

## International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program Steering Committee Meeting Summary

February 14, 2013

Meeting packet available at: [theIMTC.com/meetings](http://theIMTC.com/meetings)

### Meeting location

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

### Meeting attendance

**B.C. Ministry of Transportation** (Simon Leung, John Schnablegger, Abid Sivic); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Greg Kolesniak); **Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Goretti Day, Sari Hellsten, Jake McRae, Linell Redmond); **Canadian Consulate Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **Cascadia Center** (Bruce Agnew); **City of Blaine** (Bill Bullock); **City of Surrey** (Mirjana Petrovic); **SmartRail** (Kenneth Jones); **Township of Langley** (Richard Welfing); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Marisa Ferguson); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Mike Bol, Terry Schulze, Kenneth Williams); **WA State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Fanucci, Gordon Rogers)

### Current event updates

Bill Bullock reported that the City of Blaine is going out for statements of qualifications for the redesign of the Boblett/Sr543 intersection which will include channelization and pedestrian facilities.

John Schnablegger informed the group that discussions are being held between B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT) and both Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) regarding an upcoming proof of concept at the southbound Pacific Highway commercial port-of-entry.

Sari Hellsten added that discussions about the next steps of the cargo pre-inspection pilot are ongoing. This concept would allow U.S. officers to pre-clear FAST and other pre-approved trucks on Canadian soil. The discussions will focus on next steps. There will be a Phase II of the pilot at Fort Erie.

John Schnablegger added that the changes already made for FAST trucks in the staging area most likely yield the maximum benefit available given the infrastructure.

David Davidson asked if the legal issues regarding the pilot that were discussed several months ago have been worked through. Sari Hellsten replied this is a work in progress but steps are moving forward to allow CBP officers to operate on Canadian soil.

Kevin Cook asked what purpose the pilot is supposed to serve. Sari Hellsten answered that the pilot ideally would expedite processing and offer enhanced movement of all trucks. However greater benefits may be seen in a bridge environment as compared to this region.

Richard Welfing announced the Township of Langley will be working on the intersection of 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 248<sup>th</sup> Avenue this summer, which may impact some cross-border traffic since 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue is a major border crossing route. Hugh Conroy noted this project should be added to the construction schedule.

Ken Jones asked about high-speed rail. Hugh Conroy replied that several meetings ago the group had an update from WA State Department of Transportation's (WSDOT) Rail Office. Kerri Woehler in that office has contacted Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) to ask about interest in a regional outreach session this spring in regards to the WA State Rail Plan, which is being updated in conjunction with B.C. and Oregon. If there is interest from this group than a rail plan workshop could be scheduled around May.

Bruce Agnew added that such a venue would allow for showing local support to address issues like the mudslides. It's an opportunity to engage with communities on both sides of the border to look at short-term issues like pre-clearance as well as longer-term issues like high-speed rail or new alignments.

Bruce Agnew informed the group that John Sibold will be retiring as WSDOT's Rail Director. Once a new director is found he/she should be brought to IMTC.

David Davidson suggested that the meeting could be held in conjunction with the May IMTC meeting date.

Bruce Agnew reported that the Cascadia Center is working with Pacific Northwest Region (PNWER) on re-activating an advocacy group of business and tourism leaders to push federal governments on issues surrounding pre-clearance. There is concern that voices are not being heard from the business and tourism perspective. They have also discussed a summer meeting to bring elected officials to Vancouver and the region to look at issues regarding the corridor and energy pipelines. This is being discussed with the Canadian Consulate in Seattle.

Bruce Agnew told the committee that May 5-7 is the Can/AmBTA annual meeting. Minister Keys and Minister La Belle will be there to make presentations on the Beyond the Border (BTB) initiative.

Linell Redmond summarized the busy Family Day weekend where the traffic volumes were comparable to any other statutory holiday. There was an odd surge of traffic, with Monday having

even higher volumes than Easter Monday. CBSA opened all lanes and at one point had three NEXUS lanes open to keep NEXUS waits to a minimum.

Melissa Fanucci shared a series of photographs of the Monday night surge of traffic, courtesy of Mike Haslip and the Blaine Police Department. She also showed graphs from the Cascade Gateway Border Data Warehouse showing the increases of volume and wait time.

Todd Carlson pointed out that this was an excellent example of the possible benefits of dynamic lane assignments – instead of having all cars waiting in a long line in a single passenger vehicle lane, while the bus and truck lanes stand empty, dynamic lane assignment (presumably controlled by CBSA) would allow for better border queue storage that fits the need of the hour. He noted that many Canadians seemed to come down to Bellingham late Monday morning, and ended up returning the same time as those who went down earlier that weekend on Friday and Saturday.

Bruce Agnew asked if there is a communication strategy during dates with estimated long delays. Linell Redmond replied that CBSA does announcements for all holidays, but this was the first time this holiday was held in B.C. so they had no idea what to expect.

Terry Schulze noted that CBP also has a public affairs officer and issues advisories.

Terry Schulze announced two NEXUS enrollment blitzes coming up to provide additional NEXUS enrollment center staff to complete a greater number of interviews and speed up overall processing time for new applicants. The first blitz will start February 19 through March 2, and the second blitz will last 90 days starting March 10.

Sari Hellsten added that national level trusted traveler program directors will be coming to the area to view regional processes and consider any further enhancements to improve the enrollment process.

David Davidson informed the group that the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) will be doing a survey over spring break with students to count Canadian license plates from Blaine to the Seattle Premium Outlet mall and casino outside Marysville. They will map specific zones of parking lots to repeat the same data collection at other locations or at different dates.

Gordon Rogers announced that WCOG is hiring a thirteenth employee to be a transportation planner and enhance WCOG's ability to model traffic flows throughout the county, including the ability to micro simulate traffic county-wide.

Greg Kolesniak reported that B.C. Trucking Association has been working with BCMOT and CBP on a brochure to demonstrate how the truck staging plaza works and address compliance issues. It is being held at the moment, pending possible upcoming changes regarding the pilot project.

## Project updates

### BC Highway 11 NEXUS lane improvements

John Schnablegger reported that BCMOT has initiated engineering studies to lengthen the NEXUS lane at Highway 11 beyond the railroad crossing. Widening is needed, but it will be difficult to secure property from the Agricultural Land Reserve and commercial owners. They hope to have a complete plan by September/October which would include what acquisitions would be needed.

He added near-term improvements have been completed but they still don't address the fact that the lane is simply too short.

### ATIS Assessment and Calibration

Hugh Conroy summarized a meeting held last month with project stakeholders to scope an assessment of the accuracy of the northbound and southbound wait time systems. The scope was developed and costs were estimated. However there is a pressing need to address the northbound Pacific Highway system so this will be done first.

Todd Carlson explained that WSDOT started the validation process on February 10. Using a mobile license plate reader they took time stamps of end of queue vehicles. Using the plate numbers, CBSA will match the vehicles and generate a time series of wait time measures to compare to the ATIS system measurements. They will also be collecting data on the 24<sup>th</sup>. If everything is accurate it will be left as is, but if they are off they will work on the algorithm and do follow-on research.

This stage is currently only Pacific Highway northbound and is working with CBSA to do an in-house matching of record data. A larger effort with all four crossings in both directions is still planned for this summer.

Hugh Conroy noted there's national interest in wait time reporting systems and keeping them accurate is vital. Therefore it would be good to develop a way to streamline ongoing assessments of the systems.

He noted that prior "ground-truthing" efforts were rudimentary. While this effort is similar there is also the hope to incorporate future inspection agency information, such as what type of lane is open at each hour to be able to attribute exit rates correctly.

John Schnablegger commented that BCMOT has been using GPS tracking devices for surveys that measure travel time on B.C. Highway 91. This technology allows for easier testing of their algorithms because it gives a time stamp for a subscribed user. If used regularly one can collect an incredible set of data for future calibration efforts.

Abid Sivic mentioned that three calibrations have been completed on the southbound system since their inception. When the national-level Border Wait Time Working Group assessed the system compared to their ground-truth data they found the loop detector system was the best system.

Hugh Conroy said this current effort is funded out of the Seattle traffic office which does change some of the funding for the future project which will be a more IMTC-driven binational effort.

### **2013 Passenger Intercept Survey**

Hugh Conroy introduced discussion on a new wave of passenger intercept surveys which is a stand-alone project priority in the IMTC project list, but also can tie in with the ATIS assessment with ATIS-related questions.

A passenger intercept survey was completed in 2000 and another in 2007/2008. The surveys collected traveler data regarding origins and destinations, trip purpose, attitudes regarding NEXUS, types of ID, etc. This new effort would again gather these data but also incorporate a set of questions about people's awareness and usage of the wait-time systems. A discussion with IMTC stakeholders regarding what questions to ask on the survey will be forthcoming.

U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has funding for this effort and is willing to put forth 50 percent of the total project cost. The other half will need to be found from non-U.S. federal sources, so hopefully either WA state funds, provincial, or Canadian federal funds. WCOG has inquired with Transport Canada and BCMOT. In-kind match is also important

WCOG will pull together a conference call with stakeholder agencies. Inspection agency participation and interest is key, since all survey work will be done in the border environment.

David Davidson added that surveyors in the previous effort were able to ask twenty-one questions in under a minute. Over 12,000 records were collected at all four ports-of-entry in both directions. Coordination with each port chief was needed.

He noted that planning for the summer effort would take place in April/May with actual surveys conducted in July, and results available in late August/September. Previous surveys were done in two waves – a summer and fall or winter wave to collect seasonal travel pattern differences.

Hugh Conroy suggested adding a subset of questions regarding the border wait time systems to be asked to a random sample, not the complete sample, in order to keep questioning short for most participants.

He also commented that technology has advanced since prior efforts which will hopefully make survey data entry in the field faster and more efficient.

Hugh Conroy said that a project advisory team will be convened to build the project and vet any questions to make sure stakeholder interests are met.

### **Communications Protocol outreach**

Hugh Conroy reported that the regional communications protocol status report has been revised to incorporate issues brought up at the last meeting. It has been sent to all stakeholders to make sure information is correct and to update the status for each key agency. A second phase of the refresh, if local agencies are interested, could be to work with Public Safety Canada and U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to see if there's any interest in a validation exercise. The interest from these agencies is to see how the protocol serves needs identified in the BTB action plan.

### **Update on Point Roberts/Boundary Bay wait time system**

Hugh Conroy summarized a visit January 16 of representatives of the national Border Wait Time working group (BWT) to the Point Roberts/Boundary Bay port-of-entry to evaluate the site for a future wait time system. Whatcom County and the Corporation of Delta also attended since they would likely be owners of the eventual system. However the level of interest from Whatcom County seems vague at best. They may be more inclined to permit the space to another entity who would own and operate the equipment, given that they don't have any similar hardware in the rest of the system.

Abid Sivic wondered about the purpose of such a wait time system where there is no alternative crossing. Hugh Conroy acknowledged this and said that from WCOG's perspective it is hoped that any system deployed ties into the regional border wait time system for data collection purposes.

Hugh Conroy added that this project illustrates the different constituents for data. The BTB is interested in performance metrics and sees wait times as a metric, so for that purposes is interested in the system. Plus, from the headquarters' perspectives, it is a top 20 port in terms of volume. In this area, the primary purpose was to spread demand across existing capacity.

John Schnablegger suggested that Delta work with BCMOT since they would need to put the information up on BC Highway 17 in any case.

## **WA-B.C. Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC) working group**

Todd Carlson reviewed topics discussed at the most recent JTEC working group conference call. Regarding FAST, the group proposes to undertake a northbound analysis now that southbound is complete. Next steps would be to analyze scenarios northbound in a modeling environment, and include such options as a pricing lane similar to the high-occupancy toll lanes (HOT) in operation elsewhere within Washington State.

John Schnablegger commented that programs such as FAST consume a great deal of capacity. Once subscription to such programs has high enough numbers this is fine but in situations like at Pacific Highway northbound where northbound enrollment in FAST is so low the capacity is wasted. This is where dynamic lane allocation might tie in. It is worth looking at a variety of options including FAST and buses together, a varying FAST lane by hour, or other solutions to better use the space available.

Todd Carlson brought up the second issue of JTEC's discussion which is improvements to the advanced traveler information systems (ATIS) at the border. WSDOT has a project out for bid to improve the SR9 and SR539 ATIS systems for the fall of this year. The improvements will add cameras, fiber, and loop detectors, as well as an additional variable message sign south of Lynden on SR 539 to give travelers additional information. These improvements should be completed by fall of 2014.

Todd Carlson added that I-5 work to extend fiber and cameras will be complete this year and provide a fully connected corridor from Bellingham to the border.

Todd Carlson added they are questioning whether to go forward with NEXUS marketing, given how much appetite there is for the program and the current backlog in enrollment.

Todd Carlson added that there has been a 40 percent reduction in staff at WSDOT which limits the agency's ability to do web-based or graphic information displays. However there is still interest in having an information piece on the website showing typical wait times for certain travel periods, especially long weekends. The goal is to have that component look the same on both B.C. and WA state websites.

Todd Carlson reviewed planned improvements on SR 539 at the Lynden/Aldergrove port-of-entry. WSDOT's schedule to modify the approach lanes is being coordinated with CBSA's facility re-design. However WSDOT is on track to go to bid this fall to start construction, with the hope it would be one construction season and completed in 2014.

John Schnablegger noted that BCMOT has to make some decisions regarding 0 Avenue and whether there is enough funding to make needed improvements. The project may have to be rethought and deferred until the truck staging area is complete.

Gordon Rogers asked if the new WA State Governor has been briefed on the JTEC. Todd Carlson replied that Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond met with Governor Inslee twice, once on state highways and another time on some larger projects. She mentioned the ongoing relationship with the Premier's office and BCMOT. However no agenda has been seen yet, and Paula Hammond's confirmation as Secretary is still up in the air.

Ken Jones asked about notification at Pacific Highway that NEXUS is on the left and not on the right. Todd Carlson answered that WSDOT still has to install the sign bridge over the roadway that will explain each lane. He added an additional information about the NEXUS lane location in Sumas will be incorporated into the city's new variable message sign, whose primary purpose is to alert trucks of passenger queues that block access to Garfield Street and the truck spur.

Greg Kolesniak asked about the northbound FAST optimization project. Since it will be a modeling exercise he cautioned that the problem definition will be critical and differ depending on whether you ask CBSA or WSDOT. He noted that from CBSA's perspective the problem is insufficient participation. But from the WSDOT perspective the issue is that there isn't enough capacity to waste. This creates a different solution to the same problem – increasing volumes by relaxing criteria, or by changing the function of the lane.

Greg Kolesniak noted that the pilot being run in Sarnia assumed that de-coupling PIP and CSA would have an impact on usage of the lane, but they didn't ask carriers how that would impact them. Such a pilot may work in areas like Ontario where participation levels are high but for the BC region that model may not solve the problem.

## 2012 traffic volume overview

Melissa Fanucci presented a slideshow overview of 2012 traffic volumes crossing the border compared against previous years. The slideshow is available in the meeting packet ([www.theimtc.com/meetings](http://www.theimtc.com/meetings)).

## Presentation: Regional Traffic Data System

Keenan Kitasaka shared a presentation (available online at [www.theimtc.com/meetings](http://www.theimtc.com/meetings)) on the Regional Traffic Data System (RTDS) being developed by TransLink to monitor traffic conditions throughout the Lower Mainland using cellular phone signals. A prototype is up and collecting data.

He noted that partner agencies, including those participating in IMTC, would be able to get administrative access to run queries on the database.

The final product will go live this spring.

## IMTC Cascade Gateway construction schedule

Hugh Conroy reviewed a draft construction schedule (available in the meeting packet) that shows construction at and around the regional ports-of-entry that may impact cross-border traffic flow over the next two years. He asked for feedback on the schedule and any corrections that need to be made, and will be adding the 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue project from the Township of Langley.

Bill Bullock suggested adding the Boblett interchange construction. Hugh Conroy agreed that would be a good project to include.

## Next meeting – IMTC Core Group

Hugh Conroy informed the group that the next IMTC meeting will be a Core Group meeting on Thursday, March 14. He asked for agenda items and provided a list of possible topics to discuss, including Bellingham airport's expansion and clientele, pre-clearance, and other issues.

Bruce Agnew suggested having a panel on air travel including Alaska Air and WestJet to discuss how decisions are made to serve a particular airport.

Bruce Agnew also proposed a discussion including bus operators. He noted the new Bolt Bus service is directly cutting into the Amtrak Cascades service between Seattle and Vancouver.

Greg Kolesniak noted that CBSA is working with BC Trucking Association's bus charter companies for voluntary passenger manifests and is expecting to present initial information on this idea shortly before March 14. Once that information is publicly available that might be worth sharing at such a venue.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 11:50am.