

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program Steering Committee Meeting Summary

January 16, 2014

Meeting packet available at: theIMTC.com/meetings

Meeting location

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

Meeting attendance

B.C. Ministry of Transportation (Abid Sivic); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Greg Kolesniak); **Border Policy Research Institute** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Daniela Evans, Matt Jollymore, Bernie Pitura, Brad Valentine); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **City of Blaine** (Bill Bullock, David Wilbrecht); **City of Surrey** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council** (Jim Kohnke); **SmartRail** (Kenneth Jones); **U.S. Border Patrol** (Jim Powers); **TransLink** (Phoebe Cheung); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Tyler Koenings, Geoff Reid); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Terry Schulze, Kenneth Williams); **WA State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Fanucci)

Current event updates

Melissa Fanucci shared a data table recently prepared for B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT) showing the average wait time estimates northbound and southbound at Peace Arch/Douglas and Pacific Highway for 2013, comparing NEXUS and standard lanes.

Todd Carlson added that John Schnablegger and he are working on materials for the B.C. – WA Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC) work program and looking for ways to showcase benefits border programs have on reducing greenhouse gases.

Daniela Evans mentioned that she has been asked several times about how the lowered exchange rate is impacting border crossing volumes. She noted that this region has its dedicated shoppers that will cross regardless of the exchange rate so there has not been a significant drop in cross-border business, but there have been slightly shorter lineups.

Bernie Pitura announced his new area of responsibility is the Abbotsford-Huntingdon Port-of-Entry. They will be hosting a stakeholder meeting January 31 with BCMOT, Abbotsford police, B.C. Trucking Association, and other key agencies to share ideas and concepts for improving the southbound approach to the U.S. port-of-entry in Sumas, especially regarding the NEXUS lane. There have been numerous complaints and a lot of frustrations over the last few months, and BCMOT's solution is going to be a few years before it is finalized, so the goal is to discuss interim options.

Bernie Pitura added that plans are being made to run six oil trains a day to a refinery in Washington State on the track that crosses at Abbotsford-Sumas, which will increase border approach road blockages both for commercial traffic and cars. He will try and get more information about this for the group.

Bernie Pitura reported that there will be a tour of the Aldergrove facility on January 22nd with contractors running to bid on the project. This is the second phase of bidding. Shovels are still planned to be in the ground September. He noted that with construction at Aldergrove, and the possibility of additional trains at Abbotsford, it's going to be very busy for a time.

Matt Jollymore told the group that Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is modifying a lane at Pacific Highway to allow a third NEXUS booth to operate. This is going to be in place earlier than originally planned. Brad Valentine added that this will result in one permanent NEXUS booth and two flexible booths that can process either NEXUS or standard cars.

Todd Carlson reported that WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) plans to go ahead with tender for the SR 539 widening and border approach improvements in February.

David Davidson distributed the most recent Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) Policy Brief, summarizing the cargo pre-inspection pilot measurement work conducted by BPRI. A tech memo was also delivered to U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) who requested the work.

David Davidson informed the group that he will be retiring this summer. A replacement has been found after a long search, Laurie Trautman and she will be taking the position in June.

Phoebe Cheung reported on TransLink's goods movement strategy for the region. The objective is to confirm the roads used by commercial movements and to achieve better coordination of planning for the region. They began discussions with stakeholders in December and the work is ongoing. In spring there will be a more defined strategy document that can be shared.

Ken Jones summarized a meeting held November 26 called by the mayors of White Rock and Surrey to discuss the relocation of BNSF's primary rail line off the waterfront. Approximately 600 people attended and near 90 percent of those in attendance wanted to see the line moved.

Bill Bullock reported that the City of Blaine received \$600,000 to resolve issues around Hughes Road and to provide a secondary freight route. The city is also continuing work on the Boblett/SR 543 interchange.

David Wilbrecht, the new City Manager for Blaine, introduced himself. He is interested in IMTC efforts and wanted to learn first-hand what issues affect the city.

Jim Kohnke discussed the recent issue of the U.S. CBP expedited removal process and two appeal cases, one of which the petition was denied and the other of which the order was rescinded. This demonstrated the existence of human error on both sides of the issues and hopefully these precedents will serve to open the door to more official review procedures and more judicious use of the process. The Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council (PACE), the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, the Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce and the Northwest Economic Council were participants in the appeal review, and formal statements will be forthcoming.

Mira Petrovic reported that the City of Surrey will be completing a high-level rail study. It has been nearly ten years since the previous study. This one will look at the capacity of Terminal two.

Mira Petrovic mentioned her participation on a committee to discuss a replacement of the Massey Tunnel with a ten-lane bridge, widening Highway 99 from the border to Bridgeport. This is a massive undertaking and will require a great deal of planning and funding.

Mira Petrovic announced this is her last meeting with IMTC. She has been focused on a traffic safety program for the last six months and will be moving to that effort full time. She will be replaced at the next meeting by another Surrey planner.

Hugh Conroy shared images from a recent aerial photography flight paid for by Whatcom County jurisdictions along with Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG). WCOG's contribution helped get this detailed resolution to each border crossing and a little past the border into Canada at those locations. These images help since so many of the facilities and roadways have undergone major changes since the last fly-over. In addition they will help overlay lane geometry with the simulation model. WCOG is happy to share these files. Smaller .jpg versions (oblique and straight down views) of the aerials are available for download. To receive these or full ortho-rectified, 4 inch resolution versions contact WCOG.

Ken Williams informed the group that CBP is in the last stages of decommissioning the pre-inspection pilot. All that's left is to move the booth.

Ken Williams mentioned that a location has been chosen for the new NEXUS enrollment center. Daniela Evans added that it will be at the Birch Bay Center off Birch Bay – Lynden Road. She added that a temporary enrollment center will be in place January 20 – February 20 at Canada Place in Vancouver. Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) officers from Metro Vancouver's district will be staffing it with the hopes of accomplishing up to 140 interviews in that time.

Daniela Evans added that there will be a new NEXUS enrollment blitz ongoing until April 21. Both CBP and CBSA continue to invest additional officers toward getting the wait times for interviews down from where they currently are.

Exchange rate trends

Hugh Conroy shared historic exchange rate data and discussed how exchange rate is one of the indicators followed for predicting border traffic surges and changes in freight volumes. Most of the current financial analysis being reported predicts that the Canadian dollar will head toward .85 cents on the U.S. dollar and stay there for a while.

Bernie Pitura noted that while exchange rate may affect some shoppers as long as gas prices are low people will still cross for gas. In addition local tourism may increase as people travel closer to home.

Beyond the Border Status Report

Hugh Conroy provided an annotated copy of the Beyond the Border (BTB) Status Report released in December (see meeting packet).

Todd Carlson reflected on the mention of emergency preparedness in the report and wondered how actions from previous discussions have been incorporated into WSDOT emergency protocols. There are statewide protocols and plans but there still may be a need to better understand how efforts are communicated with other partners at the border.

Hugh Conroy summarized discussions held a few years ago between Port Director Greg Alvarez and the Freight Office at WSDOT regarding freight prioritization in response to route-closing incidents. Other planning meetings with WA State Patrol and others largely dispelled the need for parking lots at the border since any amount of messaging would get out to carriers quickly. There was some mutual recognition of strategies in place but he hasn't heard more on this. He will check in with those involved and report back.

Daniela Evans informed the group that she has been invited to participate on the national Border Wait Time Working Group that is an output of BTB. Boundary Bay/Pt. Roberts is on the list as this region is aware but it is doubtful it will be part of the top five deployments.

Hugh Conroy noted that funding for deployment has been a real challenge. Bluetooth has been selected for the most recent installations in the Buffalo/Niagara region but there have been some concerns with it there.

Project updates

Completed application for Integrated Corridor Management planning grant

Melissa Fanucci and Hugh Conroy summarized the grant WCOG submitted to the Integrated Corridor Management (ICM) Planning Grant call for projects. The proposed project is called Dynamic Border Management and focuses on four projects deemed important by IMTC's project list and recent discussions: border simulation modeling, coordination with partner agencies for Advanced Traveler Information System (ATIS) evaluation and calibration, dynamic lane management at Pacific Highway, and predictive near-term traffic surge analysis.

Todd Carlson said that WSDOT has begun a ramp metering study through Bellingham that would look at the feasibility of installing ramp meters through the urban corridor of I-5 to make the mainline smoother. The study will complete this spring. It may stretch from Fairhaven to Ferndale and some of the ramp meters, if not used for actual traffic metering, could simply be used to detect surges in on-ramp traffic for better predictive capabilities.

Summary of January 9 Pacific Highway northbound options subcommittee meeting

Hugh Conroy presented slides showing options discussed at the January 9 meeting with stakeholders at Pacific Highway to consider options for near-term northbound bus routing options and longer term FAST lane optimization solutions.

Bernie Pitura commented that he believed more than one lane could be created behind the Duty Free, possibly allowing for a through-lane and one lane for queuing.

Kevin Cook suggested that bus advanced passenger information systems (APIS) as discussed at the last Steering Committee meeting, as well as these discussions to expedite bus movements given their increases in volume, are an excellent topic for future BTB consideration. The Canadian Consulate has funding to sponsor a future stakeholder consultation meeting to identify future points of consideration for inclusion in the BTB action plan.

Kevin Cook asked what the worst bus queues look like. Bernie Pitura replied that bus queues could extend up to the duty free on weekends, translating to an hour bus wait time or 15-16 buses to process.

David Davidson clarified that the last option displayed should show that the farthest north commercial spur lane is a bus lane and could allow the buses to stack up as needed. The second lane is for FAST and they can pull around any bus queue. The only purpose for a signal would be for general purpose commercial vehicles, which would be held back until there was space. One thing to note with this layout is the risk of having truckers cheat the system by using the FAST lane to bypass queues when not carrying FAST approved shipments. It has been an issue southbound and they have had to monitor this.

Ken Williams commented that they have cameras to monitor the staging area which is helpful during the day. They currently spot check with the cameras but that would be an important piece of the system.

Matt Jollymore noted that bus surges generally occur on weekends, at the exact opposite schedule of FAST truck surges.

Daniela Evans noted that there is every indication that cruise ship charters will likely increase next year. This, in addition to the possibility that construction at Aldergrove may add trucks to Pacific Highway, means that creative solutions for maximizing facility usage are needed.

Daniela Evans added that headquarters CBSA folks came out to tour the facility and took note of the low usage of FAST northbound in this region. They are looking for ways to expand the program to other trusted components, but no changes are being made at this time.

Ken Williams commented that CBP's initial trade notice to carriers stated that the FAST lane would be offered Monday – Friday 8am – 8pm. Therefore the premise of having a FAST lane open on weekends is non-existent and they can go ahead and close that specific lane to trucks and open it exclusively to bus companies that have filed advanced information to allow them head of the queue access.

Regarding the discussion of northbound options, Greg Kolesniak said that, from the motorcoach perspective, it hasn't escaped notice that there's a lane unused at the border, but the B.C. Trucking Association (BCTA) also doesn't want to see the FAST lane lost entirely, especially since some carriers have made major investments to use it. Having a FAST and bus lane is an appealing option.

Greg Kolesniak added that having a queue jump for FAST but all booths open to all trucks has been proven effective southbound, and has actually improved standard truck waits. Not only would the solution northbound provide benefits to FAST and bus, but would impact standard waits as well.

Hugh Conroy told the group that WCOG would continue to refine these options for next steps, and be in contact about cost components and who would be responsible for each improvement.

Passenger Intercept Survey calendar for February

Hugh Conroy reviewed a calendar of the upcoming winter wave of the 2013/2014 Passenger Intercept Survey. Surveying will begin in February and take place on weekends, Tuesdays, and Thursdays.

Proposed add-on two day pilot with Destination BC

Hugh Conroy discussed a proposal presented by Destination BC and BC Tourism. In previous years these agencies worked with Statistics Canada to administer surveys at the border with a sixty second question portion and a mail back or internet component. These surveys collected information on tourism in Canada, as in how long Americans were visiting Canada, etc. However these surveys were discontinued due to Statistics Canada worksite policies. They are interested in seeing if they can partner with an effort by BPRI or WCOG to continue conducting periodic surveys of cross-border travelers. Their sample is much smaller but they would like to do it a few days every month, and it would target specifically U.S. or Canadian plates dependent on the survey.

Their focus is the I-5/B.C. Highway 99 corridor. It is unclear at this point how BPRI or WCOG would maintain a crew but there could be benefits to figuring it out. However it depends on being acceptable to inspection agencies and funding. A small pilot effort to test the survey will be conducted at the end of the winter wave while a student survey crew is still under hire.

David Davidson noted that there may be a possibility for other transportation or inspection agency questions to be included in each survey effort to make it more useful for a wider variety of organizations.

SHRP2 Prep Kit available for distribution

Hugh Conroy provided an annotated copy of a prep kit provided by U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as part of the Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP 2) project that IMTC has been selected for. In March a SHRP 2 workshop assessment is scheduled instead of a typical IMTC meeting and will be an opportunity to work with a FHWA contractor to think about how IMTC organizes itself and how to improve operations and program predictability.

FHWA emailed the prep kit (available in the packet) and a summary of the effort is on page 3. Through the workshop the group will address basic concepts on how IMTC works in each category or “dimension,” which is scaled Level 1-4.

There is still no confirmation of the date. The objective will be to develop an action plan that would be collectively undertaken and gain endorsement of senior leadership, who would then sign on to an implementation plan for a period of two years. Note that this program was applied for with the initial idea that it would receive \$200,000 to implement this action plan. However IMTC was only given “limited assistance.” This has been highlighted in the recently submitted ICM planning grant.

Abbotsford-Huntingdon/Sumas NEXUS update

Bernie Pitura announced a January 31 meeting with stakeholders regarding traffic issues surrounding the NEXUS lane southbound at the Sumas Port-of-Entry. BCMOT will be improving the southbound approach around September, so there needs to be mitigation for construction. At the same time Abbotsford will be closing Vye Road and will develop a McConnell route bypass. Strategies are needed to segregate commercial traffic from other modes.

Abid Sivic described the BCMOT project which will widen B.C. Highway 11 southbound from Vye Road to add a dedicated NEXUS lane and truck storage to address the issue of trucks on the shoulder destroying the infrastructure. Design criteria are under development and it is planned to have a request for proposals ready by the end of March. The advanced traveler information system will be maintained during construction.

Bernie Pitura added that much of the discussions January 31 will be on a temporary concept until the long-term project is completed. One idea may be to segregate NEXUS at 4th Avenue.

Bernie Pitura commented that many of their travelers are low-risk frequent travelers that are Canadian citizens but may speak little English. They are developing ideas for advertising the benefits of NEXUS to these travelers in multiple languages.

Pacific Highway bus APIS and expedited bus routing update

Ken Williams provided a brief update on the bus APIS pilot. Buses who submit their passenger manifests in advance will use the FAST lane on weekends to expedite their access to the bus inspection area. During the pilot of this someone will be out in the commercial staging area to help buses cross the commercial lanes to the bus queue. Terry Schulze is in discussion with multiple companies.

Canadian Consulate support available for a regional Beyond the Border session

Kevin Cook announced that the Canadian Consulate is interested in sponsoring a BTB Action Plan workshop to brainstorm key ideas for upcoming initiatives. He referred to the December report of BTB where it states that both countries are interested in continuing stakeholder outreach and public consultation. Previously there was a trusted trader workshop 18 months ago, and the Consulate conducted a business traveler roundtable session in Bellingham last July.

The meeting could be held around June. Kevin Cook recommended including the bus APIS pilot as part of the future regional discussions.

U.S. – Canada Border Data Warehouse

Melissa Fanucci reviewed a beta website for the national U.S. – Canada Border Data Warehouse portal, which can be found at: www.borderdatawarehouse.com. This is a site designed off the local Cascade Gateway Border Data Warehouse but will archive only data commonly shared between all participating ports-of-entry. Currently data are stored from the Cascade Gateway system and the Border Wait Time Working Group's installation of Bluetooth readers at the Buffalo/Niagara crossings. She asked data-savvy users to test the website query tool and provide feedback.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:00pm.