

Transportation Technical Advisory Committee

Whatcom Council of Governments

Meeting Summary

July 8, 2010

Start time: 8:30

Attendees:

Gordon Rogers, WCOG

Mary Anderson, WCOG

Andres Gomez, WCOG

Ellen Barton, WCOG

Rod Fadden, City of Sumas

Mark Sandal, Lynden Public Works

Rollin Harper, Sehome Planning; Everson,
Nooksack

Kirk Vinish, Lummi Nation

Joe Rutan, WC Public Works

John Hergesheimer, Port of Bellingham

Chris Brueske, Whatcom County

Janis Marlega, City of Ferndale

Ron Cubellis, WCOG

Bill Bullock, Blaine Public Works

Becky Kelly, WTA

Brent Baldwin, Bellingham Public Works

Kerri Woehler, WSDOT

Geneva Faulkner, Sehome Planning

I. STP Regional Project Scoring and Priority Array

G. Rogers: Please provide your STP-R scores to Ron, as there is none from WTA, we will proceed without theirs. As a reminder for the July 22 TTAC meeting, we will be discussing the priority list of projects, top 20 for our region. It is a long range list that will be discussed by legislators during the 2011 session. This could be their shopping list for projects for next legislative session, or it could be simply an illustrative list to show the scope of needs.

R. Harper: Did you mention something about being ready to go in five years?

G. Rogers: There will be a final guidance letter from the Transportation Commission soon, things will be clarified then.

J. Marlega: Should we bring project ideas to the July meeting?

G. Rogers: Couldn't hurt, we may take August off if there are a lot of people on vacation..

K. Woehler: WSDOT is preparing some lists as well, we are thinking about state highway projects that may go on list. We are collecting lists of projects that will affect highways.

R. Fadden: On Sumas' project, if we were to rebuild Railroad Ave, we would like to turn it over to State, but that is a long process, it won't happen for quite awhile.

G. Rogers: Regarding the Washington Transportation Plan, the Transportation Commission will be holding a series of public comment sessions around the State. The closest is Everett. I am trying to convince them to have one in this area, maybe Mt. Vernon. I would like have a more local session here for public comment.

B. Baldwin: The Ohio-King off ramp project bid will be awarded on Monday, and construction will start this summer to improve the intersection, there will be a right in and out only at McDonalds. No left turns. That area has a lot of crashes. We will add a right turn lane where Diamond Jim's used to be.

J. Hergesheimer: We are close to final supplemental draft EIS for the Waterfront, almost done with master plan.

G. Rogers: Is anyone planning on applying for TIGER II.
[Lummi Nation, Whatcom County, City of Bellingham responded]

There are three grant opportunities, TIGER II Construction, TIGER II Planning and a sustainable regional communities grant, which is also a planning grant. The TIGER II Planning grant includes funds from FHWA and HUD. Given the different approaches of the two agencies, this will be a difficult process. A group including representatives from B'ham, County, Port and others is meeting this afternoon to decide if there is a project that fits with enough support to be competitive.

Several years ago the Policy Board authorized WCOG to take 5% off the top of STP-R funds for planning work. The STP-R and STP-E lists you recommend will go to the Policy Board for a vote next week, on the 14th.

[STP-R Project Scoring was finalized with the following results: Bellingham #1, Ferndale #2, Whatcom County #3, Lynden #4, Sumas #5, Blaine #6.]

R. Harper: Would Lynden allow Sumas to be bumped ahead of them, since they are only getting partial funding?

J. Hergesheimer: I didn't see a local match for W.C.

J. Rutan: We don't have any local money, but we used State Rural Arterial Program (RAP) funds. The criterion is that it's non-federal funds.

J. Marlega: What if we took \$25,000 off the top four projects?

J. Rutan: That's a policy decision, not technical advisory.

B. Baldwin: We already cut our project in half.

J. Rutan: Bellingham and W.C. are representing 40% each of the population, but we each get only one vote. At Policy Board they can vote on that. I have 70% of the road miles. I didn't submit a glamorous project; I am putting forward rehab projects.

R. Harper: I appreciate the brainstorming however I think that the most direct solution is to look at the partially funded project, Lynden. Part of the rationale is that the point

categories don't favor Sumas' project, it has no possibility of being multi-modal. We can't have sidewalks at the Truck crossing.

M. Sandal: Right now I'm looking at only having a million bucks; it's not up to me, it's up to my Council and Mayor.

B. Bullock: He's asking us as a technical advisory board to move it to 4 as a recommendation to the Policy Board. The Policy Board would then have the final decision on the ranking.

R. Harper: In the past we have as TTAC, moved projects up the list.

G. Rogers: It's important to know that when I go to the Policy Board I push hard for them to adopt what you have recommended to them, they respect you and your work to make this list.

J. Rutan: My problem is you are taking forward skewed votes, an example of 9 to 2, with smaller cities voting against Whatcom County and Bellingham.

G. Rogers: What has happened in the past is that once you open the door, it becomes an issue of personality, not the process. This is a regional program; it is not based on population. We are required to report on how we awarded the projects.

J. Rutan: I'd have to go my council, it's a policy decision. I'm uncomfortable dealing with the policy. We are the TTAC, not the PTAC.

R. Cubellis: That is what the Policy Board expects from you. An example was ARRA stimulus one, where the Policy Board was involved in the project selection and they didn't like it. I don't see this as a policy issue.

B. Baldwin: If I was asked to give up \$100,000 I'd have to go back to my Mayor and ask him if it's okay.

R. Harper: From a technical standpoint, the request would be of this body, as a motion and a vote.

M. Sandal: You mentioned that you looked at the criteria a month and a half ago and you agreed your project didn't meet all of the qualifications.

R. Harper: This is a route that comes right off a border crossing, it is used by many trucks each day.

K. Vinish: For those projects that we will fund, is there likely to have left over funds available for Sumas project?

B. Baldwin: Bellingham is already using multiple funding sources on their current STP-R project.

K. Woehler: There may be an opportunity for coordinated board infrastructure funds. I think there is policy within the scoring that we are doing.

R. Cubellis: This winter the bids were substantially lower for the W. Illinois Timpson project, there should be STP money left over.

J. Rutan: That money will go to Yew St if needed, which was the agreement at TTAC.

B. Baldwin: There are multiple funding sources for that project, I'm not sure which will be used first.

G. Rogers: It is possible for Sumas project to get funded if there is money left over from projects.

B. Bullock: It is something to look at; Sumas and Lynden only differ by 20 points.

R. Harper: Based on importance to regional system and unique circumstances I make a motion that Sumas project be moved from priority number 5 to number 4.

[Second by R. Fadden.

2 in favor, 5 against, 2 abstained

Motion fails]

K. Vinish: Perhaps if STP funds are returned the Sumas project could get first priority.

R. Harper: I appreciate that, but it may be premature to use that route. They are many variables.

J. Hergesheimer: I make a motion to approve the list as it stands.

Second: J. Rutan

[All in favor]

II. Enhancement Project Presentations, Scoring and Priority Array

B. Baldwin: I contacted S. Tax, state rep for our Enhancement project. She looked at it and said it's questionable for being scored as an environmental project if it is only a fish passage project. Since it does have bike/ped facilities; we changed scoring category to non-motorized from environmental. This is the main truck route into waterfront. Currently does not have sidewalks or bike lanes. This project will build new bridge, fully standard with bike lanes, lead towards sidewalks on Roeder. It is a flood hazard area. Replacing bridge will enhance fish passage. Currently there are three culverts. We will be lowering culverts to allow additional flow. At low tide salmon can't make it up existing culverts. The Port and Bellingham Bay Keepers will be doing some Estuary improvement work. This project is essential to their work. It benefits a broad range of

users; currently there is no transit route here. There is no State bridge money on this project now. Not sure if we could ask for that money, because the structure of bridge is not the issue, it wouldn't rank high.

R. Harper: I looked at the question of it qualifying for environmental, and because of flooding over roadway carrying pollutants; I think it would have scored well.

B. Baldwin: I went to three different federal sources on the environment criterion and saw three different answers, that was frustrating.

B. Bullock: The Blaine project includes creating several interpretive signs as part of the Coast Millennium Trail system. They will cover various subjects about historical and environmental aspects of the area. There will be 21 different signs. There are many visitors to Marine Park each year. It is a destination spot with the park and Semiahmoo. There is hope of opening shellfish beds to harvesting in the next few years, they are closed now because of contaminates.

R. Harper: Has the blockage on North side been resolved?

B. Bullock: Not sure about that area. Trillium development has to put in bike ped facilities; it will also have way point signs. Next project is the Peace Portal Community Trail, also part of Coast Millennium Trail. Parts of the trail have been improved, it is a limestone path, and not made to any ADA standards. On undeveloped right of way, we will build a ten foot wide bike and pedestrian path. It is currently fairly well used. There is a high density community area adjacent to the trail, and it is close to, and will then connect with the downtown core.

M. Sandal: Is TIB money available?

B. Bullock: Don't have it yet, but the project has scored well and the Transportation Improvement Board has visited the project site.

K. Vinish: Accident data?

B. Bullock: Don't have any.

R. Harper: City of Everson would like to acquire abandoned railway right-a-way for future improvement as a portion of Bay to Baker trail. This has been planned and discussed for over twenty years. We developed about 1.5 miles of the trail five years ago. The next phase would be to build the trail when funds become available. The current trail is very heavily used. This has a regional benefit. We have multiple letters of support. Had some funding support for this previously from the POB, but right now we are looking for funds to buy property.

M. Sandal: What's the plan for the rest of the area?

R. Harper: Right now it's just trail corridor. It could be constructed in the future as part of Mission Road. One objective for STP-E is to preserve abandoned railroad beds.

K. Vinish: Safety data? Support from Nooksack Tribe?

R. Harper: No safety data, I haven't heard from the Nooksack Tribe. In general they support the links throughout the system. I would anticipate some sort of crossing to Nooksack Tribal Housing. Those details will be worked out eventually.

J. Marlega: Our first project is constructing sidewalk 2nd Ave to Cherry St, closing the gap. Sidewalks are needed for pedestrians walking from the downtown area, senior center, and park. It will be a simple concrete path within city right of way. It is a busy area, now including the new Boys and Girls Club.

B. Kelly: WTA has plans to put in a stop at Cherry and 2nd Street.

J. Marlega: Ferndale's second project is to install a sidewalk on Malloy St. at the roundabout in the existing city right of way. At some points it will have to switch from East to West side. It is near the High School and housing developments, and also serves local parks and two elementary schools. There is already impervious surface; the minimum amount of sidewalk would be 4,600 feet.

K. Vinish: Lummi project is installing a roundabout to reduce crash injuries. There isn't a safe way for Pedestrians to cross Kwina. We are currently building a ten foot wide ped pathway that ends at Kwina Road. There are widened shoulders on Haxton. It is a skewed intersection; it's difficult to see cars on the road.

J. Rutan: This roundabout will tie into the new sidewalks that Lummi is building.

K. Vinish: The County is not supportive of having a signalized intersection here.

J. Rutan: It doesn't meet warrants; the County is supportive of the roundabout project.

K. Vinish: The project is in design phase right now, will be done with design by September. Have completed environmental and permitting. We will be shovel ready by September. BIA has talked with us about future funding. Our hope is that we'll get \$900,000 from BIA. We are asking for \$700,000 from STP-E. We can sign contracts this fall and construct next spring. If there are cost overruns the tribe will absorb those.

J. Hergesheimer: Looks like it would qualify for STP-R funds, as an intersection improvement.

K. Vinish: Our focus is safety and getting pedestrian movement.

B. Bullock: Looks like your funding most your self. Do you know the estimate for just the pedestrian facilities?

K. Vinish: Don't know.

R. Harper: Would you be willing to ask for less, for the percentage that is bike ped related.

G. Rogers: For the record, what is your request?

K. Vinish: \$700,000

B. Baldwin: How sure are you that you'll get the BIA money?

K. Vinish: Last go around, everyone who submitted projects was funded. I think it'll be the same this go around.

B. Baldwin: Who maintains it?

K. Vinish: It's a County road, they will maintain it.

J. Rutan: Will be nice for pedestrians and traffic calming.

K. Vinish: This is the number one project for the tribe. We've been delivering projects on time, which is why we keep getting funding from the BIA.

J. Marlega: What is the maximum amount you can ask for?

K. Vinish: \$1 million.

G. Rogers: The RTPO is responsible this funding cycle to make sure projects meet eligibility and qualify for funding. I see this as a road project, it would be different if this were a pedestrian project providing just those facilities.

J. Rutan: There are pedestrians there, but it doesn't meet warrants for stop signs, I can't put in a crosswalk at un-controlled intersection. I see it as a pedestrian project.

J. Rutan: We have to deal with the pedestrians at this intersection. I will only put in a crosswalk if the intersection is controlled it's the stop sign that stops the cars, not the paint.

R. Harper: Won't people be driving through roundabout, still uncontrolled.

J. Rutan: They will be going much slower.

J. Hergesheimer: Can't you put in a stop sign for much less money.

J. Rutan: I wouldn't risk my license for that. I don't recommend putting in stop signs that don't meet warrants. If you put a stop sign, you'll have high speed t-bone crashes. Haxton doesn't meet warrants for stop sign, nor signal.

J. Marlega: There's an example from Skagit County, the roundabout there worked great.

J. Hergesheimer: It seems to be in the wrong category. STP-R is the correct category.

K. Vinish: We are installing a pedestrian counter on the new path.

E. Barton: My request is for Whatcom Bike Month Phase II, this is an expansion of the project from 2006-2008. This work encourages and educates people about safe bicycling, and will expand these activities in small cities. We do outreach from January – June currently. With this project outreach will go through October. This project is regional in nature, we have held bike rodeos in all small cities except Sumas. This will allow us to do more of that. Because of our work we've been able to increase bike trips by 35%. We have local support; City of Bellingham has supported Smart Trips, as have the County, and WTA as well. This benefits underserved population, people not driving, children and seniors. It increases safety for those on the road. Increases number of bicyclists on the road, which also increases safety. A few years ago we saw VMT go down, in some areas crash numbers were down 12% because of that.

R. Harper: Does this fill a gap in the system?

E. Barton: There is nothing else that teaches people bicycle safety, fills the gap that way.

J. Rutan: Ours is a culvert project, it is hard to envision what needs to be there, so I will show this brief video. This will open up additional spawning habitat for salmon. It is on many plans, and is regional in nature. We have local and regional support. For the environmental project, loss of opportunity, it is greatly needed. On a narrow road, the culvert is from the '40's. This will help maintain habitat connectivity. A 12 foot culvert with a flat bottom will replace the small existing concrete culvert. We will install guardrails with shoulder widening as well.

C. Brueske: Culvert not flat, will install baffles. This is the most productive stream in California Creek basin. It falls through on other funding sources. The County prioritizes maintenance and fish passage. It doesn't qualify for maintenance. If project is done, land would become eligible for CREP funding.

J. Rutan: This is on our 6 year plan. We could have submitted a larger project. I submitted one that's 40% of original funding amount.

R. Harper: I appreciate what you said about selecting projects. I read what DOT says about vehicle caused wildlife mortality vs. transportation infrastructure.

J. Rutan: I'm going on the paper that says: reducing vehicle caused wildlife mortality while improving connectivity. If I knew that would be an issue I would have submitted a different project.

B. Bullock: I read it as preventing people from putting up fences, blocking corridor.

K. Woehler: Should we check if other fish passage projects have been funded.

G. Rogers: My perspective is that if sent to another body for approval, it could get kicked back. I would recommend that the project follows the logic that Joe is using.

M. Sandal: If there wasn't a road there wouldn't be a culvert, that's fish passage blockage.

R. Cubellis: Before I put it in the STIP I'd like to send it to Stephanie for preapproval. Or send it to Ed.

G. Rogers: If this group wants to do that you can.

K. Vinish: Couldn't we ask the question.

R. Harper: If that's not the point of this funding source then we're opening this up to many culvert projects.

G. Rogers: This will go to the board. If we ask K. Davis and S. Tax the same question we might get two different answers.

G. Rogers: Number 1 is Bellingham, number 2 Lummi Nation, number 3 is Ferndale 2nd Ave sidewalk.

R. Cubellis: Funding is cut off at number 2.

J. Rutan: I'll let the executive know how the City and County voted.

R. Harper: A lot of good small projects that won't be funded, it's unfortunate.

K. Vinish: I can ask BIA for \$1 million, I will call them on Monday.

J. Rutan: I think Sumas was ignored by the feds with the border crossing. I'm more than willing to write letter of support.

R. Harper: Kerri suggested getting on the Sumas project on the International Mobility and Trade Corridor (IMTC) project list.

G. Rogers: I will send this list to the board.

III. Adjourn