summary data. The actual Entry summary cannot be filed before the merchandise is "arrived" in the USA; 3) The merchandise contains "American Goods Returned."

This is because it is not possible to tell from the tariff number if there is a Prior Notice Required by the FDA. Summary entries can be filed up to ten days after the load has entered the country. If the filing is withheld a day then the truck has greater routing options.

Jan Brock reported that Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) continues to explore closing down commercial processing at the Aldergrove port-of-entry. The facility that is slated to be built at the site will not have commercial, and so it is in preparation for this. Currently there isn't a facility for full commercial inspection and so it is a security risk.

Jan Brock also described efforts to expand commercial processing at the Huntingdon port-of-entry. It is a difficult footprint of land to expand on, but CBSA will be considering ways to improve throughput with the available space.

Todd Carlson said he thinks closing Aldergrove to commercial traffic will mean there is no need to widen State Route 539 to the border. CBSA is consistent with WSDOT's plan.

James Rector reminded that June 1 is the date that the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) goes into effect. CBP will hand those who aren't in compliance a tear sheet with information. If they are out of compliance again then they are brought in to secondary. He doesn't predict any problems with WHTI in this region.

Jim Kohnke reported that the B.C. Chamber of Commerce has written a letter regarding its position on CBSA's proposed closure of the Aldergrove port-of-entry to commercial traffic. He will be distributing the letter at the next meeting.

Ed McCormack introduced members of the University of Washington team working as part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Center for Excellence project. The team is part of three nationwide that will compare the Blaine, Detroit, and El Paso, Texas border crossing systems.

Sid Stecker informed the group that Kevin Ward at U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has been promoted and will be leaving his position in July.

Cherie Little asked whether an enhanced drivers license (EDL) is available in B.C. as it is in Washington State. James Rector replied that B.C.'s EDL has moved past the pilot-phase and is now being widely offered.

Todd Carlson summarized an incident on Monday, May 18 when the variable message sign (VMS) just south of Bellingham reported that there was only a 15 minute delay at the northbound Sumas port-of-entry, causing numerous people to re-route only to discover wait times over two hours. He distributed examples of the archived data showing that the instrumentation was not capable of measuring lineups exceeding 90 minutes. WSDOT's ITS engineers are working to solve this problem, and also to change the sign so that once the lineup exceeds 90 minutes it says "Greater than 2 hours" or some other message so that travelers know the queue is very long. WSDOT acknowledges that it is worse to tell someone the wrong time than no time.

Todd Carlson distributed a design for new signs to go up on I-5 showing the Peace Arch and Pacific Highway options for cross-border travelers. It also includes NEXUS hours and other information. The signage plan will be going into effect shortly. Funding came from the Coordinated Border Infrastructure program funds. The entire signage project will cost \$50,000 (USD).

Todd Carlson updated the group on the ongoing Transportation Border Congestion Relief program (TBCR) through FHWA. The effort underway is to expand regional ATIS and also work with public private partnerships to improve information technology in the region. WSDOT has been working with

WCOG on a border plan with some concrete projects to push forward around December. One project idea is an analysis of alternatives for managing the FAST truck lane, which may also include analysis of congestion pricing strategies.

Hugh Conroy clarified that several strategies for managing commercial vehicle capacity are of interest for this work. Specifically, analysis of pricing, at an international border crossing, can only be done with agencies from both countries, state, and province evaluating options in mutually acknowledged terms.

Todd Carlson discussed upcoming funding opportunities including a possible extension of the Coordinated Border Infrastructure program (CBI) program, which could possibly provide funds to widen Guide Meridian (SR 539) north to Badger Road; and upcoming Transportation Investments Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) applications which may be able to fund a portion of the TBCR program of projects.

Gordon Rogers commented that there is not enough funding to fix the system and so alternative methods for funding improvements will need to be found. The Highway Trust Fund was running out of resources even before the recession. It is worth considering regional funding revenues to solve local issues.

Hugh Conroy provided a summary of the recent Olympics-related meeting between Vancouver Olympic Committee (VANOC) staff, inspection agencies, and transportation agencies on ways to streamline moving buses across the border for the event. Also discussed were forecasted traffic counts. At the last analysis WCOG estimated approximately 200+ cars a day additional traffic in both directions. However a week later VANOC announced that the US ticket sales will be doubled to 80,000. How this impacts the traffic has yet to be calculated, but even doubling the predicted number to 400 cars a day is not enough to seriously hinder the system. The base numbers are still lower than earlier estimates by WCOG.

Hugh Conroy added that CBSA announced they will be dedicating an inspection lane at Douglas for the Olympic family.

Hugh Conroy summarized recent requests for funding to support the continued coordination of IMTC. A high priority project request for IMTC has been submitted, and is being put through by Congressman Rick Larsen. Currently it seems that reauthorization of the U.S. transportation act will be delayed by one year, meaning last year's CBI program will be continued and generate another annual apportionment to border states. WCOG is also looking to TIGER funds for TBCR program projects that WCOG hopes to work on.

City of Abbotsford transportation plan review

Russ Mammel provided an overview of the revised transportation plan for the City of Abbotsford. A map of suggested changes that may impact cross-border movement is included in the meeting packet online.

Sumas alternate truck route signage project

Hugh Conroy introduced the project that is funded by the CBI program funds established for Sumas border improvements. Rod Fadden explained that the signage will re-route trucks heading north on State Route 9 to the border, directing them to Bob Mitchell Way, so that they can bypass passenger vehicle queues and have direct access to the truck spur. Similarly, if commercial vehicle lineups occur, the trucks can be re-routed to free up access for passenger vehicle travelers. The sign may be

simple (i.e. “X-Border trucks use alt route when flashing”) with a switch that the City can flip as needed.

Sumas heavy haul roadway improvements

Rodd Fadden described a project funded out of stimulus package money to improve the roadways in the city for increased numbers of commercial vehicles traveling through town.

The improvements to the roadway will expand the existing heavy-haul route to prevent wear and tear on the roadway and will also improve access to the existing transfer site, which currently is four acres and serves Abbotsford garbage movements (approximately 12-20 containers a day of garbage from Abbotsford).

Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD) currently ships garbage south to the U.S. through Sumas, either by rail or by truck. However, due to an upcoming closure of a garbage facility in BC, the volume through Sumas could dramatically increase to 40-80 trucks a day, destined for a landfill near Wenatchee.

Kathleen Hill noted that moving garbage across the border has been a high-profile issue between Toronto and the Midwest and has involved the U.S. State Department in the past.

Bob Bromley added that this garbage will be ground up and stuffed into containers.

U.S. inspection facility at Sumas

Pat Hinchey, James Rector, Lynn Gardner, and Tom Schreiber of CBP provided a tour of the Sumas port-of-entry facility.

Kevin Cook asked what percentage of trucks go through the VACIS machine. Lynn Gardner responded that at Sumas nearly 100 percent of all trucks are able to go through the machine.

Canadian inspection facility at Huntingdon

Jan Brock of CBSA provided a tour of the facility and pointed out where the facility may change in the next two years to provide for more commercial inspection capacity.

The livestock inspection facility may be moved or eradicated as part of this development. Currently CBP uses the Canadian livestock pens for inspections, and so a new arrangement may have to be made.

Current project updates

2009 Commercial Vehicle Operations Study

Hugh Conroy reported on planning for the CVO study, which will begin in June and continue collecting data through July. Data collection will occur at all three commercial vehicle crossings, both directions, and include in-booth origin-destination and commodity data collection at Pacific Highway. A bus component and a web-based survey are still being designed.

There are two planned schedules, depending on whether or not Lynden/Aldergrove northbound will be open to commercial vehicles next month.

Border Circulation Analysis

Hugh Conroy informed the group that a project team meeting will take place next week and discuss initial strategies based on technical reports, stakeholder interviews, and modeling efforts. The goal will be to prioritize next steps and apply the traffic model to specific scenarios.

Cross-border Communication Protocol

Hugh Conroy told the group that all but one agency have completed the status report for the updated communication protocol. The document should be completed, along with a status report, in time for the next meeting between B.C.'s premier and the Governor of Washington State.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 1:00pm.