

It matters how we get there

Meeting Summary

February 24, 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: 4:30

Stop: 6:30

In Attendance:

Members:

Kathy Berg
Dave Pros
Patrick Pollock
Carole Macdonald
Carol Berry

Administrative:

Gordon Rogers
Mary Anderson
Andres Gomez

Technical Advisory:

Ellen Barton
Chris Comeau
Maureen McCarthy

Not in Attendance:

Members:

A.J. Garcia
Glen Hallman
Chris Hatch
Larry Wickkiser

Administrative:

Technical Advisory:

John Hergesheimer
Gary Davis
Jessica Lee

I. Whatcom Transportation Plan (WTP) - Action - Andy Gomez

A. Gomez: The first task is to work on the goals and policy section. This will start as a homework assignment and then we'll come back and work through it. We can continue or refine the current goals and policies, or change them, whatever we want. Each of you will pick a goal out of a box; take it home and work on it.

C. MacDonald: If we keep revising the goals we won't get to what we did to begin with.

A. Gomez: We update the WTP every 5 years; sometimes things occur that we never thought would, like the current economy. Goals and Policies aren't dependent on other parts of the plan; this won't slow down the rest of the planning process. Instead of me just putting it up, I want you to think about it, we will work it out together during a work session at the next CTAG meeting.

K. Berg: Early on I looked at goals and policy, the first goal is to educate. What is the mission of this plan for which we need goals and policies to

implement. What are we trying to accomplish, other than just meeting the Governments requirements?

A. Gomez: We have to be consistent with the transportation element of all the comp plans within Whatcom County; we can not contradict each other. The plan does not have a mission statement.

C. Comeau: Bellingham went through process and established 'Visions for Bellingham', we established vision statements, it is multiple pages in length, it had many contradictions within it. We don't have a mission statement, but we have the visions.

A. Gomez: WSDOT will incorporate our plan into theirs. They have their own goals and policies, we have more goals than they do right now.

C. MacDonald: How will the various plans sync up?

C. Comeau: The City of Bellingham has an adopted transportation comp plan.

A. Gomez: We will adopt our plan 6 months after the cities have to adopt theirs, which means the plans can sync up.

C. Comeau: There is also legislation to change the year to 2014 due to no funding. COB is proceeding with ours.

A. Gomez: Whatcom County has their own plan, each of the Cities has their own plan, and the WCOG, which is the local RTPO/MPO has their own plan. The RTPO meets statewide requirements, while the MPO meets federal requirements.

The WA State transportation goals [adopted by the Legislature] are: economic vitality, preservation, safety, mobility, environment and stewardship.

Instead of each of you focusing on all the goals and policies, each of you will focus on one. We will come back next month and discuss them together.

C. MacDonald: Goal will focus on what?

A. Gomez: It is County wide, both cities and unincorporated County; that is why we have to work with the local jurisdictions. Need to make sure there are no contradictions. The plan will go through public input, and will then be adopted by the Policy Board at WCOG. The plan will go to Olympia, WA State will look at RTPO requirements and the Federal Government will look at MPO requirements. WSDOT has come up with a reference book that compiles the requirements.

C. MacDonald: I would like to see the [WCOG] plan.

G. Rogers: The plan is on the web-site. In the box are goals from the WCOG's existing plan; look at the goal in the context of issues in Whatcom County. Ask if it is current and meaningful, is there a better way of dealing with implications of goal. Even if you aren't an expert you can look at it in your own way, with your own opinion.

A. Gomez: You can go online and look at the policies that relate to your goal.

G. Rogers: I think you'll all see the value in doing this. The major part of the plan will be on a web-site, all this will tie into what we are working on. Give it your best shot, any perspective you have will be great.

A. Gomez: You can look at the cities plans and do research on your goal. We will gather together next month and gather input. I will then compile your findings and we will view at April CTAG.

E. Barton: Even though there isn't an existing mission statement, it wouldn't preclude each of you from thinking about what the mission could be, it may help clarify your thoughts.

II. Scenic Byways- Carole MacDonald

C. MacDonald: In the late 1960s the Federal Highway Administration decided that certain Highways that should be designated as Scenic Byways for various reasons. WA State was one of the first States to start doing this. In WA there are 125 federally designated byways and 26 with State designation. Designation was to have corridor management plan, mission, and vision. If you had a corridor Management Plan you could apply for funding for signage, scenic lookout, etc.

G. Rogers: Intrinsic values was a required element in development of the corridor management plan, had to say what was important to the community about that corridor.

C. MacDonald: The scenic byways in our area are Chuckanut Drive, Mt Baker Hwy, and State Route 547.

G. Rogers: WCOG applied and received funding from the National Scenic Byways program in the past to come a Corridor Management Plan for the Mt Baker Hwy. That was a competitive process (we had to apply). About three years ago the funding process shifted to one of earmark, but now it seem sto have gone back to a competition.

C. MacDonald: There are 3 designations, State, Federal and All American. Some wording indicates that preservation is a bad word for some people. If Nationally designated, some people worry that they won't be able to cut trees

on their private land. A couple years ago I took two WSDOT staff to look at Artist point. One requirement for National designation is that you can accommodate buses. We have State designation right now. I am the volunteer coordinator for area. I am working on writing a grant to update plan, we would also like to hire a part time coordinator. There is also a volunteer coordinator for the Chuckanut Drive Scenic Byway,

E. Barton: I believe it is Laura Leigh Brakke, a volunteer from years ago.

C. MacDonald: Signage rules are very stringent on scenic byways.

G. Rogers: Funds can be obtained by groups to help maintain those intrinsic values. There must be a corridor management plan in place that calls out improvements that need to be done. For the Mt Baker Scenic Byway; installation of restrooms, marketing, a map, and signs were identified and these projects have been completed. The marketing grant was to teach businesses how to be more customer-friendly.

C. MacDonald: We would like to complete a corridor management plan update, but need to hire a consultant to do the work. Stewardship is a fine line of promoting tourism and keeping things the way they are, since that's why people want to come.

D. Pros: Is the whole Hwy designated, or just portions?

G. Rogers: From I-5 to top, you can designate a part of it, we choose not to.

D. Pros: Are there a set of restrictions so intrinsic value remains.

C. MacDonald: Not too many restrictions, advantage of have the plan is finding out what the community wants for the future. We would like to clear out the lookout area, the sign needs to be redone, and tree tops trimmed.

P. Pollock: I think Boy Scouts cleared out that area before.

C. MacDonald: Can't find out who really owns that property. There is a beautiful lookout, with a large pull out area. You need a corridor management plan in order to apply for funds.

D. Pros: Does it extend to preserving view?

C. MacDonald: No, I talked with the National representative about how people are concerned about property rights being taken away, she said that doesn't happen.

D. Pros: John Cooper said that if we want to maintain our biggest source of income [tourism], need to be different than where people live.

C. MacDonald: There are huge concerns about the balance of keeping tourism at the right level. WSDOT has certain responsibilities since it's a State Highway.

E. Barton: With my experience in doing a C.M.P. [Corridor Management Plan] what I noticed was that doing the actual plan, was maybe not the first step, what needs to happen first are partnerships, you can do those agreements and get a project done. The latest info I heard a few years ago is that States are less likely to fund the writing of plans.

C. MacDonald: The Chamber bought 9 acres; we will build a Welcome Center, we are applying for funding to build. WSDOT let their Scenic Byways Coordinator go about 5 months ago; so a bunch of volunteers throughout state are forming byways alliance for state. We will probably form a 501 C 3 and put bylaws together. There is a website as well, <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/localprograms/scenicbyways/map.htm>.

IV. Travel Presentation - Maureen McCarthy

Please contact M. Anderson, mary@wcog.org, if you'd like a copy of this presentation.

M. McCarthy: WTA did not pay for this trip, I went with the International Transit Studies Program (ITSP), the goal of the program is to make sure the US stays globally competitive and to make sure new practices are known. We visited 4 South American Cities.

In Guayaquil, Ecuador, population 2.6 million, 80% don't own a car. Two years ago the buses were all privately owned and run, 900 buses with 600 owners. There were no regulations on maintenance of buses or hours drivers could work per day. 25% of all traffic accidents were the cause of transit. The buses operated as taxis and theft was very high.

They now have Bus Rapid Transit and managed routes, 3 groups of individual owners report to system of 16 people manage dozens of contracts. Operators benefits, work 8 hour days, 5 days a week, with paid time off, one free meal a day, and picked up and dropped off at home. Buses are dispatched and on organized routes, contracts for maintenance, and stations are staffed by armed security guards. Two goals of the program were to reduce traffic crashes and personal security. This took about 3 years to implement.

In Porto Alegre, Brazil, population just under 2 million, they had more choice riders, had programs in place to try and get people out of their cars. Government was really excited to have us there, to learn from them.

Bus Rapid Transit is meant to make buses as much like a train as possible. Pull up to a platform, oftentimes a designated lane, have four doors.

In Santiago, the BRT implementation was so rushed and bad that the metro system changed its logo and color because it was too much like the Trans Santiago logo. One presenter said that it's a story that is not over yet.

BRT is 7 minutes or more frequent, almost always prepay fare before boarding.

Learned how transit can bring vitality back to downtown, had festivals and performers at facilities, crosswalk campaign "put a hand out to cross the street", and other things geared towards choice riders. People could pay a premium fare for premium rides, smaller bus, larger seats; it is a hybrid of van pool and fixed route.

C. MacDonald: How did fares compare to economics?

M. McCarthy: Subject of fares is a big deal, there is a tendency to look at things and think that it's better. On the flip side, the agencies don't have much power to manage business. Private operators can't change fares. If government comes up with a new rule or regulation, they have to find way to pay for it, can't really raise fares.

C. Comeau: Do they have reserves?

M. McCarthy: Yes, but not as healthy as ours.

I. Member Sharing

P. Pollock: Brought an overhead photograph of upcoming traffic revision, roundabout at BP Cherry Point. We are in the process of building a new main campus; it is a large three story office building and warehousing. This is a safety product, we have an over-pressure zone inside of the refinery, if an event occurred in the refinery, windows could shatter, etc. We are moving people out of areas, away from the pressure zone, so they won't be exposed if an explosion occurred.

Still have operators who run the refinery. All truckers currently get fully inspected to drive through gate, they will now be able to unload at warehouse, and won't have to drive through gate. The refinery has lost money for the first time ever this year. Oil prices remain high, China and Asia have own refineries, they use a lot, whereas in the US, energy use has gone down.

BP is promoting a traffic circle at the intersection for Grandview and Blaine Roads. It will have bike and ped accessibility and lighting, and will be the main entrance now. A lot of people inside the refinery don't like the roundabouts. I have been giving safety talks, I told them that compared to traffic Lights, roundabouts have 90% less fatalities, and 75% of crash instances are low to no injury. This is a single lane; do not enter if truck is in circle. With a traffic light, we would have many back-ups, and it would have been designated a Level F intersection.

What about big equipment coming in? We would shut down incoming traffic on roads to make wider path turn. There are 2000 people here everyday, Birch Bay has grown as well.

K. Berg: I heard about this from you and sent the info out to my community.

P. Pollock: Construction begins in July, done by end of summer. We own all the land so right-of-way is not an issue.

C. Berry: Nothing to report.

C. MacDonald: There is a new trail head at Maple Falls, turn left on Silver Lake Rd, there is an A frame church, to the left of the A frame, you will see the trail, which is marked. It is 3.5 miles out and back. It is beautiful. This is a piece of Bay to Baker Trail, connecting Maple Falls almost to Glacier. There is always someone on the trail.

P. Pollock: County built a bridge at old air force base, bay horizon, links to new neighborhood.

K. Berg: County Council voted for funding at Bay Horizon to build a park, playground.

C. Comeau: Did not get any money for TIGER grant. We are trying to get some money for one aspect of it, we need to rebuild Central Ave Bridge; it will be the main access to the waterfront for quite some time.

We have a lot of construction projects coming up. We are working on Northwest St, adding bike and ped improvements. W. Illinois to Marine St, by Tech College just got awarded. We will start improving Bill McDonald and 21st Street. Meador Ave will get bike ped improvements, going from a 3 way stop to a 4 way stop at James St, will add a ped bridge over Whatcom Creek. We just finished up conceptual concepts of Fountain District Urban Village.

P. Pollock: I have heard that people really like the ped crossings on Lakeway.

C. Comeau: COB was invited by WSDOT to submit grants for Bike-Ped safety; the two locations are Indian St up to WWU, and Samish Way for Ped crossing.

C. Berry: Hard to see pedestrians on that street at night.

V. Other

VI. Adjourn