Information sheets are prepared and maintained for each project currently approved by IMTC Program organizations for their 2013 list of shared priorities for Cascade Gateway border improvements. Information sheets are updated as needed and thus include a version-date. Current copies, inclusive of any changes to information below, are available in the future-projects section at theIMTC.com.

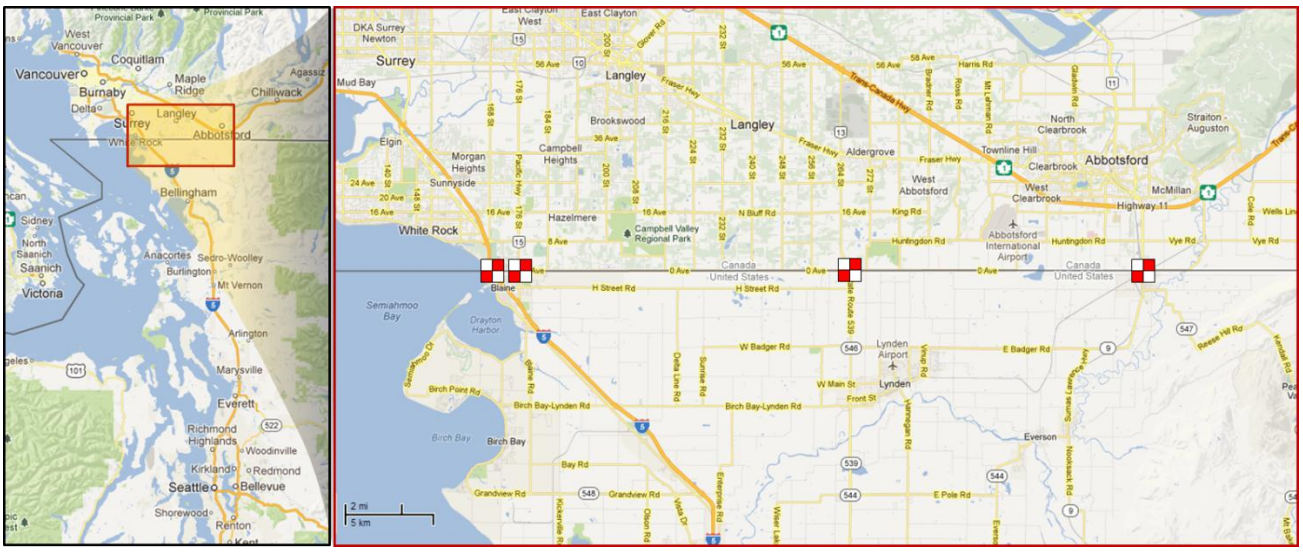
Cascade Gateway Regional Economic Model

Overview

This project will acquire a regional economic modeling capability to estimate the relative benefits of transportation and border-system investment and policy decisions—on both sides of the Cascade Gateway. Model coverage will include U.S. and Canadian economic analysis zones on both sides of this important border gateway.

Location

The map below shows the border crossings, related approach roads, and border-region road network of the Cascade Gateway –the center of the project geography.



Why this project is needed

Transportation systems directly serve both mobility and economic activity. Cross-border transportation systems also serve international trade. While objective cost-benefit justification is important for investment decisions, good data and tools for conducting such assessments are often not available. An added challenge in a border region is that the orientation of each country's economic differs in geographic scale and time frame.

In the last few years federal agencies have increased emphasis on performance-based project selection and project management. With regard to the U.S.-Canada border, numerous performance measures have been integrated into the *Beyond the Border Action Plan* (BtB). Given these trends in high-level policy direction there is an increased expectation, and thus a regional need, to greatly improve the capacity to generate cost-benefit assessments and quantify relationships between system measures (ex. traffic volume & capacity), investment and policy options (ex. infrastructure, operational subsidies), and forecast impact on broader economic and policy outcomes (like employment, and trade).

Results

This project will consist of coordinated evaluation and acquisition of a regional economic modeling capability that will serve the Cascade Gateway binational region. While several options exist, regional U.S. and Canadian stakeholders will cooperatively evaluate alternatives and assess the sufficiency of blending cross-border data and other issues possibly associated with analysis in binational economic geography. There is also the possibility of pursuing a multi-agency acquisition inclusive of state and provincial agencies, federal agency offices, and regional academic institutions.

Application to other IMTC projects

This project will have direct connections to other current priority IMTC projects. These include:

- Circulation Analysis Phase II
- Passenger and freight survey efforts
- Evaluation of investments for I-5 Exit 274
- WA Hwy 539—Lynden to H St widening

Estimated project schedule

Coordinated selection and acquisition of an economic modeling solution is estimated to take four months. Probable need to aggregate and prepare underlying data is estimated to take three months. Establishing the office(s) that will obtain supplemental training and maintain capacity for performing analysis is estimated to take three – five months.

Cost

Depending on the solution chosen and needs for training and data acquisition, this project is estimated to cost between $200,000 and $500,000 for five years (including training and staff time for operation). Pricing in this industry is changing however as regional data maintenance is moving to cloud-based subscription arrangements as well as recently typical user-licenses.

This project is not currently funded.

Administration, funding, and partnerships

In addition to a strong interest by the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG), other agencies who have expressed an interest in acquiring a regional economic modeling capability include Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Transport Canada (TC), and Western Washington University (WWU). These and other agencies will continue to be engaged as potential partners as funding opportunities are explored.

A regional economic model focused on transportation investments can be very well complemented by output from regional traffic models. Given WCOG's existing investments in a cross-border traffic model and a cross-border commercial vehicle model, WCOG, in coordination through the IMTC project, can at least be an initial home for regional coordination and development of this resource. As previously mentioned, shared access among multiple agencies is a possibility.