



It matters how we get there

Meeting Summary

January 27, 2010  
Whatcom Council of Governments

**CTAG Members**

- Kathy Berg, Chair
- Dave Pros, Vice Chair
- Glen Hallman
- Chris Hatch
- Carole Macdonald
- Patrick Pollock
- Larry Wickkiser
- A.J. Garcia
- Carol Berry

**Technical Advisors**

- Ellen Barton
- Gary Davis
- John Hergesheimer
- Jessica Lee
- Maureen McCarthy
- Chris Comeau

**Administrative Support**

- Mary Anderson
- Gordon Rogers

**Start:** 5:15

**Stop:** 6:45

In Attendance:

*Members:*

- Kathy Berg
- Dave Pros
- Patrick Pollock
- Carol Berry

*Administrative:*

- Gordon Rogers
- Mary Anderson
- Andres Gomez

*Technical Advisory:*

- Gary Davis
- Chris Comeau
- Maureen McCarthy

Not in Attendance:

*Members:*

- A.J. Garcia
- Glen Hallman
- Carole Macdonald
- Larry Wickkiser
- Chris Hatch

*Administrative:*

*Technical Advisory:*

- John Hergesheimer
- Ellen Barton
- Jessica Lee

**I. Whatcom Transportation Plan**

A. Gomez: I listed the tasks and the timeline for each task for the Whatcom Transportation Plan. CTAG's will mainly be helping with the goals and policy section. I will use a blog as well, to exchange ideas. We will start working on this at the next CTAG meeting. CTAG members were emailed the current goals and policy section, please look over for next CTAG meeting; email me any comments. We will have a discussion about your ideas for the goals and policies section. This is one of the very first tasks, and the main thing that CTAG will help with.

The next task I will work on is to develop regionally significant systems; I will find out where the regional significant service areas are, such as shopping centers, parks, WTA stations, etc. Then I will map a shortest path algorithm. From that we will have a regional transportation system; we may be able to use that to develop a priority list for funding projects.

P. Pollock: Are we talking about transportation modes between centers or just roads.

A. Gomez: The plan will be multimodal in nature; it will have a transit component for the first time. For freight we can look at freight corridors, for bikes we can look at the trail systems and access to regionally significant areas from those trails.

C. Berry: Bike Ped Advisory Committee has identified bike routes.

A. Gomez: I am looking at routes between communities, not inside communities. It will be Whatcom County regional.

C. Berry: How far down will we get? Looking at transit access from Blaine to Bellingham, are we looking at the residents ability to access bus stops? Are we looking at the walkability to bus stops? What about significant barriers, when the whole community can't access bus stops, etc?

A. Gomez: That might be too local. We are looking at the current system, what's already in place. The idea is to see how we will identify funds. After we identify the regional system, we will look at deficiencies. For cars we look at Level of Service, LOS. For non-motorized modes, we may look at gaps in the system for the region. We will then run scenarios with our model. We will have a transit and road component, and I am working on adding a bicycle component.

I will do a comparison analysis to find out what would be the best way to target our funds. I will then come up with a fiscally constrained project list. We can also have a 'needs' list; a list of unfunded projects.

As I work on the update I will be blogging and have a newsletter to get the word out about the Whatcom Transportation Plan to various groups. There will be continuous opportunities for the public to see what we are doing in the plan before it becomes draft, in mid 2011. We are required to have the final document finished in June 2012.

CTAG members can give broad and detailed comments on the WTP. Tell me what you would like to add to the goals and policies. You can edit content or writing, all those types of input are welcome.

G. Davis: Whatcom County will probably be updating its Transportation chapter in their comprehensive plan at same time. There is some legislation may allow Counties to hold off on the mandatory 7 year revision update of the comp plans. However, that won't prohibit Counties from doing the updates.

C. Comeau: The Association of Washington Cities and Dept of Commerce are sponsoring legislation to back the deadline up to 2014 (from 2011). It has to do with Governors budget being cut by \$3.2 million; there is no money to fund the work.

G. Davis: We also may be coming to CTAG and asking you to look at our document and make comment. We will probably be following the same tract as the WTP and hopefully coordinating with WCOG staff.

D. Pros: What is the relationship between the two plans?

G. Rogers: The WTP and County Comp Plans are required by Growth Management law to be consistent.

C. Comeau: The City doesn't know exactly what the County is going to do with the recent planning it's done. Have heard you may revisit some decisions that were recently adopted concerning our UGA. For us the question is, do we engage in this work if we don't know if our plan will be consistent with the county in next year or two.

G. Davis: That's the UGA update that was passed by our previous council. There have been motions filed objecting to our requests to have it declared compliant with GMA, it will go to the hearing board this spring. There have also been requests to revisit with the new council. We don't know where it will fit in the process. It either needs to get docketed, or it can go forward as a non-docketed. It's not a done deal we don't know what the process will be; it depends on what hearing board says.

D. Pros: I thought that they said for Bellingham they had to have a detailed comprehensive plan to cover all possible solutions.

C. Comeau: We did that last time, and then the county decided they wanted a different UGA boundary. We decided to hold off on revisiting our work until the County was done with their decision making. Now that is up in the air. We are questioning whether we should spend money and staff time if it will end up that we are not consistent with the County.

G. Davis: There are requests in to change Yew St area back from Urban Reserve to UGA and to add in the Kytac area.

C. Comeau: Both of which affect our transportation system.

A. Gomez: If there is a small change it may not impact transportation system, but I don't know since I haven't run model yet.

C. Comeau: There are regional facilities that would be constructed in these areas, so there would be an impact on traffic. The Yew St corridor being removed from UGA affects Bellingham's ability to put in San Juan Blvd as well as a Governor Road spine. Kytac would extend Cordota up to Smith Rd, running parallel to the Guide; that has development capacity to serve 1,800 homes.

A. Gomez: So it does have impact. I can't stop my planning efforts; I am using the best available information that is available now.

C. Comeau: I think we will go with what the County has decided now in regards to Yew St., if the County decides to add Yew St back into the UGA, it will go into the next Comp Plan update.

G. Rogers: Nothing prevents us from updating in the future.

A. Gomez: We can make an amendment, if things happen to impact the plan.

P. Pollock: We worked on the Whatcom County comp plan 3 years ago; we had a lot of input on that plan already.

G. Rogers: The plan that we are beginning work on now will have little resemblance to old one in many respects. It will be electronic mostly, not many printed copies. There won't be separate chapters for bike, freight, highway, etc, it will be more holistic.

A website visitor looks at this plan, will look at it from the perspective of 'what does this mean to me', what do I do when I travel. We want the plan to appeal to the website visitor. The current plan is designed to meet Federal requirements; it is hard to get into. We want to make the plan user friendly to the system user.

K. Berg: I'd suggest an executive summary in the beginning; the plan is hard to get into, I'm glad we are taking a new approach, I look forward to it.

### **III. TRB**

G. Rogers: The Transportation Research Board, is a large organization that is part of the National Association of Scientists, there are 130 committees that do a number of things, the most important thing they do is develop a list of issues that need further research. They ask for proposals from the community on a big range of topics.

I chair a committee International Trade and Transportation Committee; I just went to the annual meeting in WA DC. I thought I'd share a couple things that may be of interest to you. We are still struggling with unemployment and a down economy. My committee and other committees that are relative to movement of freights and goods, and all the presenters think that the market will come back in the short term, rather than the long term. It might not look the same. Through the down economy, the global market has changed. People stopped buying; imports are down 30-50% nationally, while exports are up 15% and climbing. A lot of people feel that the trade demand will rise, but the nature will be different. All things that occur in the global market affect us here, perhaps more than others, because of the border and ports in Seattle and Vancouver. I think you'll see a lot of change in the freight industry. Right now

trucks are the cheapest method to ship things, because of this there is a lot of competition, the mom and pop operations are hurting.

Something that does potentially affect us, is the widening of Panama Canal, one of their chief economist gave a very detailed presentation on what they are doing. In response to that, ports like Charleston, Savannah and others are thinking that once that canal is completed they can get larger ships through the canal and that people may stop using LA and Long Beach ports. LA and Long Beach serve 50% if the Mid-West's goods flow. Nobody knows for sure if it will happen, however people are investing billions of dollars. Some caution investors, since there are no guarantees it'll happen. Once you get threw the canal there is no place to take the ships.

K. Berg: I grew up in Long Beach, LA area; I shared the freeway with all those shipping trucks. How is the freight moving now, and how might that change with the canal being widened?

G. Rogers: Right now about 50% of the freight in Long Beach doesn't stay in the State, it goes to mid-west. Ships in from Asia and is transferred to rail or truck. They spend millions of dollars getting the freight from the ship to the rest of the transportation system. They are saying that if we keep some freight trucks off the road that way, and reduce the amount of freight on the rail, we could put more people on the rail that would reduce congestion, however, it's not that simple.

Every year there is a chairman's luncheon. U.S. Secretary of Transportation LaHood said that we need to fix the limitations on how federal transit money is used, to free up that program to that more agencies can use the money. He made everyone in the room (about 800 people) promise they wouldn't talk on their cell phones.

### **III. Member Sharing**

L. Wickkiser: (as relayed to M. Anderson) WWU ordered engine and tanks for methane fuel bus; they will use a 36 passenger coach. That will take 2 -3 months to install. We are leaving on Saturday to go to Canada for the Olympics with 16 buses and 32 drivers.

C. Comeau: Don't have anything to report.

C. Comeau: I read that they are trying to get Canadians out of their cars for Olympics, is there anything local for people heading up to the Olympics.

C. Berry: I'll I've heard is to drive to border, park and take the bus.

K. Berg: I saw in Bellingham Herald, that a guy in Birch Bay Square is selling Olympic stuff; he is trying to organize transportation from Birch Bay Square to the boarder.

C. Berry: I remember in 1984 that there was encouragement for residents to use alternative transportation.

K. Berg: They encouraged residents to leave the area if possible; they encouraged employers to stagger start times.

G. Rogers: We have done some research here; a group of us went to Salt Lake City for a peer exchange. We talked to transportation professionals, we were there for a week, and then they came up here. We learned that ticket sales is a major determinant, right now US only gets 3% of total tickets. The average person buys 4 tickets, and many car pool, so we determined it would not be as big of a traffic problem as many may think it'll be. In August there was an event called the International Police and Fire Games, it was a big deal, but went unnoticeable, and that was in busy season.

I decided early on that I wanted to volunteer at the Olympics; they said I had to live in Vancouver to volunteer.

G. Davis: I already shared that the Transportation Plan rewrite is coming up.

C. Comeau: In terms of deficiencies, there will be areas with deficiencies, do they go on the list or not? What are you identifying and investing?

C. Berry: I'd like to address that, "what is a deficiency? And how can we address it"

C. Comeau: One example is, Sunset Drive, we just added bike lanes and widened it; you won't see those types of capital projects again. In terms of the matrix you are using to define deficiency.

G. Rogers: It's a policy decision, we need to decide where to draw the line at bad, what we will accept as a deficiency, since we know we don't have any funding.

P. Pollock: In business we have capital we can spend, we have lots of stuff we want to do, we put things on a list, and set a policy on why they belong there, however, once it got to list we see that we don't have capital to fix all. What level of risk is highest? It's against our policy, but we just can't fix it. Someone will have to decide what level of risk is acceptable for these roads.

M. McCarthy: TRB has an International Transit Research Board, last November I went to South America for 2 weeks, visiting 4 communities, to learn about their transit programs. I would love to give a presentation on it at some point.

WTA is asking voters for .02% increase in tax will be on the ballot in April. This will allow service levels to stay where they are currently.

K. Berg: I'd like to educate my community on this topic.

M. McCarthy: There is a grant program for bus livability; WTA is putting together a proposal for 4 hybrid vehicles.

C. Comeau: Got a message from someone thinking that the City is the transit provider, they thought there was a meeting on Feb 8<sup>th</sup>.

M. McCarthy: I don't know about a meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup>, I'm not sure what that would be.

D. Pros: I don't have anything, but would like to know if you heard anything about test for Lummi Ferry?

G. Rogers: Just what was in the paper, said it took 50 minutes. I think they'd have to modify it to do the run.

C. Berry: The student transportation program is continuing to work on bus pass encoded on student card, currently testing on 50 cards. Hope to do full scale testing in summer, then roll out in fall. Reminds us that technology is fabulous but transportation happens to real people in real time. WWU at waterfront on hold due to budget, I think.

C. Comeau: WWU and BTC went together on the Technology Innovations building, right now putting something very small down there.

G. Rogers: Revitalization in Baltimore took 20 years.

P. Pollock: Grant for Complete Streets, said that city's needed to have some sort of complete street wording, who locally has this on their radar?

C. Comeau: I have heard about it, in Bellingham, we have policies that address the same things as complete streets; they just are not called complete streets. We are already taking this approach. It will be interesting if they set up a funded account, there's no money anywhere right now. This will probably only applies to cities with 20,000+ residents.

C. Berry: Does that tie into towns where the Main Street is also a State Highway?

C. Comeau: That is a DOT grant program; they are targeting large corridors in cities.

C. Berry: I have seen areas in very small towns in Eastern Washington, where it was obvious that work had recently be done.

G. Rogers: There was a consulting firm traveling around the state, selling that program. They were showing those smaller towns what they did in other towns and how to apply for funding.

We just had a Full Council meeting, I talked to Sam Crawford afterwards, and he suggested having a joint meeting with CTAG at some point to talk about the work being done on the WTP.

#### **IV. Adjourn**