

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program Core Group Meeting Summary

March 14, 2013

Meeting packet available at: theIMTC.com/meetings

Meeting location

The meeting was held at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal in Bellingham, Washington.

Meeting attendance

A&A Contract Customs Brokers (Lynn Woodbury); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Greg Kolesniak); **Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Sari Hellsten, Tammy Rathgeber); **City of Bellingham** (Stan Snapp); **City of Blaine** (Bill Bullock, Bonnie Onyon); **City of Surrey** (Mirjana Petrovic, Ken Zondervan); **City of White Rock** (Dan Bottrill); **Cloverdale District Chamber of Commerce** (Bill Reid); **Member of Parliament Russ Hiebert** (Elizabeth Hull); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **SmartRail** (Kenneth Jones); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Border Patrol** (John C. Bates); **U.S. Congressman Rick Larsen** (Thomas Boucher); **U.S. Congresswoman Suzan DelBene** (Patrick Hogan); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Marisa Ferguson); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Terry Schulze, Kenneth Williams); **U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell** (Sally Hintz); **U.S. Senator Patty Murray** (Max Brown); **Unaffiliated** (Jay Brandt); **WA State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Fanucci, Gordon Rogers, Bob Wilson)

Current event updates

Ken Williams announced that Canada's Ministry of Public Safety and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security signed a pre-inspection agreement this morning.

David Davidson asked if this agreement ties to Border Patrol's NextGen efforts. John Bates replied that he has to first see how the agreement is worded but that this may assist the program efforts.

Hugh Conroy recast the question as whether today's announcement may indicate a broader resolution of pre-inspection that applies to rail pre-clearance and programs like NextGen or whether it is limited only to the truck pre-clearance pilot.

Sari Hellsten provided some more details on the announcement regarding the new Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. and Canada. This concept is something that has been sought by a lot of stakeholders for easing congestion. The pilot at Pacific Highway will be the first part of a broader pilot that will start in Fort Erie after this one is done. The Pacific Highway pilot will run for six months to test the concept of operations, which entails having U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) officers on the Canadian side of the border performing primary inspection of trucks in the commercial staging area. For the test of concept this pilot will only involve FAST trucks. There will be a continuous Canadian police presence at that primary booth even though the U.S. officer will be carrying a firearm.

Sari Hellsten added that the broader discussions regarding land, rail, and marine are still underway, but this pilot will test the general concept that may have broader outcomes. This pilot is planned to commence mid-May and will run Monday through Friday from 8:00am – 4:00pm.

A question was asked as to whether the truck will be stopped twice – once at the pre-inspection booth and again at the main primary booths. Ken Williams responded that the concept they're reviewing now would be that the second stop would be rolling, stopping just long enough to verify the vehicle and load have been pre-cleared.

Marisa Ferguson asked if the target date is firm and how sequestration may affect it. Ken Williams replied that it is the targeted start date but funding definitely could affect it.

Max Brown reported that Senator Patty Murray introduced a response to the budget resolution in the Senate Budget Committee that seeks to replace the sequester with targeted investments and careful cuts.

Todd Carlson informed the group that last Friday was the last day for former WA State Secretary of Transportation Paula Hammond, who retired from the WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) after thirty-three years. Governor Jay Inslee has appointed Ms. Lynn Peterson.

Todd Carlson noted that there is discussion of having an executive meeting between the new Governor and B.C.'s new premier this summer to continue the efforts of the Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC).

John Bates expressed concern regarding the recent budget sequestration and how it may impact border patrol issues.

Terry Schulze noted that there are a few bills in Congress to fully fund U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) and another to keep funding as part of a continuing resolution. The agency is looking to get out of its budget crisis. Easter and spring break are approaching and the sequester, which impacts overtime, will reduce available staff, meaning it will be likely felt on these holiday weekends with longer wait times. Last year for the holiday they opened all ten Peace Arch lanes and all six Pacific Highway lanes early. This year they won't be able to do that given budget constraints. With reduced staff CBP will have to manage a trade-off between adequately staffing the booths and adequately staffing the lobby.

John Bates noted that the furloughs coming from sequestration don't commence until April 1. That's when the public will see the impacts.

Jim Kohnke reported that an election is taking place in B.C. on May 14. The B.C. Chamber of Commerce annual meeting is also upcoming.

Sally Hintz commented that Senator Cantwell and her staff are waiting to find out what the impacts will be, but are working to support a resolution however they can.

Bill Bullock updated the group on City of Blaine projects. The city is going out for design for the SR643/Boblett Street intersection re-signalization and re-channelization project. There is also design/construction slated for Boblett Street pedestrian improvements. The city completed improvements along Marine Drive and H Street.

Hugh Conroy reported that a facility review of Point Roberts regarding the installation of a Border Wait Time system has been drafted but the working group representatives that came out last month have yet to make any recommendations.

Hugh Conroy informed the group that the next U.S. – Canada Transportation Border Working Group meeting will be in Detroit April 23-25. Of particular interest is the reconvening of the passenger rail discussion group. U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) availed travel funds for WSDOT Rail Office staff to be able to attend the discussion.

Project updates

SR 9 Variable message sign

Todd Carlson shared some slides of the new variable message sign in Sumas that will be used to redirect trucks during lengthy passenger-vehicle queues which block the commercial spur. When not being used for this, the sign will provide information about the NEXUS lane.

Todd Carlson noted the funding for this came from Coordinated Border Infrastructure funds eleven years ago designated to address Sumas commercial truck issues. Although it took time the solution is much better than those considered years prior.

Todd Carlson also showed images of new signage for SR 539.

Ken Jones commented that the NEXUS signs aren't close enough. Todd Carlson replied that they are working on a future sign bridge but since the cost is \$70,000 right now they will make do with some roadside signs that will be in around the end of March.

ATIS assessment and calibration

Hugh Conroy summarized the discussion at the last IMTC Steering Committee meeting, where there were plans to complete a larger assessment of the advanced traveler information systems (ATIS) at all four Cascade Gateway ports-of-entry in both directions. Since then, state research funding fell

through but WSDOT was able to move ahead doing their own more immediate assessment of the northbound Pacific Highway system, working with Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

Funding has been secured by U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to complete the traveler interviews component as part of a larger passenger intercept survey planned for this summer. The ATIS component of the interview will determine travelers' considerations of the ATIS system, and how they view it and use it.

Hugh Conroy presented an overview of the recent validation effort completed February 10, comparing ATIS-reported estimated wait times with actual wait times as collected between an installed license plate reader and CBSA's reader at the primary booth. WSDOT and CBSA joined 1,300 records and stripped the license information for privacy.

The initial analysis shows the system appears to be generally accurate in its reporting, however, wait times throughout the February 10 sample were generally under 30 minutes. More data was collected February 20 and will also be reviewed.

Todd Carlson commented on the importance of this data to customers, both the traveling public as well as CBSA, and how integral such data can be to planning at operations.

Chris Hoff asked if there is still interest in looking at southbound ATIS systems. Hugh Conroy replied that John Schnablegger has expressed interest in having the southbound system assessed as well. The southbound system has had a bit more calibration, and recently was analyzed as part of the recent upgrade to all four crossings.

Passenger intercept survey

Hugh Conroy announced a new wave of passenger intercept surveys to take place at all four Cascade Gateway ports-of-entry plus Point Roberts, both directions, this summer. The last time the survey was completed was in 2007/2008 and was funded by the Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) and conducted with the collaboration of multiple agencies.

This effort will refresh the data after five years. Results provide origin-destination patterns, trip purpose, where they reside, NEXUS-specific questions, etc.

FHWA will provide 50 percent of the funding for this project so now Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) is working with regional agencies to develop match.

Hugh Conroy presented a slideshow showing some aspects of the planned study. An additional component this time around will include questions regarding the ATIS wait times systems and how they are perceived. There will also be a bus survey component.

The last effort collected around 20,000 total records. Similar numbers are expected in this effort, which will run most likely between June 17 and the end of July.

David Davidson mentioned that the questionnaire for the survey is being developed now, so that if folks have a question they are interested in including they should send them to Hugh at the earliest convenience.

Considerations in planning for cross-border freight movement

Gordon Rogers presented a global perspective of freight movement and changes that are effecting the entire system. The presentation is available online (<http://theimtc.com/meetings/>).

Roberts Bank Corridor project update

Ken Zondervan from the City of Surrey presented an update of the multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional Roberts Bank Corridor project, which is now 40 percent complete. The presentation is available online (<http://theimtc.com/meetings/>).

NEXUS Program updates

Terry Schulze reported that CBP and CBSA are working on a NEXUS enrollment blitz that started March 10 and will continue through June 9. They hope to increase the number of NEXUS participant interviews to 144 a day and include 10 walk-ins a day. They plan to process 12,960 applications over the period of the blitz.

Tammy Rathgeber added that the next appointment availability date for applicants is in June. They are receiving approximately 4,000 applications every week.

Current NEXUS enrollment is at 132,000 for the Blaine area only. 30 percent of southbound Peace Arch traffic continues to be NEXUS users.

Terry Schulze also reported that CBP is working with U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) to find an off-site NEXUS enrollment center. They are now looking at alternate facilities and hope to close a bid on a potential site next week.

Terry Schulze updated the group on the Sumas NEXUS lane, which is now looking to adjust the hours of operation for the lane to maximize benefit and reduce overall wait times.

He added that representatives of the program from headquarters came out last month and reviewed practices, and saw what the regional office hopes to improve upon.

Hugh Conroy asked if it's possible to see how many applications are for residents living in the Sumas/Abbotsford area. Tammy Rathgeber responded that they don't have the ability to break down applicant location, but they hope soon to be able to break down applications and enrollees by postal code.

Terry Schulze noted that there is still less than 2 percent of the overall traffic using the Ready Lane.

Cross-border buses

Melissa Fanucci reviewed recent bus volumes at Pacific Highway and five year trends, showing a thirteen percent increase in cross-border buses since 2008 (data is in the meeting packet at <http://theimtc.com/meetings/>).

Hugh Conroy reviewed the current approach lane arrangement for northbound buses at Pacific Highway as an introduction to the issue of potential modifications at the crossing.

Todd Carlson added that the main issue is with the underutilized FAST lane northbound. From WSDOT's perspective that lane could potentially be used to also transport buses and get them out of the lane they currently share with general traffic. They are now evaluating this solution to get a better idea of its practicality and impacts.

Hugh Conroy asked if CBP still plans to process sealed, pre-inspected charter buses through Peace Arch this summer. Terry Schulze responded that CBP will be meeting with cruise industry representatives later that day to discuss continuing the program which seals buses at Vancouver cruise terminals headed directly across the border. These buses can be inspected before they reach the port-of-entry. This cut eight daily buses out of the Pacific Highway bus processing queue last summer. There has been some connectivity issues with the hand-held document scanners CBP used last year so there may be some changes in the processing procedure but they hope to continue it nevertheless.

Terry Schulze added that Disney will be adding a cruise ship to the region and will also be a regular cross-border bus service.

Cascade Gateway construction schedule

Hugh Conroy noted the most recent version of a construction schedule (in the packet) illustrating what construction is planned over the next few years that may impact cross-border traffic movements. This schedule will be continually updated by WCOG as information is received and will be put up on the website.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 11:25am.