

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Steering Committee Meeting Summary

July 15, 2010

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/7-15-10scp.pdf>

Meeting Location

The meeting was held at the Blaine Boating Center at the Blaine Marina in Blaine, Washington.

Meeting Attendance

B.C. Ministry of Tourism, Culture, & the Arts (Andrew Little); **B.C. Ministry of Transportation** (Ashok Bhatti, Abid Sivic); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Louise Yako); **Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Darryl Lavia, John Linde); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **Cascadia Center, Discovery Institute** (Bruce Agnew); **Cascadia Institute** (Charles Kelly); **City of Bellingham, WA** (Linda Stewart); **City of Blaine, WA** (Bill Bullock); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Congressman Rick Larsen's Office** (Lindsay Crocker, Rafeeka Gafoor); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Beau Fancher); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Jay Brandt (retired); Lynn Gardner, James Rector); **U.S. Federal Highway Administration** (Jack Lord, Sid Stecker); **University of Washington** (Matt Klein, Felipe Sandoval, Wenjuan Zhao); **Washington State Department of Licensing** (Doron Maniece); **Washington State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson, Andrew Wood); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Miller, Kathleen Mintz, Gordon Rogers)

Current event updates

Abid Sivic updated the group on the B.C. Ministry of Transportation (MOT) project to expand the border wait time Advanced Traveler Information System (ATIS) to B.C. Highway 13 and B.C. Highway 11. The agency is now in consultation with stakeholders and finalizing the funding contract with Transport Canada.

Jim Kohnke reported that the B.C. Chamber of Commerce had its annual meeting in May. Several resolutions were adopted. For copies of the resolutions, including one on the Aldergrove crossing and one on the second Amtrak train, contact him.

Linda Stewart informed the group that the preliminary draft master plan for the Bellingham waterfront project has been released this morning. They have finalized the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the site as well.

John Linde reported that the Pacific Highway and Abbotsford-Huntingdon crossing improvement projects are going well and are on schedule. The design contract has been awarded and Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) will be tendering for construction this fall.

Bruce Agnew summarized the July 8-9 high-speed rail planning session in Portland, Oregon attended by numerous agencies including Amtrak, TransLink, and corridor municipalities. Attendees envisioned what a high-speed rail corridor would look like. Results from the session will be shared with the IMTC group.

Bruce Agnew also described the June 9 rail conference held in Vancouver and sponsored by Vancouver's mayor. A focus of that session was the continuation of the second Amtrak train between Seattle and Vancouver.

Bruce Agnew informed the group that the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) conference is this weekend in Calgary. There is a high-speed rail group as part of PNWER. Don Alper from the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) at Western Washington University will be chairing a border issues group.

Kevin Cook reported that the Canadian Consulate sponsored a three-day border and security tour for congressional representatives May 18-20, which included twelve state senators and senior staff from Alaska, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. He thanked Kim Scoville and James Rector for their assistance with tours of the border crossing facilities.

Kevin Cook mentioned that eleven university presidents will be meeting in Calgary Friday and Saturday as part of the PNWER conference to look at expanding cross-border academic linkages.

David Davidson distributed the newest BPRI Border Policy Brief, "WHTI, the Recession, and Cross-Border Travel." The analysis includes the northern and southern borders. Copies are available on their website: <http://www.wwu.edu/bpri>.

David Davidson added that BPRI is currently working on a project to develop a more usable front-end to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS) transborder surface freight database. Developers will be working this summer and they hope to have a demo to show the IMTC later this year.

Gordon Rogers reminded the group of issues surrounding Railroad Avenue in Sumas. After the installation of the VACIS machine and shed at the U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) facility in Sumas, trucks were re-routed and now exit the facility onto Railroad Avenue which was never designed for heavy loads and has been severely compromised from the truck traffic. The City of Sumas does not have the money to repair this road. However the Whatcom Transportation Policy Board on Wednesday approved \$250,000 for this project out of Surface Transportation Program Regional funds. Improvements to the road will now proceed.

Matt Klein reported on a project undertaken by University of Washington graduate students and funded by The Canadian Consulate. Kevin Cook was very helpful in setting up the funding. The project looked at cross-border regional infrastructure and included this region and the Detroit/Windsor crossings as well. The project has been documented on the blog: <http://www.goodsmovementcollaborative.blogspot.com>

Bill Bullock told the group that Blaine is applying for funding to improve Blaine's "Gateway" area near the roundabouts, and to tie into the existing bicycle/pedestrian path to the park and marina.

Todd Carlson reported that the next meeting of the WA/BC Joint Transportation Executive Council (JTEC) will be in September. A working group meets monthly. Issues currently being examined include a FAST program analysis, improving advanced traveler information systems (ATIS), and looking at greenhouse gas emissions at the border. There is also much interest in the results from the Aldergrove/Lynden assessment recently completed. Other issues include linking CVISN and the B.C. Weigh-to-Go programs, and examining opportunities for Seattle harbor to Vancouver harbor air connections. Also being discussed is the \$16-17 million of Coordinated Border Infrastructure (CBI) funds available.

Sid Stecker introduced Jack Lord as the U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) statewide Planner.

Jack Lord responded that he has been in the state for a month and has an interest in border issues, having come from New Mexico where he worked with state agencies on southern border concerns.

Lynn Gardner attended an international trade conference where CBP Commissioner Bersin discussed ideas for changes to land border operations. They also covered issues of collaboration and transparency. Discussion at the conference also covered how CBP is enhancing their core strategies with radio frequency identification (RFID) and other technologies to help push the borders back and expedite inspection for vetted cargo and travelers. The goal is to protect passengers and cargo but CBP must also develop better risk assessments to not waste time and resources where there is no risk. CBP realizes the big part they play in protecting the economic vitality of the United States and will be working to help expedite legitimate cross-border trade.

Lynn Gardner said he expects to see some changes in the near future. Next week peers in regional field offices will be discussing ways to improve risk assessment.

James Rector reported that testing of lane equipment at Peace Arch will occur in August. By the middle of August CBP hopes to move out of the old Peace Arch facility and into the new building, and testing booth computers to run cars through the new lanes. He noted the next four weeks will be hectic as there will be traffic changes during busy summer traffic. There will be a bypass lane to use staggered primary booths in the new secondary area, and a NEXUS lane available as well. The hope is to have eight booths open in early August.

James Rector said that agencies and U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) have looked at five different properties in Blaine for the NEXUS/FAST enrollment center move. In the next few weeks a location will be determined, and the hope is to move the enrollment center to its new location by the end of the year.

Todd Carlson asked why the center is being moved. James Rector responded that it will be easier for people to park and access the center, and easier for CBP not to have people moving around a secured facility. However they need a facility that has room for truck parking, since it will also be the FAST driver enrollment center as well.

David Davidson raised the issue of an environmental impact statement (EIS) meeting CBP is hosting Monday night in Bellingham. James Rector replied that this is a CBP headquarters initiative.

Melissa Miller asked anyone on the Steering Committee who hasn't yet received a 2010 IMTC Resource Manual to contact her, and she will make sure copies are sent.

Hugh Conroy updated the group on the Border Wait Time group technology testing. Tests of several technologies have started at Pacific Highway and will continue for a 30-day period. A plan for auditing the baseline measures has been developed, and surveyors will be on the ground for one or two weeks manually collecting wait-time samples. A meeting will be held in July to review progress to date.

Project updates

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

Hugh Conroy reviewed the formation of this project, funded by Transport Canada, FHWA, and WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) is finalizing its agreement with Transport Canada.

Melissa Miller summarized a meeting of the project advisory team, which discussed current system limitations and requested improvements, reviewed a concept of operations for the project, went over a feedback survey for users to discuss the existing warehouse and recommended improvements, and what elements need to be included in a request for proposals (RFP) to be finalized by the end of

the month. She asked all Steering Committee members to complete the feedback survey, even if they don't currently use the data warehouse.

Hugh Conroy added that the new warehouse will store more raw data. One advisory team discussion pondered the notion of having the site independently calculate wait times to compare to the reported times. It is also an opportunity to improve the database structure, the data sharing system, and of course system performance and speed.

An ongoing issue is how the ATIS systems will detect NEXUS lane traffic. At Pacific Highway and the new U.S. facility at Peace Arch, any lane can be a NEXUS lane, which will affect the wait time system. The advisory team suggested working with inspection agencies and GSA to see if there is a way to determine lane status so that it can be incorporated into the wait time calculations.

Doron Maniece asked if data are collected on the type of documentation presented at the booths. Hugh Conroy responded that the warehouse does not collect this but CBP and CBSA do.

James Rector replied that they see approximately 60-120 enhanced drivers licenses (EDL) a day. About 70 to 80 percent of folks use passports which must be swiped and so take longer to process. Documents with RFID bring down inspection time to as low as ten seconds, so they do make a difference.

Cascade Gateway Border Circulation Analysis

Hugh Conroy reported that the draft FAST technical report has been emailed to the Steering Committee for review. Any comments should be sent to WCOG. A NEXUS draft technical report will be emailed shortly. The NEXUS report is pending results from a Border Wizard analysis of adding a NEXUS lane at Lynden/Aldergrove, although the assumptions being used in the model should first be reviewed with inspection agencies before being distributed.

Hugh Conroy summarized a meeting of a subset of project stakeholders to discuss evaluating the cross-border freight model. A recent analysis of the previous tool revealed gaps in the border choice model and how border crossing choice was assigned. Transport Canada is supporting a project to improve a cross-border freight forecasting model and has contributed \$100,000 to the project.

Chris Hoff described an analysis run on previous cross-border freight volume forecasts, reviewing one in 2002 (commodity-based forecast), and 2004 (industry-based), and a regression model developed in 2000. All three used different methods to forecast commercial vehicle traffic, and all three turned out to be inaccurate.

Funds from the Gateways and Borders program of Transport Canada will be used to update the border crossing model, as Transport Canada's contribution to the Border Circulation Analysis. A terms of reference has been developed and is now going through the Transport Canada contracting process. The goal is to start the project in September. The project will develop commercial vehicle forecasts and five scenarios. A technical advisory team will continue to meet to discuss the initiative.

Hugh Conroy added that since past methods were not accurate, a part of this effort will be looking to understand what went wrong with previous methods and what variables need to be evaluated.

Louise Yako asked if any one model was more accurate than others. Chris Hoff replied that all of them were off. This is partially because they are a product of their time, based on 1990-2000 trade growth which showed a straight line increase in cross-border commercial volume.

2002 trip rates went into the binational model, so the new model needs to understand why trip rates changed, and what the former models lacked.

Cross-border road network

Hugh Conroy reviewed the revised cross-border road network (included in the meeting packet). The network was identified by assigning trip data from the 2009 IMTC Commercial Vehicle Operations Evaluation survey in the cross-border model, and reviewing with regional agencies. Some are future routes to be developed as east-west connectors between ports.

Orange dots have been added to show forecasted congestion points based on TransLink and Whatcom County models' 2021 and 2032 no-build scenarios. South of the border only downtown Bellingham's I-5 shows forecasted congestion issues, although Guide Meridian likely needs to be updated. North of the border there are numerous points. The purpose of this map is to illustrate where regional investments in the network will improve cross-border trade and mobility, and thus are projects of significance to both Washington and British Columbia.

Peace Arch/Douglas Errant Trucks

Hugh Conroy informed the group that an evaluation of how many errant trucks arrive northbound and southbound at the Peace Arch/Douglas crossings is underway. CBP and CBSA will be logging the number of trucks that arrive at the ports, what time of day, and other issues so that the group can understand the scope of the problem. Current estimates are that an average of ten trucks a day erroneously arrive at the passenger-only ports-of-entry.

The problem needs to be better defined: is it a local issue or long-distance trucks? Is language an issue? Once better understood then the group can consider if and how to address it.

Aldergrove/Lynden Border Assessment

Hugh Conroy reviewed a meeting of the project subcommittee, where the data compilation for the crossing was reviewed. The draft report compiled trade and traffic flow data for the port and puts it in context of the full Cascade Gateway system. A copy of the draft report is available on the project website: <http://www.wcog.org/Border/IMTC-Projects/Aldergrove-Lynden-Border-Assessment/405.aspx>

The next task is to complete technical memoranda from agencies operating at the port including CBP, CBSA, WSDOT, and BCMOT. They will be assessing their current plans, and near and long-term, needs for the port. CBSA is going first, and others will use CBSA's memo as a starting point.

John Linde added that the memo will be completed shortly.

John Linde informed the group that CBSA has hired a consultant to outreach with key stakeholder agencies to make sure planning for the site is done in partnership. They hope to finalize a report by December 2010 that will include options for site development.

Jim Kohnke noted the recent CBSA announcement to restrict commercial access northbound at Aldergrove to permit-only commercial movements, starting this summer. He asked why the permit-only status is beginning so soon if construction isn't slated until much later.

Darryl Lavia replied that the space required for the temporary facilities, which will arrive sooner, will restrict the available space for commercial vehicle traffic. He added that over fifty applications have already been received. CBSA is processing those applications now and determining which companies will be approved.

Hugh Conroy asked if empties will still be able to use the port, similar to southbound processing, where permitted trucks as well as any empties may cross.

Darryl Lavia said all commercial carriers arriving northbound at Aldergrove must have a CBSA letter of authorization effective August 1st, 2010 .

Gordon Rogers asked about the lack of an end-date for permitting. Is this related to an unsure construction schedule or a permanent policy.

Darryl Lavia responded that the construction schedule has not yet been established. The end date for permitting will be reviewed in conjunction with the project schedule.

Jim Kohnke asked how long construction will take. John Linde replied that the project is in its early stages and while a notional schedule is being updated, the construction period will be dependent on the schedule from the general contractor.

Final report by University of Washington

Matthew Klein presented data resulting from the analysis of dispatcher surveys collected during the 2009 IMTC Commercial Vehicle Operations Evaluation Survey.

The presentation is available on the IMTC meeting website: <http://www.wcog.org/Border/Meeting-Info/59.aspx>

The final draft of the report should be available in the next few weeks. A link will be distributed to the Steering Committee.

Cross-border rail issues update

Andrew Wood provided an update of several regional rail initiatives. Since WSDOT was awarded \$590m in the ARRA funding High Speed rail had been declared a Mega Project. A new section within the Rail office had been established to handle project delivery. Andrew said that would enable him to concentrate more on Operations and Marketing.

Amtrak Cascades ridership, and the 2010 Winter Olympic Games

There were 16 sold out trains during the Olympic games, and a 34 percent increase in ridership on the Amtrak Cascades. The service had its best ever February, and best first quarter. It has also maintained the increase in ridership and is looking to have its best ever second quarter.

The first train had an average daily ridership of 149, up from 122 in 2009. The second train is up to an average 83 people per day, above the 60 it was anticipated needed to demonstrate sustainability.

Ridership is up 13.9 percent overall from last year. Revenue has also increased. Because the service north of Seattle is funded entirely by the State, WSDOT manages the subsidies. In 2008, 46 percent of the operating costs were recovered at the fare box. Last year fare box recovery increased to 54 percent. This is far higher than commuter rail or transit which has around 11 percent fare box recovery.

South of Seattle, rail costs are shared between the State and Amtrak. However with the new high-speed rail funding, the State will have to be 100 percent responsible, which means a likely increase of \$4-8 million (USD) in operating costs.

High-speed rail stimulus funding

WSDOT was awarded funding for eleven projects for the Amtrak Cascades out of the high-speed rail stimulus package. All of them are "corridor" projects, not individual, which require more work (i.e. NEPA certification, etc.). Once the NEPA process goes through then the projects will begin.

All of the projects are south of Seattle. The Track 2 projects that were north of Seattle were not funded. The funded projects will lead to an additional round-trip train between Seattle and Portland. It will also improve on-time performance, increasing it from 62 percent average on-time reliability to 88 percent.

Of the eleven projects, one is in Everett and will assist the second Seattle – Vancouver train. A second will re-signal the entire corridor.

Of the original \$8 billion, not all funding was issued. \$115 million remains and so there has been a second call for projects, split for planning and projects. WSDOT submitted six projects, three in each category. Submitted projects include extending the siding in Mt. Vernon. There are two planning projects for this region, including completing the corridor NEPA which is necessary for four round trips between Seattle and Vancouver. This has to be in place before funding can be secured, and this is the last of the planning money available.

Bruce Agnew commented that it is critical to get Canadian political support for these initiatives. The goal is to have four round trip trains between Seattle and Vancouver. He asked if it is possible to use CBI funding for this if the planning funding request through Federal Railroad Association (FRA) doesn't go through.

Todd Carlson answered that it may be eligible as planning. He will look into it.

Andrew Wood noted that FRA does not accept FHWA NEPA documents.

Andrew Wood informed the group that another call for high-speed funding came out last Monday, with \$2.5 billion available. The applications close August 6 with announcements due September 30. It was stressed that all projects applied for had to be ready to go.

WSDOT is planning to apply for nine projects including the three applied for previously.

Pre-clearance issues in Vancouver

Amtrak has agreed to spend \$540,000 to improve Pacific Central Station. Station improvements would be required if true pre-clearance were implemented. The improvements are going forward.

Amtrak marketing

Amtrak is currently doing a survey on-board its Amtrak Cascades service to determine how many travelers are leisure versus business.

WSDOT has done a lot of marketing over the last year. In September 2009 they initiated regular six month marketing meetings that are open to all stakeholders. Good turnout has resulted in new ideas. Since the first meeting Amtrak Cascades has run a special with tourism magazines in Japan through the Japanese consulate. Japanese tourists make up a large part of the international tourism industry in the Pacific Northwest, and the ads focus on the “two nation vacation” concept.

There have also been print, radio, and television ads, and specials with hotels and other services. Joint marketing with enterprises like Sounders soccer games and the WA State lottery has also been added to the mix.

BCMOT is also getting involved in joint marketing efforts to promote the corridor and build second train ridership. A new campaign is planned for September.

Meeting with White Rock

Amtrak, WSDOT and BCMOT met with representatives from the City of White Rock on July 18 to discuss a White Rock station. Amtrak will be running models to see what sort of impacts on travel times, costs, and service such a stop would have.

Other issues

Bruce Agnew commented that a lot can be done with minor improvements, such as improving the manual switching of tracks out of Pacific Central station. However the train is required to run at very low speeds through White Rock, Burnaby, and other municipalities, so all travel time reductions will most likely be connected to improvements south of Blaine.

Andrew Wood commented that he imagined the BC government is being cautious about rail investments, as they wouldn't want to invest millions into the current track alignment if the planned long-term strategy is to move the line inland. A longer-term vision may affect shorter-term investments on existing track.

WA sales tax exemption

Hugh Conroy summarized the recent decision by the WA State auditors office that, since B.C. transitioned to harmonized sales tax, it is actually no longer a *sales* tax, and therefore B.C. residents qualify for the sales tax exemption established under state law in the 1960s. The original exemption was to encourage Idaho and Oregon residents, who don't have sales taxes, to shop in WA state.

However the issue is being challenged by regional governments that stand to lose revenue.

Although the ruling went into effect July 1 of this year, legal action is pending. Individual retailers are making their own decisions whether or not to honor the exemption, as some fear they may be on the hook to repay the tax revenue if the decision is overturned.

This is an evolving issue. As more details emerge they will be shared. Meanwhile the question is raised: will this affect the number of people crossing the border to shop in the U.S.?

Bicycle/pedestrian route through Peace Arch

Hugh Conroy reported that GSA is developing a cross-border bike/ped route at Peace Arch. The route stops at the edge of the U.S. facility and cyclists and pedestrians have to cross the park grass or else go onto the main road.

The issue should be discussed with representatives from Blaine, CBSA, and the park to see if a more defined route can be established through the facility.

September General Assembly

Hugh Conroy informed the group that since September 16 is the date of the WA Governor/BC Premier meeting, and because of the level of effort required to hold a General Assembly, WCOG is considering reaching out to assembly members individually via emails and feedback surveys this year as a way to update border stakeholders and gather feedback on current concerns. The last General Assembly was attended predominantly by government agency representatives, which are an important part of the group, but there was a noticeable lack of companies, chambers of commerce, and other industry representatives whom previously made up the bulk of the attendees at these events.

Kevin Cook asked if an evening event had been considered. Hugh Conroy responded that it hadn't, on its own, but perhaps if it were jointly sponsored with another event. The previous effort to have an information fair was a successful outreach approach but requires a great deal of planning.

FHWA CBI program funding expectations

Todd Carlson reported that WSDOT headquarters asked the regional divisions for projects last October. A \$72 million project list was developed which included IMTC funding. This money was available out of unspent funds from the original U.S. FY 2005-2009 allocations.

Additional funds may yet again become available as federal continuing resolutions are passed instead of a new transportation act.

Todd Carlson stressed the importance of having a current IMTC project list that he can put forward to secure funding for regional projects from the available CBI funds.

Todd Carlson noted that funding secured from CBI for this region includes the funding for the regional diesel multiple units (DMU) rail study, IMTC funding, and match for the border warehouse upgrade and BIFA integration project.

He noted that key projects, such as the Railroad Avenue issue in Sumas, was not on the IMTC project list.

Bruce Agnew noted that it would be interesting to analyze where CBI funding has gone over the years since TEA-21. It could be used to develop a cost-benefit analysis.

Gordon Rogers commented that it would also be good to see how the various CBI components (unanticipated receipts and continuing resolutions) have been distributed.

Hugh Conroy suggested looking at the project list at the next IMTC meeting and after two Steering Committee reviews, finalizing a new project list with the Core Group in October or November.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:05pm.