

# International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

## Steering Committee Meeting Summary

July 21, 2011

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/7-21-11scp.pdf>

### Meeting Location

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The meeting was held at Canada Border Services Agency's Douglas Port-of-Entry in Surrey, British Columbia.

### Meeting Attendance

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**B.C. Ministry of Transportation** (Simon Leung, John Schnablegger, Abid Sivic); **Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (David Derrick, Kim Scoville); **City of Blaine, WA** (Stephen Banham); **City of Surrey, B.C.** (Mirjana Petrovic); **City of White Rock, B.C.** (Peggy Clark); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **SmartRail Inc.** (Kenneth Jones); **U.S. Border Patrol** (John Bates); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Karen Graham); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Lynn Gardner, Pat Hinchey); **U.S. Federal Highway Administration** (Chris Dingman, David Franklin); **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

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Kim Scoville reported that the main issue for Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) operations continues to be the Cascade Gateway region's growth in traffic volumes. To mitigate the impacts CBSA has introduced its summer action plan. From May 15 – September 15 they have committed to staffing all lanes Friday noon through Sunday evening. During the week they will open all lanes between 2:00pm and midnight, in addition to NEXUS.

Dave Franklin described work at the federal level and through the Transportation Border Working Group (TBWG) to promote cross-border relationships across the U.S. – Canada border. He's attending the meeting to capture what IMTC has done right to help develop similar coalitions in other parts of the nation.

Peggy Clark informed the group that White Rock had a meeting with WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT), and Amtrak representatives to discuss an Amtrak stop in White Rock. It was determined that no stop will be added in White Rock in the short term. They are now receiving feedback from citizens in White Rock. She asked what the status was for Blaine's push for a station.

Stephen Banham reported that Blaine's City Council has expressed interest in the possibility of a station to facilitate inspection agency operations at the border. It could be housed in the old Blaine train station, which is becoming a liability. The city must decide to either use the structure or demolish it. He noted that the city passed a resolution in support of the White Rock station request several years back. Blaine will continue to lobby for a stop like many small cities are doing.

John Schnablegger noted that discussions in B.C. and WA government relative to the Beyond the Border Vision initiative has highlighted an interest in considering joint facilities at locations such as

Lynden/Aldergrove as a strategy to advance cost-effective facilitation of growth in commercial traffic. The B.C. – WA Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC) is making the issue a priority.

Kim Scoville noted that no discussion has been held about joint facilities internally at CBSA.

Gordon Rogers discussed reauthorization of the U.S. Transportation Act. There is no indication that the Coordinated Border Infrastructure program in SAFETEA-LU will be continued in a new act. However until a new act is passed, the region still receives CBI funds as part of continuing resolutions for transportation funding authorization. It may be 2013 before a new act is passed.

Chris Dingman added that it is a contentious time in Washington, D.C. Congress is split on whether to advance a new two year program or a six year program. Even if agreements are reached it would be another year before the program goes into effect.

Chris Dingman informed the group that they are looking to host the spring 2012 TBWG meeting in the Seattle area.

David Davidson summarized a seminar hosted with the Canadian Consulate in late June in Seattle that was tied to the Beyond the Border initiative. The objective was to ask key border policy analysts to develop ideas from our region to put forward as part of the work of the initiative. A copy of the proceedings is available on the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) website:

[http://www.wvu.edu/bpri/files/2011\\_Jul\\_BBWG\\_Seminar\\_Proceedings.pdf](http://www.wvu.edu/bpri/files/2011_Jul_BBWG_Seminar_Proceedings.pdf)

Kim Scoville reported that last week he sat with CBSA senior executives and distributed the Aldergrove technical study completed by the IMTC group. The report was recognized as a model for future business decisions and they look to incorporate that methodology into practice. IMTC and BPRI were discussed at length.

Karen Graham described the recent Building Bridges Symposium and reported it was a successful conference.

Lynn Gardner announced that booth 1 at Pacific Highway southbound will be replaced with a split level booth in September, which will delay traffic. They are hoping to divert FAST trucks and empties to Lynden during construction which should hopefully be concluded by the end of September.

## **B.C. Highway 11 NEXUS lane feasibility assessment results**

John Schnabegger shared a presentation showing design plans for revisions to the B.C. Highway 11 approach to the Sumas Port-of-Entry in Abbotsford which would accommodate the addition of a NEXUS lane. The design determined it is feasible to add a NEXUS lane going as far back as the railway crossing with the option of expanding the lane further back in the future. The 190 meters of construction will cost \$200,000 (CAD). BCMOT is ready to do the construction but is suggesting postponing it until after September 15 so as not to negatively impact summer peak volumes.

It is expected construction will last approximately two weeks.

Todd Carlson said WSDOT is continuing to work on reciprocal designs for a NEXUS lane northbound through Sumas.

## **FAST – after the southbound pilot**

Hugh Conroy summarized a meeting held two weeks prior, convened by U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) to discuss the next steps following the conclusion of the southbound FAST lane pilot at Pacific Highway. This is concurrent with WSDOT's interest in analyzing a second set of modeling scenarios that would also apply to the northbound approach and FAST lane.

Lynn Gardner informed the group that headquarters' permission to maintain the current alignment is on borrowed time. CBP headquarters will terminate the extension of the pilot scenario (where there is no designated FAST lane and all booths are open to all trucks) at the end of September. Since accommodating and promoting FAST as a program is a CBP goal, the port must develop a way to re-establish some travel lane privileges in addition to the privileges FAST carriers and shippers receive once reaching the booth.

Currently, despite there being two lanes for trucks behind the Duty Free approaching the U.S. port-of-entry, trucks typically queue down the middle, using both lanes as one. One idea is to make the second lane a FAST lane and grant FAST drivers an expedited approach to the lighted stop bar, as well as a weighted advantage for green lights at the stop bar.

CBP likes the idea of looking at solutions which would not require returning the original FAST lane to FAST participants since the lane is now used to expedite bus traffic and has improved NEXUS and general purpose traffic approaches.

CBP is working with BCMOT and other agencies to develop this idea and model the scenario. One of the biggest challenges will be policing the use of the lane, since there would be no way for CBP to know if the trucks using the FAST lane are FAST approved or not.

Hugh Conroy added that Mark Springer is looking to model the scenario and other possibilities, including the effects of a prioritized lighting system. For example, if there is a surge of FAST trucks and FAST trucks receive 100 percent priority at the light, it may bring general purpose trucks to a standstill. Such scenarios need to be considered before initiating.

One idea may be to have FAST trucks get two green lights and general purpose one green light in an alternating pattern.

John Schnablegger suggested allowing the inspection officers in the booths to control the lights during such times. David Davidson noted that the booths would need video feeds of the traffic since there is no line-of-sight view of the stop bar.

Hugh Conroy summarized that the modeling of this scenario will be part of near-term work. The next phase of work was also discussed at the meeting.

David Davidson explained that BPRI will be collecting a four-day data set of border processing wait times northbound at Pacific Highway comparable to the southbound set collected in February. The four day set will include arrival rates, queue lengths, and dwell times at the booths. The goal is to collect data on four nine-hour days, or a 3500 truck sample. The data can contribute to longer-term discussions on what to do northbound. The project should be complete by the end of August.

David Davidson clarified that the northbound effort is just data collection, no modeling at this time. An entirely separate model would have to be built for the northbound system, which would be part of a follow-on effort.

Kim Scoville replied that this initiative is timed nicely with perimeter security discussions.

Hugh Conroy asked for clarification from CBSA of any northbound processing changes, and a sense of where they see opportunities for processing improvements.

Todd commented that the Premier/Governor task force has an interest in this issue. Recently there have been times when the northbound trucks on I-5 have backed up onto the off-ramp and highway which becomes a safety issue. It would be good to have a better idea of what issues cause the backups for longer-range planning solutions.

John Schnablegger asked Lynn Gardner if support letters for the current alignment would be beneficial. Lynn Gardner replied he would look into that.

John Schnablegger recommended developing a visual model to show headquarters and JTEC so they can understand the effects of different scenarios on queue reduction.

## **State Route 543 signage update plan**

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Todd Carlson reviewed alternatives from WSDOT to improve traffic movement on State Route 543 and the approach to the northbound Pacific Highway port-of-entry. The signage and striping changes are intended to help the merging of duty free store traffic into general purpose traffic without blocking the NEXUS lane. To complement these strategies, jurisdictional definitions are being evaluated that would enable Blaine Police to enforce new requirements as a ticketable offense.

Stephen Banham noted that although the port-of-entry approach is within Blaine's urban growth area, the area in question is part of a federal annex and property of U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). Although within Whatcom County it is not part of Blaine so Blaine can't enforce traffic laws unless granted the right.

Todd Carlson suggested that as an addition to the proposed changes they may be able to consider an anti-idling traffic signal system like at southbound Peace Arch. This would have to be phased, however, since signage is expensive. The goal is to get the current improvements completed in the next two to three weeks.

Stephen Banham suggested that if a signal system is included it should also look at signals at the Duty Free to help alleviate that issue.

Ken Jones asked if the cross-hatching of do-not-block sections will include the D Street overpass. Todd Carlson said yes.

## **Peace Arch pedestrian route improvements**

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Stephen Banham provided an overview of the project to date. The goal is to provide a signed route for pedestrians interested in crossing the border on foot. The route northbound is not the same as southbound, since the southbound route leads through the U.S. port-of-entry at Peace Arch and the northbound pedestrians are not allowed to travel through the port at the same location. Therefore the northbound route will go through the park.

WA State Parks has had difficulty getting the project approved and funded given their cutbacks. The B.C. portion of the sidewalk needed for the route has been completed, and the International Boundary Commission has moved the boundary marker at the border in preparation for continuing the sidewalk to the U.S. facility.

It was proposed that agencies in support of the sidewalk project write letters of support to WA State Parks to move the project up in their schedule. Funding would still need to be identified for both the sidewalk and the signage, which would be less than \$100 per sign. The sidewalk work will be around \$40,000-\$60,000. He shared a signage plan with the group.

For bicyclists, they would have the option of using the pedestrian path by walking their bikes or they could possibly use the D Street on-ramp and off-ramps, since the speed of the highway from those sections at the border are 35 mph or less. This needs to be checked with WSDOT.

Hugh Conroy wondered if this would be an opportunity for JTEC since it would be a greening of the border project encouraging alternative modes.

Stephen Banham added that State Parks can manufacture the signs and the ones on Blaine city streets would be provided by Blaine.

Todd Carlson acknowledged that it is a great project for a small cost, and will put it on the JTEC agenda.

Hugh Conroy noted a sign on the border approach showing a person walking their bicycle. It would be great if such icons are identical in both directions for improving clarity for trail users.

Stephen Banham suggested a signage review at the crossing. He shared the image of a pedestrian crossing sign where the sign simply says "Pedestrian X" which would mean "do not cross" in the U.S. but means "crossing" in Canada.

## **Review of recent NEXUS marketing**

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Hugh Conroy shared pictures and statistics from a recent NEXUS marketing effort undertaken by Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) in coordination with inspection agencies and with additional help from Cloverdale Chamber of Commerce and Bill Reid. The effort included hiring students to distribute informational flyers about the NEXUS program to travelers stuck in long lines during the busy July 1/July 4 holiday weekend. Over 20,000 flyers were handed out. 75,000 flyers were printed so additional materials are available to duty free stores, tourist information sites, etc. CBSA has also decided to hand out flyers directly from the booth.

One box of flyers was taken from the Peace Arch lawn and remains missing.

Kim Scoville asked if the getNEXUS.com banners could be put back up at the Peace Arch and Pacific Highway crossings for the rest of the summer. Hugh Conroy agreed to do so.

## **Southbound ATIS – calibration and Hwy 11 & 13 activation**

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Abid Sivic presented an overview of the calibration process of the southbound advanced traveler information system (ATIS) for the border crossings. Once the final report of the calibration effort is available he will share it with the group.

Abid Sivic noted that a discussion should be held with CBP officials to discuss the underestimation of queue lengths occurring at Peace Arch due to the new facility lane markings. Marking the approach with better striping may alleviate the issue. However there is also a problem with the moving NEXUS and Ready lanes.

Hugh Conroy added that given the possibility of erroneous counts, the system may need to be more general and report waits of "15 minutes or less" or other such phrasing.

Another issue discussed is the lane configuration approaching the U.S. general passenger booth lanes at Hwy 15. The configuration does not allow even allocation of booths to feeder lanes. Instead, the far east lane goes to only one booth, whereas the other 2-3 lanes have distributed access to the remaining four booths. The result is that two travelers using different lanes will experience quite different wait times which both differ from the average time posted on the ATIS system.

Abid Sivic explained that one issue in calibrating the ATIS system at the two new locations (Highways 13 and 11) has been low volumes and little data so they are going back to collect more information. However the system overall is working well. But any suggestions for improving the system are welcome.

The new system and website are ready to be turned on before August.

Stephen Banham reminded the group of the incident last year when the northbound Sumas/Huntingdon wait times were wrong. Accuracy is a concern at these further crossings since people may make a choice to detour way out of their way, assuming a shorter wait. If they get there and discover the wait time is longer than expected, they will be unlikely to trust the system in the future.

Melissa Miller requested a better link between the WA and BC ATIS system websites and maps for easier use of both systems for travelers.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:00 pm.