

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program Steering Committee Meeting Summary

September 19, 2013

Meeting packet available at: theIMTC.com/meetings

Meeting location

The meeting was held at the U.S. Customs & Border Protection meeting room at the Peace Arch Port-of-Entry in Blaine, Washington.

Meeting attendance

B.C. Ministry of Transportation (Simon Leung, Abid Sivic); **Border Policy Research Institute** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Sean Averill, Daniela Evans, Jake McRae, Linell Redmond); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **City of Blaine** (Bill Bullock); **City of Lynden** (Stephen Banham); **City of Surrey** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **SmartRail** (Kenneth Jones); **Township of Langley** (Mike Stang); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Border Patrol** (Sean Monroe); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Geoff Reid); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Mike Bol, Jonni Galarza, Terry Schulze); **U.S. Federal Highway Administration** (Sid Stecker); **WA State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson, Tom Stacey); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Fanucci, Gordon Rogers)

Current event updates

Stephen Banham reported that the City of Lynden is pleased with the new roundabouts on Badger Road and there have not been any complaints.

Kevin Cook informed the group that the Canadian Consulate in Seattle is hosting a tenth border tour that will begin Tuesday and is called the Beyond the Border border, ports, and rail tour. People from all over the country will be attending to learn from the Pacific Northwest's unique situation and visit the land ports-of-entry, Port Metro Vancouver, the Vancouver International Airport, and the rail preclearance at Prince Rupert. He expressed thanks to all the agency partners providing tours and time for this effort.

Kevin Cook reported on a July 11-12 partnership between the Canadian Consulate and Cascadia Center and Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) to have representatives tour the region with a focus on Beyond the Border (BTB) action items.

Kevin Cook also reported on the July 25 roundtable held with U.S. CBP, CBSA, and the Canadian Privy Council's Office on trusted trader and traveler issues under BTB. This region was picked for this type of outreach, with Boston following on.

Kevin Cook announced that Consul Denis Stevens has moved from his post a year early after being appointed Deputy Ambassador to the United States. The consulate will know who his replacement is early next year.

Abid Sivic announced that new cameras are available for the B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT) advanced traveler information systems (ATIS) and will compliment border wait times.

Abid Sivic reported that queues over labor day weekend frequently extended beyond 8th Avenue, exceeding what the existing ATIS system can measure. The system can only estimate delay up to the last loop. They are now looking into what it would cost to extend the ATIS system beyond 8th Avenue.

Abid Sivic also mentioned that their consultants developed a spreadsheet showing the cumulative effects on the accuracy of the southbound ATIS wait time reportings with various NEXUS booth opening scenarios. This emphasizes the need to have booth status data incorporated into the ATIS system for more accurate reporting.

Hugh Conroy passed along an update from Dan Hill at U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) headquarters in Washington, D.C. on the booth status data project. The scope of work for this has been approved and it needs to be budgeted into the work and schedule of the IT folks at CBP. They also need to determine which public-facing server to put the information on for uptake by BCMOT.

Jim Kohnke summarized a recent brief filed by the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, the Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce, and the Northwest Economic Council in a case concerning the issue of whether a Canadian citizen seeking entry to the U.S. can be subject to expedited removal by CBP. More information is available on the Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council (PACE) blog at: <http://paceborderblog.blogspot.com/>

Hugh Conroy mentioned that the next Transportation Border Working Group (TBWG) meeting will be October 22-23 in Montreal, Quebec.

Hugh Conroy passed along information provided by David Davidson regarding a Cargo Logistics Canada event that will be held January 29-30, 2014 in Vancouver. More information is on the event website: <http://www.cargologisticscanada.com/>. A promo code has been provided for U.S. attendees. If they use the discount code "CLCUS1FL" they will get a 15 percent discount off registration fees.

2013 IMTC Passenger Intercept Survey update

Hugh Conroy reviewed a PowerPoint presentation (available on the website) of preliminary results from the summer wave of data collection for the Passenger Vehicle Intercept Survey. The presentation was initially developed for a meeting with the Eastern Border Trade Coalition (EBTC).

A tech memo on the summer wave of the project will be made available for next month's IMTC Core Group meeting.

Western Washington University's Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) and the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG) are developing the winter wave calendar for surveying in February, 2014. A meeting with inspection agencies will take place beforehand to review the prior wave and see what changes if any should be considered.

Todd Carlson was interested in seeing whether trip duration has increased over time, and if travelers are going further for recreation in the Pacific Northwest.

Chris Hoff wondered about the number of NEXUS trips being made for gas, and wondered if this was an example of being a victim of success – that the NEXUS lane has made it easy enough to cross weekly for fuel alone, and so now the NEXUS lane is populated with this.

Todd Carlson appreciated the responses to the questions regarding the advanced traveler information systems (ATIS), but would like to see 90 percent of travelers believing the signage to be accurate.

Linell Redmond noted that occasionally trucks back up in the truck lane and impeded the flow of passenger vehicles and park on the sensors. This means that in front of the sensor the lane is empty, but the sensor tells the ATIS system there is a long queue.

Bill Bullock added that similarly, the system may also display no wait time at Pacific Highway but that's because trucks block access and passenger vehicles can't even get to the border to join the queue.

Todd Carlson commented that if there's an option to check a box and get a passcard for those 40 percent who will be renewing their passports, it may be easier to get folks enrolled in that radio frequency identification (RFID) program.

Hugh Conroy suggested it's worth investigating whether a certain level of enhanced drivers license (EDL) attainment shaves off a percentage of wait time traffic and compare the cost of possible program subsidies to the cost of attaining commensurate improvements with infrastructure. In other words, what investment in EDLs provides the same benefits as new highway lanes.

Recap of recent workshops

July 25 Beyond the Border roundtable

Kevin Cook summarized this event that was held in conjunction with CBSA and CBP. The roundtable focused on two items within the Beyond the Border Action Plan: trusted trader and business travelers. One takeaway was how open to feedback and questions both agencies were. Local business representatives said the information was useful and appreciated the meeting.

Hugh Conroy commended the Canadian Consulate in gathering a group of diverse shippers to participate. The shippers illustrated the complexities of this region and using FAST with cargo. There were a lot of details revealed that the IMTC group isn't always exposed to.

August 28 Cross-Border Traffic Simulation Modeling Workshop

Hugh Conroy summarized a workshop held by Caliper, the vendor of the Whatcom County transportation model that WCOG uses. Over the last six months WCOG has been working to set up a regional microsimulation model using Caliper's Trans Modeler Software that is calibrated down to the width and turn radius of lanes. After a week of training on the microsimulation model WCOG and the consultant convened a short workshop to discuss how this model could be applied at border crossings.

He added that the model under development includes the road network in Canada around the region's ports-of-entries. The model could be used to consider alternatives by looking at lane-to-booth assignments southbound at Pacific Highway, or to model options for the northbound FAST lane at Pacific Highway. Paul Neel from WSDOT is interested in using the software to validate the wait time systems in the modeled environment.

The model is still 3-4 months away from completion, and the first priority will be to run a few high profile projects in Whatcom County.

Another needed input for the model's setup is a recently taken set of highly detailed aerial photographs that should be available next month.

Abid Sivic asked how factors of a border environment with stopping and speed issues affect modeling. Hugh Conroy replied there was much discussion about using similar examples in existing tools, like those set up for tolling environments. However modeling specific lane types like NEXUS cars, FAST trucks, etc. may require modifying existing tools. To address issues with a custom package may involve a large price tag.

Steve Banham commented that he had a hard time figuring how roadway geometry was an important decision factor in the cross-border road network as compared to signage and information. Hugh Conroy agreed, but noted that intersections and pinch points may have slight impacts that add up to the total transaction time of crossing a border.

Cascade Gateway construction schedule

Hugh Conroy reviewed the draft construction schedule available in the packet. This is a draft only and so any changes needed should be sent to him via email. It's an information piece for planning, that simply keeps all agencies aware of ongoing work that may impact crossing patterns.

Aldergrove port replacement project and associated highway updates

Sean Averill reported that CBSA has made a lot of progress over the last six months toward replacing the port facility at Aldergrove. They have acquired property next to the facility and expanded the scope of the project to look at the potential for commercial processing. There is now a defined boundary. Over the last few months they have been finalizing the request for proposal to go to tender, which should happen in the next week to ten days. There will be a forty day tender period.

The project should be awarded early next year and go into a design development contract. The hope is to have shovels in the ground next summer but the schedule is largely up to the general contractor. They are assuming an 18-20 month construction period.

CBSA is committed to putting a full commercial facility in place with commercial primary lanes and a warehouse and parking area, along with a full replacement of the passenger processing facility. This work is being planned in conjunction with BCMOT and the Township of Langley. WSDOT has also developed good plans for splitting travelers and freight south of the duty free store.

The port will remain open during construction, and the schedule is to be determined by the general contractor. As part of the RFP response the general contractor must develop traffic management plans.

Steve Banham inquired if the port's operational hours will change. He noted the eight o'clock start time is challenging to those working on the other side of the border. Daniela Evans clarified that there are no plans to change the hours of operation of the port, and that she has no data on the number of complaints regarding port hours. She added the commercial component is a big change for the port. They are pleased to continue to offer trade service at Aldergrove.

Hugh Conroy asked if removing the permit requirements northbound would be mirrored southbound. Terry Schulze replied that CBP does not plan to remove the permit requirement at this time.

Mike Bol asked whether it would be unwelcome as there is a concern in making it a straight shot to I-5 and an overused alternative to Pacific Highway. Hugh Conroy replied that a recent study showed the majority of the trucks crossing at Lynden/Aldergrove are regionally based and is more a direct route for local movements than an alternative route for longer-distance trips.

Todd Carlson added that a big piece on making that a viable alternative would also be fixing the congestion issues around the Bellis Fair Mall on SR 539 in Bellingham. That is a \$150 million fix which is planned but not funded.

Todd Carlson described WSDOT's plans for SR 539. WSDOT expanded and improved this route up to Main Street in Lynden, but was unable to fund the last piece to SR 546 (Badger Road). Recently this piece has become a top priority. The new Secretary believes this should be completed as part of the original plan. Improvements to the port have also been funded.

Simon Leung discussed plans for improving B.C. Highway 13. There is currently not enough funding to complete the long-term solutions for this corridor, but John Schnablegger is working with partners looking at what can be afforded right now to accommodate immediate port replacement needs while requesting funding support to develop solutions to meet longer term port requirements. The longer term goal is to separate trucks and cars.

Steve Banham asked if there are ATIS components in these projects. Todd Carlson replied there will be lots of cameras and signage added south of Smith Road as part of the project. Similarly additional components will be added on SR 546 all the way to SR 9 in Sumas. This project piece will take care of adding loops and cameras for the ATIS at the Lynden/Aldergrove port and along Cherry Street in Sumas.

Hugh Conroy asked whether there has been discussion about adding NEXUS lanes at Lynden/Aldergrove, as mentioned in the Beyond the Border Action Plan. Sean Averill replied it is in the project scope to provide a NEXUS lane northbound.

Terry Schulze commented that southbound there is a Ready Lane available at Lynden that can process NEXUS cars. Its hours could expand based on demand.

Summary of NEXUS enrollment blitzes

Jonni Galarza summarized the recently completed NEXUS enrollment blitz. Two have been completed to provide the extra staffing needed to handle existing demand. They completed 7,200 additional NEXUS interview appointments. That number doesn't include the customers coming in for lost cards or walk-in interviews. CBP is talking with CBSA to see if there can be another enrollment blitz.

Blaine's NEXUS enrollment center is operating at 100 percent capacity. They schedule 148 interviews a day but generally complete between 150-160. Seattle has 26 appointment slots per day. Their next available appointment is March 5. In Vancouver they have 44 daily slots. They are booked until February 19.

The next available appointment is January 20. Nationally they receive 1,000 applications a day. 25,000 applications are pending but that includes renewals, that don't need an interview.

Prior to the blitzes they could process 10,000, so the blitzes nearly doubled their processing rate.

Todd Carlson asked if moving to the new enrollment center will assist in the backlog. Jonni Galarza said it is a staffing issue, but the new building will provide additional room should they get more staff.

Kevin Cook clarified that renewals didn't have to come in for an appointment. Jonni Galarza replied that some renewals still must come in to capture fingerprints but soon those will be just sending out the card for renewal.

Daniela Evans commented that there has been discussion about an enrollment center on the Canadian side, given the percentage of Canadians enrolled. And there has been an increase through the summer of the NEXUS lane usage.

Jonni Galarza added that southbound at Peace Arch there have been up to three NEXUS lanes open at once to clear the queue.

Feasibility of NEXUS expansion

Hugh Conroy reminded the committee that the current IMTC Future Project List includes a project to look at a regional view of NEXUS – what NEXUS growth meant to overall Cascade Gateway traffic, continuing marketing efforts, etc. Clearly getting the word out about NEXUS is not an issue right now. He suggested data from the 2013 Passenger Intercept Survey be used to examine current trends and opportunities and then revisit interest in advancing a project.

ATIS-based traffic volume data

Hugh presented slides (see presentations) illustrating differences discovered between volume data being reported from the regional ATIS loop detector archives, and the officially reported monthly vehicle counts from CBP and CBSA. Steve Beningo from U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics had an intern compare the volume counts and brought the issue to WCOG's attention.

The discrepancies are large and hard to explain. There does not seem to be a specific counter that is misreading because comparisons between volume counts along a route are similar, yet the system as a whole is dramatically under-reporting southbound and over-reporting northbound.

This is important to resolve since these data are availed to the public. At the very minimum a caveat on the data quality should be added to the website at www.CascadeGatewayData.com, with further efforts to be taken to determine the cause of the discrepancies.

Todd Carlson added that this is important to look at, since WSDOT is using these data for plans of a northbound idle-free zone similar to what exists southbound at Peace Arch.

Abid Sivic noted that slow-moving traffic situations are the worst for data collection devices such as loops or microwave sensors.

David Davidson suggested throwing a video camera in the field and perform a visual validation of the data, pointing it to a loop location to sync with WSDOT's output and see what the loop detectors are reading, and BCMOT. He is willing to help set this up.

Beyond the Border – Binational Infrastructure Investment Plan

Hugh Conroy apologized that there was not time to discuss this. He summarized the topic, saying current consultations between states and provinces and respective inspection agencies are underway to update the second BIIP. BCMOT is in the process of developing feedback for Transport Canada, and U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is working to update the information in the existing BIIP. A draft of what could possibly be advanced for inclusion is in the meeting packet and pulls mostly from the IMTC future project list as well as longer term goals from the B.C. – WA Joint Transportation Executive Committee and WSDOT's project list.

The prior BIIP included only the top twenty busiest ports-of-entry. The new version will also include mid-sized ports and add ITS projects, and will be open for general feedback. It is hoped that the new plan will also include planning projects and not just infrastructure improvements.

Hugh Conroy reminded the committee this is not a funding document, it is simply a reference document used as a communications tool. Although most action taking place with the BIIP is at the headquarters levels of inspection agencies he felt it important to pull together regional feedback to have a cohesive response to the planning process.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:10pm.