

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Steering Committee Meeting Summary

June 16, 2011

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/6-16-11scp.pdf>

Meeting Location

The meeting was held at the U.S. Port-of-Entry at Peace Arch in Blaine, Washington

Meeting Attendance

B.C. Trucking Association (Greg Kolesniak); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **City of Blaine, WA** (Stephen Banham); **City of Surrey, BC** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **Royal Canadian Mounted Police** (Peter Koleyak; Dave Williams); **SmartRail Inc.** (Kenneth Jones); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff, Jessica Yen); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Lynn Gardner, Terry Schulze, Christian Wassen); **U.S. General Services Administration** (Wayton Lim); **Washington State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson, Dale Tabat); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Miller, Gordon Rogers)

Current event updates

Jim Kohnke reported that the Bridges to Prosperity Symposium was well attended. He helped distribute getNEXUS.com post-its at the event as part of the latest effort to market the NEXUS program.

Jim Kohnke also attended the B.C. Chamber of Commerce annual meeting, where three border-related resolutions were passed. He will distribute the resolutions once available.

Ken Jones said he is promoting a re-route of BNSF and Amtrak up Highway 15 and not on the White Rock waterfront.

Lynn Gardner informed the group that the end of September, first week of October U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) working with U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) will be replacing one of the three commercial booths at Pacific Highway with a split-level booth which will be able to also process cars. The commercial port will therefore be down to one or two lanes for at least three weeks. CBP will be informing the industry and encouraging empties to cross further east at Lynden/Aldergrove.

Terry Schulze reported that the Ready Lane at Peace Arch continues to operate Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 1:00pm. Currently most of those using the lane are NEXUS holders.

Terry Schulze noted that this weekend a large bicycle group with the Ride to Conquer Cancer will be crossing the border at Peace Arch with over 3,000 bicyclists. CBP is working with the group to help process riders efficiently, including using mobile devices to check documentation. Lanes 1 and 2 will be available for processing bicycles.

Terry Schulze reminded the group that the July 1-July4 weekend is historically a very busy weekend for border crossings, and CBP is advising travelers to travel early. CBP plans to have all lanes open at Sumas and Blaine ports from 6:00am onward on July 1 and 2.

Hugh Conroy commented that oftentimes traffic is spread out when people leave on a long weekend, but they all generally return at the same time on Sunday night.

Terry Schulze described recent improvements to commercial bus processing. Pre-inspected, sealed cruise line charter buses are now cleared at Peace Arch between 8:00am and 11:00am on Saturdays, again using portable devices to check identification documents. Currently the program is only open to sealed buses with U.S. citizens on board. CBP continues to work with B.C. Trucking Association (BCTA) and other charter representatives to look at other time savings initiatives to reduce bus queues this summer.

Lynn Gardner added that the FAST lane revisions at Pacific Highway have also provided a clear approach lane for buses approaching the southbound port-of-entry, separate from the NEXUS traffic.

Dale Tabat informed the group that WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has organized a meeting for later today to discuss actions in the case of partial or full highway closures to commercial vehicles trying to cross the border. The objective is to discuss how to manage the movement of northbound trucks, working with WA State Patrol, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and border inspection agencies to develop a mutually-agreed upon plan.

Mira Petrovic reported that the City of Surrey's plan for the Trans Canada Highway 1/B.C. Highway 15 area is in its final stages. They are also working on the design of a grade separation for the Golden Ears connector near B.C. Highway 15.

Peter Koleyak introduced himself and said this is his first IMTC meeting. RCMP is reviewing procedures and radio communications in order to better exchange information with U.S. law enforcement.

Stephen Banham told the group that the City of Blaine has adopted the Interchange Justification Report for I-5 Exit 274 and incorporated it into their comprehensive plan. They have applied for federal funding to move forward with environmental and preliminary design work.

Stephen Banham reported there have been issues with traffic conflicts at the on-ramp of Exit 276. Blaine's Chief of Police was there over the weekend assisting the movement of travelers and reducing the road rage caused by travelers using the on-ramp and not being allowed in to merge with other northbound I-5 traffic, thereby blocking the NEXUS lane.

Kevin Cook announced that the Canadian Consulate in Seattle, in conjunction with the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) at Western Washington University will be hosting a dialog on next steps regarding the Beyond the Border vision. A working group is focusing on four pillars under the vision, including addressing threats, trade facilitation, integrated law enforcement, and infrastructure. The working group seeks to engage feedback through public dialogues.

Kevin Cook also mentioned the Battle of the Border baseball game between Toronto and Seattle on August 17. The Consulate is offering tickets for \$15 or \$30 for boxed seats. A t-shirt is included in the ticket price, and there will also be a barbeque and drinks.

Wayton Lim summarized work GSA is undertaking in Sumas to pave outside the VACIS shed in conjunction with the City of Sumas' efforts to improve the road access.

Wayton Lim also mentioned the split-level booth going in at the U.S. Pacific Highway port-of-entry at the end of summer.

Wayton Lim reported that an oil spill at the station caused almost ten hours of delay. A hazmat team cleaned up the area.

Hugh Conroy told the committee about progress to date on a small IMTC project to look at addressing where the volume data we use in this region comes from, and comparing the various sources to better understand what the discrepancies between sources represent.

Gordon Rogers provided an update on the Cross-Border Rail Study being conducted by the Cascadia Center. The study covers three aspects of rail along the I-5 corridor, including diesel multiple units (DMUs), freight rail, and the future of Amtrak. The study looks at how these services could work together, whether there is room for improvement, and other strategies to improve rail in the region. A full report will be available shortly and will be shared with IMTC participants.

Gordon Rogers noted that Andrew Wood has left the WSDOT rail office and now works for Amtrak. A replacement has yet to be announced. Dale Tabat added that a hiring freeze is in place in the agency until July 1.

Dale Tabat commented that the WSDOT DMU study for the Stampede Pass area is now available on the WSDOT website.

Todd Carlson reported that the semi-annual BC-WA Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC) meeting was held via video conference. Key issues include the future of the second Amtrak train to Vancouver, which is currently scheduled to cease October 31 unless reimbursement funds for CBSA can be identified; the Weigh-to-Go initiative; and other land border issues including advanced traveler information systems (ATIS), FAST optimization, NEXUS marketing, and other initiatives. The next step is to develop specific action items for the Premier/Governor meeting in October.

Melissa Miller reported that a presentation of the new border data warehouse was made at ITS Canada at the beginning of June. As part of the presentation she also raised questions about the architecture process and the BIFA border architecture tool. Full reports from the BIFA project will be available by the end of July.

Hugh Conroy brought up B.C. Ministry of Transportation's (BCMOT) project to update the calibration of southbound border ATIS wait-time measurement systems. He spoke with BCMOT about involving the inspections agencies more directly, as appropriate, with the calibration process. One concern was the distance that the final loop-set is from the CBP primary inspection booths at Peace Arch. It appears that the recently replaced loop-set is farther from booths than the previous set. This, combined with a lack of lane-striping is possibly creating some difficulty in associating volume data with individual booths. Because this loop-station is the best proxy for departure rate and the only station able to generate departure rates to correspond to booth status (open/closed, NEXUS, standard, Ready Lane, etc.), accuracy is of great concern. This, coupled with the lack of painted lane-lines on the asphalt is likely to be examined closely in a calibration review.

Rail peer exchange

Gordon Rogers summarized Whatcom Council of Governments' (WCOG) participation as a co-sponsor of the U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) peer exchange on cross-border rail, held in Burlington, Vermont in May. The Eastern Border Transportation Coalition (EBTC) and Vermont Department of Transportation (VDOT) were also champions of the issue.

Melissa Miller attended the meeting and reviewed the agenda and key action items at the conclusion, which include moving forward on the passenger rail pre-clearance issue. A smaller group of key stakeholder agencies will be meeting to discuss actual language to be incorporated into a law to allow for pre-clearance, similar to that available through the Air Pre-Clearance Act.

Work on this issue will continue under the auspices of the Transportation Border Working Group (TBWG).

Terry Schulze asked if Rocky Mountaineer was in attendance. Melissa Miller said no. Terry Schulze explained that Rocky Mountaineer is a Canadian-based charter company looking to provide rail service to Seattle cruise ship customers. They intend to start a pilot next August, using two rail cars

and passengers that have information available in advance. They hope to clear at Peace Arch although this is a challenge since there is no inspection facility at the site.

Stephen Banham commented that the abandoned BNSF rail station in Blaine continues to be a liability for the city, with vandalism and other concerns.

Hugh Conroy added that the rail peer exchange grew out of the TBWG which has spent the last four years looking at the issues surrounding cross-border rail, and realized there are some common concerns across the border which could be discussed at a national level.

Project updates

Peace Arch bicycle/pedestrian plan update

Stephen Banham summarized a recent meeting between Peace Arch park representatives, inspection agencies, and the City of Blaine to discuss a formalized route for pedestrians looking to cross the border on foot, and to advise bicyclists on a preferred route. The need emerged after the new U.S. facility was completed. Signage currently directing pedestrians only tells them where not to go and provides no information for a northbound route.

The City of Blaine has developed a signage plan which would direct travelers through the park northbound and along a pedestrian sidewalk southbound. The park agencies and inspection agencies have tentatively agreed to the plan. Quotes for the signs are now being collected.

The sidewalk has been completed on the Canadian side by B.C. Parks, and the monument has been moved out of the way of the new sidewalk. Even though only half-complete, both park agencies noted that the sidewalk is already getting a lot of usage as people choose to use the sidewalk instead of attempting to push strollers through the grass or on the roadway.

The U.S. sidewalk component is undergoing a primary archaeological survey. Funding still needs to be found to complete the portion of sidewalk from the U.S. boundary marker to the U.S. inspection facility.

Bicyclists will be encouraged to go northbound on the on-ramp. There are slow speeds on the roadway at that point which would allow this.

NEXUS marketing

Melissa Miller described the first telephone conference of the IMTC NEXUS Marketing Subcommittee. The group identified the need for immediate marketing to use the \$20,000 available through WCOG. In addition a longer-range marketing plan will be distributed among committee members and finalized for agencies to participate in.

Hugh Conroy summarized a plan to market NEXUS in line during the busy July 1-July 4 holiday weekend. He also encouraged a joint press release with inspection agencies.

Flyers will be produced encouraging drivers to get more information, and will be distributed through the subcommittee to regional chambers of commerce, duty frees, tourism information centers, and other locations.

Todd Carlson added that JTEC has a goal to increase NEXUS enrollment.

Kevin Cook volunteered to display NEXUS promotional flyers at the Canadian consulate.

Blaine I-5 on-ramp and NEXUS lane issues

Stephen Banham reported that the City of Blaine police department has recently dealt with numerous traffic incidents and raised tempers on busy weekends. In Blaine, non-NEXUS travelers using the on-ramp at Exit 276 are not being allowed to merge with other traffic, leaving them stranded and blocking the NEXUS lane. The issue of how to better facilitate that traffic stream is one which needs addressing.

Todd Carlson suggested that striping around the D Street ramp to create an open space may help, and lane markings designating travelers not to block the NEXUS area. This would probably be a preferable solution to closing the on-ramp, since it is the only access to the NEXUS lane for Blaine residents.

Another issue mentioned southbound regarding the Pacific Highway NEXUS lane was that when the lane closes at 6:00pm those who are in the lane are given no advance warning, and then have to reverse or try and squeeze into the other lanes.

Terry Schulze responded that the lane should convert to a general purpose after it closes but will check as to whether that is occurring.

Topic Focus: Border communications protocol

Hugh Conroy reviewed the existing border communications protocol, which outlines how border transportation and inspection agencies should contact each other in the event of a border or border-approach highway closure. The protocol was reviewed in 2009 and a status report was completed by most participating agencies at that time. The topic was revisited in light of discussions WSDOT is having to formulate a plan for commercial vehicles following a border closure.

There was also previous interest in having a table-top exercise to test the functionality of the protocol system in place.

Kevin Cook asked if there were examples of when it was used. Terry Schulze replied that the border was closed recently for Hands Across the Border and WA State Patrol was notified. However this information was not displayed on southbound B.C. Highway 99 signs.

Kevin Cook offered to find out what other border region's may have in place regarding protocols.

Hugh Conroy agreed to re-distribute the existing protocol and confirm all phone numbers and information is current. It would also be good to add recent examples to the status update, and will follow up with Kevin Cook on other regional protocols in place.

Steven Banham asked why no local law enforcement was on the list. He noted that Blaine would be good to add given its close relationship with CBP.

Binational commercial vehicle transportation model review

Chris Hoff introduced Basse Clement from Halcrow Consulting, who developed a revised binational commercial vehicle transportation model. This work was Transport Canada's contribution to the Border Circulation Study. It looks at work previously completed on former commercial vehicle cross-border forecasts that have since proven to be very inaccurate.

Basse Clement gave a presentation of the model. A copy is available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/6-16-11scp.pdf>.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:15pm.