

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Project

Core Group Meeting Summary

November 15, 2012

Meeting packet available online at: <http://resources.wcog.org/border/11-15-12cgp.pdf>

Meeting Location

The meeting was held at the Hazelmere Country Club in Surrey, British Columbia.

Meeting Attendance

A & A Contract Customs Brokers (Lynn Woodbury); **Abbotsford Duty Free** (Garry Dickinson); **B.C. Ministry of Transportation** (John Schnablegger); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Greg Kolesniak); **Border Policy Research Institute, Western Washington University** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Sean Averill, Bernie Pitura); **City of Blaine** (Bill Bullock); **City of Lynden** (Stephen Banham); **City of Surrey** (Mirjana Petrovic); **Cloverdale District Chamber of Commerce** (Bill Reid); **SmartRail** (Kenneth Jones); **Surrey Board of Trade** (Ray Hudson); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Border Patrol** (Henry Rolon); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Greg Alvarez, Pat Hinchey, Terry Schulze, Ken Williams); **WA State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Fanucci, Gordon Rogers)

Current event updates

Sean Averill updated the group on the Aldergrove port-of-entry facility replacement. This project continues to slowly move ahead. Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is developing detailed site designs and finalizing property acquisitions. They are also working with WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT) to coordinate issues surrounding the transportation system.

David Davidson distributed the newest Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) Policy Brief. Metrics of Policy Effects at the Canada – U.S. Border: The National Export Initiative and the Effort to “Green the Border” was produced in conjunction with Western Economic Diversification Canada and the Pacific Corridor Enterprise Council. The brief is also available online at: http://www.wvu.edu/bpri/files/2012_Fall_Border_Brief.pdf

Lynn Woodbury noted that she and other customs brokers are busy dealing with the effects of new CBP rules.

Todd Carlson reported that WSDOT is planning to re-sign portions of SR 9 in Sumas to make sure commercial vehicles know where to turn. Since the installation of the NEXUS lane there has been some confusion with the replacement signage so now they are going back to install additional signs.

Todd Carlson also said they plan to add signage leading to the Aldergrove Port-of-Entry on SR539 with the hours of operation for that port. An additional sign will be placed south of Birch Bay-Lynden Road on SR 539 that includes “Sumas open 24 hours” so trucks will be less likely to arrive at Aldergrove during non-business hours.

Steve Banham announced that the voters of Lynden passed a transportation benefit district request, which will provide more funds for community transportation improvements.

Mira Petrovic told the group that the City of Surrey is working on the functional design for an interchange at 16th Avenue.

Mira Petrovic added the City of Surrey has started working on a safety mobility plan to improve movement through Surrey. They are working on various analyses along with stakeholders (BCMOT, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, etc.) to determine next steps.

Hugh Conroy provided an update on the project to link a data feed from U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) to the advanced traveler information systems (ATIS) at the border in order to provide booth status data. The assumption of the folks working on this at CBP headquarters was that data could be transferred under an existing protocol. However since the data has to go to a BC server it will require a different agreement. Therefore the technology and approvals are complete, and now the project needs to undergo an agreement process, shifting the early November estimate for completion back. However the hope is that they can develop a broader approach that can later be applicable to other regions such as Niagara.

John Schnablegger mentioned that this project was also discussed at the last B.C. – WA Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC) meeting.

Hugh Conroy summarized the Transportation Border Working Group (TBWG) meeting he attended in Ottawa November 7-8. Conference participants received an update on the annually updated, five year Beyond the Border (BTB) investment plan. The first iteration is expected December 7. The prospect for funding BTB initiatives looks more promising on the Canadian side. However on the U.S. side there's skepticism about any foreseeable revenue package. The Ministry of Transportation for Ontario gave a good presentation on their upcoming commercial vehicle intercept survey. They've developed a dashboard on cross-border metrics and freight. As part of this project they received a grant from U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to host a series of workshops about their surveys and how they apply them in models and other analyses. These workshops will be in spring 2014, with one in this area. This might be a good pre-cursor for any future commercial intercept survey in this region.

David Davidson added that the Ontario survey team have offered to make their equipment available for this region's surveying.

Hugh Conroy continued with the TBWG re-cap stating that CBP presented their investment plans, and efforts to develop alternative financing strategies. They are now looking at draft legislation to allow entering into public-private partnerships so third-parties could fund staffing or other resources. There was also an update on the new Detroit international crossing, which is moving forward with the creation of the New Windsor Detroit Bridge Authority.

David Davidson added that there is a report to leaders about BTB due out in December as well. In late spring there will be an opportunity to select additions and new items for the Border Infrastructure Investment Plan, which is characterized as a living document. So there may be time late Spring of next year to select additions for a draft going to Ottawa in July.

JTEC Action Plan update

Todd Carlson reported that Jay Inslee was elected as Governor for Washington State. This is the first gubernatorial change since the creation of JTEC and may spell change for the program. Any changes might occur around spring, but it is hoped the relationship between the Governor and Premier through this group has been institutionalized by now and will continue forward.

Prior action plan items include: FAST operability, ATIS improvements, greenhouse gas reduction initiatives, NEXUS promotion, the Lynden/Aldergrove crossing improvements, and the border

circulation analysis. Two new items have been added to this list: performance measurements on the existing ATIS systems, and long-range infrastructure planning.

FAST enhancements

Western Washington University's BPRI completed a model that can be used to test different operating scenarios for the northbound FAST lane at Pacific Highway. This modeling work is similar to what occurred southbound, and can analyze results if different operational approaches are applied (i.e. de-coupling CSA and PIP, FAST through all booths, etc.). The results of the modeling analysis may lead to a terms of reference for a new pilot project.

John Schnablegger added that southbound, BCMOT is looking to extend the FAST truck queue jump to 8th Avenue, which will help reduce delay for FAST trucks. He hopes RCMP intervention has helped stabilize some of the compliancy issues in the staging area.

ATIS improvements

Construction is underway on I-5 to add new ITS components including loops, cameras, and better travel times. This work is expected to complete this Spring.

WSDOT also has an advertisement date for ITS installation work along SR 539 to prove more accurate data and enhance the ability for the agency and users to know what's happening on the roadway. Normally WSDOT does not provide this level of ITS work on smaller arterials, but this had some funds remaining from the SAFETEA-LU Coordinated Border Infrastructure program. Now that there is no longer such a program in MAP-21, these project will be more challenging to fund.

Todd Carlson added that SR 9 will also be receiving some upgrades in equipment and fiber to improve the ATIS system.

Melissa Fanucci asked about whether the new system being installed in Bellingham along I-5 to the border would be able to provide system travel times in addition to border delay (i.e. Bellingham to Vancouver). Todd Carlson replied that this is possible in the future.

John Schnablegger commented that part of the BCMOT new initiative is taking the data collected to provide regional travel times, i.e. Vancouver, Seattle, Blaine, Surrey, etc.

Lynden/Aldergrove facility

BCMOT and WSDOT continue to work toward next fall and be prepared for CBSA's construction. WSDOT's new design includes a commercial spur similar to that northbound at Pacific Highway which would redirect trucks around the duty free. The new configuration includes a NEXUS and two truck lanes. They plan to go to ad next fall, and be open to traffic in the winter of 2013.

John Schnablegger added that they assessed every possible option and are working with CBSA to terminate Zero Avenue.

Border Circulation

John Schnablegger reported that BCMOT recently completed a memorandum of understanding with the City of Surrey to start construction on the 16th Avenue interchange. They are also starting to build secondary infrastructure to be followed by additional ATIS components.

ATIS performance measurements

This new initiative is to look at the ATIS systems in place and validate them to make sure they match experienced travel times. This is not currently funded but is a high priority. \$150,000 is the cost estimate for the northbound portion.

John Schnablegger added that these systems need to be calibrated at a minimum every five years to provide system reliability. After investigating some claims of inaccuracy they've found them to be true. The infrastructure, behaviors, and other factors change, and this can be a deadly blow if agencies can't maintain public confidence in the system.

Todd Carlson noted the project has two objectives: one, to determine if ATIS has been a good investment. And two, to use the calibrated and measured system to show how other improvements perform.

Garry Dickinson asked if wait time signage can list NEXUS waits as well. John Schnablegger replied not yet, especially with booths changing from NEXUS to standard or vice versa. Todd Carlson added that the northbound system is set up, but currently NEXUS delay is listed only on the website and on smart phones.

Bernie Pitura commented that CBSA has started to rely once again on its older method of judging delay by the length of queue, not by the signs, since it is often not correct. He used as an example last week when Pacific Highway showed a 90 minute wait, then a 145 minute wait, then no info, but it was only a fifteen minute wait. This may have something to do with the system working with the new set of booths. He is also concerned how the second NEXUS lane is being classified, and the third when open.

Steve Banham asked if there is a mechanism for replacing sign data that is known to be wrong with manually entered data. Todd Carlson replied that they've created a protocol when the system goes down they can manually enter information. The idea is that CBSA would call WSDOT and have them broadcast the information during equipment down time.

David Davidson suggested that, given the level of interest in a calibrated ATIS system and the fact that it is currently unfunded, the project should be added to the 2013 IMTC Project List and have a high priority. The Core Group agreed to this.

Steve Banham noted prior mention of public-private partnerships and wondered if there was an opportunity to partner with private companies to distribute information. John Schnablegger commented that technology in-vehicles is definitely going in that direction.

Todd Carlson added that another outcome of validating the data would be to identify data gaps and determine if there are ways to fill those with other data sets, i.e. INREX data.

ACTION ITEM: 2013 IMTC project list approval

Hugh Conroy reviewed the final version of the project list. The Core Group discussed the list and made the following adjustments:

Amendments:

- Take off expanded Hwy 11 NEXUS lane project – already funded
- Add the ATIS calibration and improvement project as top priority
- Add Point Roberts wait time system installation to the construction list at number 4
- Move econometric model to the end of the list.
- Move the Pacific Highway bus re-routing project from construction to planning, and raise priority to number 3.

- Take bus routing and make planning and design and move over to planning as a higher priority to number 3. Consider breaking it into two phases similar to Exit 274, or else combining with the northbound active lane management project which has similar objectives.

Hugh noted that the projects 6,7, and 8 were in response to a request from FHWA for research proposals. It's not too late to add the ATIS calibration project to our list of submissions.

Hugh Conroy noted that this list will stand for next year. There are no identified funding programs at this time, but the objective of having the list is to be able to quickly reference projects when opportunities arise, as well as to illustrate the binational partnering and identification of regionally-significant projects.

John Schnablegger commented that funding is easier to secure if you can show partnerships and match.

Bill Reid asked what the ATIS calibration cost might be. John Schnablegger replied he didn't know at this time. Todd Carlson estimated the research piece was \$150,000 for the northbound direction. David Davidson amended that to be \$100,000 if it was stripped down to basics.

Project Updates

Truck Route staging area

John Schnablegger summarized recent improvements to the southbound Highway 15 commercial vehicle staging area. Now the focus is to update software to deal with abandoned vehicles confusing the loop detection system. The next step will be to add loops to improve system functionality. And enforcement continues to be a need. BCMOT is meeting with the RCMP on a regular basis. They are also looking to contract with the duty free staff to serve as tutors to help with the system.

Greg Kolesniak noted that B.C. Trucking Association is working with Mike at BCMOT to develop a brochure for the trucking community on the new staging area.

NEXUS at Sumas/Abbotsford-Huntingdon

John Schnablegger reported that BCMOT has an agreement with the City of Abbotsford regarding B.C. Highway 11 to expand it from Vye Road to the border. This will include intersection improvements, additional turn radii, and an overpass of the railway track. The goal is to move toward a continuous route between Hwy 99 and 16th Avenue to Hwy 11 and 8th Avenue. One challenge is that these are all municipal roads, so they are negotiating with Langley, Abbotsford, and Surrey regarding construction and maintenance funds.

Inspection agency updates

Entry-exit data sharing pilot

Greg Alvarez introduced the pilot. The intent is to use license plate readers to provide exit data for those who need to register when they exit the country. For immigration purposes, working with Canada on this can lead to a significant reduction in infrastructure investments.

Bernie Pitura informed the group that this new initiative is being worked on at the headquarters level and will be rolled out to the ports-of-entry, but little is known at this time at the local level.

Terry Schulze added that four pilot ports-of-entry will be selected for a trial period. They are still evaluating which ports will be test locations.

Greg Alvarez added that from the local CBP perspective the benefits could be in turning the I-94 process into an electronic process, it could expedite processing and improve throughput.

NEXUS enrollment strategies for 2013

Greg Alvarez reported that at the recent Binational Port Operating Committee (BPOC) meeting they discussed NEXUS enrollment strategies and current backlogs. At Pacific Highway they average 104 appointments a day, roughly three appointments every fifteen minutes. Even so they are at standing-room only capacity. Last year they extended the NEXUS enrollment center hours to 6:00pm. They have increased staffing and doubled their appointments on weekends. Nevertheless the backlog for NEXUS appointments is still three months out.

The population of NEXUS enrollees in the Lower Mainland and western Washington is 298,000, the largest in the nation.

There are CBP “jump teams” where additional resources can be applied to help process NEXUS enrollment but they prioritize airports.

The regional NEXUS enrollment center will be moving offsite, one mile from Pacific Highway in Blaine. This facility will be larger. It should be open late summer 2013 at the earliest, due to funding constraints.

Bernie Pitura noted that CBSA now offers iris scan appointments at the Pacific Highway port-of-entry. The scans are completed at the commercial area on the Canadian side. They are now formalizing parking and signage. The eye scans will be open 7:00am to 5:00pm and can be done after a person gets their NEXUS card.

Pre-clearance pilot site between B.C. and WA

Greg Alvarez reported that work continues on the feasibility of a proof-of-concept in Blaine, where a truck booth is established in the trucking plaza in B.C. and through which CBP could perform pre-inspection of certain vehicles (FAST only). This pre-inspection zone would process the arrival of the truck, and then the truck would proceed to the truck crossing and go directly through. The pilot would need to take measurements at key points in the processing chain to best understand what time savings benefits this program could offer. The test would not be a permanent change – it would run for approximately six months, solely for the purpose of gathering data.

The intent is to thin the border for commercial vehicles. This isn't going to improve upon processing times, and may be less efficient.

There are many issues still to resolve. The bargaining unit is involved as well as issues regarding the placement of the booth. No date has been set for the pilot, but it is hoped to take place sometime next calendar year.

Greg Alvarez noted that Pacific Highway southbound had one of the worst commercial wait times in the country. Thanks to the changes opening all three booths to all traffic, it is now one of the most efficient crossings.

Hugh Conroy added that the pilot does raise interesting questions. Would all FAST become pre-cleared? How will trucks arriving at the booths pre-cleared be identified and tracked through the port-of-entry? Etc.

Infrastructure updates

Additional NEXUS booth at Douglas

Bernie Pitura reported that configurations for a third NEXUS booth northbound at the Douglas port-of-entry are complete. Now all three eastern booths are NEXUS-ready. The plan is to have two NEXUS booths open most of the time, and open the third as needed, since the third can also process regular traffic.

David Davidson asked about the concrete divider that currently separates the two NEXUS booths from the rest of the traffic. Bernie Pitura replied they are still assessing how best to manage the approach to a third NEXUS booth, and the barrier complicates matters.

Bernie Pitura acknowledged that the third NEXUS lane does affect northbound data, similar to issues with identifying NEXUS data southbound.

NEXUS functionality at Sumas/Abbotsford-Huntingdon

Pat Hinchey commented that CBP is trying to be more dynamic with its NEXUS lane at Sumas. They need LED signage up ahead in Canada to better manage the traffic.

Melissa Fanucci asked whether NEXUS participation at Sumas has increased. Pat Hinchey responded that they have 120-150 NEXUS cars a day maximum.

Greg Alvarez added the NEXUS booth at Sumas has impacted Sumas wait times, which have doubled. Using a booth for 15 or so cars an hour is not an efficient use of the lane. They are looking at possibly scaling back the NEXUS hours at Sumas since most people cross between 7:00am and 12:00pm. One idea is to have the lane be NEXUS only during those hours.

Unlike other ports it is difficult to wave over non-NEXUS cars into the lane given the infrastructure. However if there was programmable signage in Canada they could be directed into the lane when it is open to general purpose traffic.

Greg Alvarez also said the lane has had an adverse effect on the duty free store, blocking access during peak travel periods.

Garry Dickinson suggested running NEXUS through another lane – perhaps the motor home lane or a truck lane. If it was opposite what they have now it might make more sense, if feasible.

Steve Banham noted having a 3-4 month lag time for NEXUS appointments should be considered. The NEXUS lanes at Sumas didn't open until August, which means anyone who applied when it opened is still in the queue for a NEXUS interview. Use of the lane may increase dramatically once those people get their cards. He suggested making it clear, if hours are reduced, that they will be expanded again once the need is there.

Hugh Conroy asked if it would be possible for CBP to look at the list of waiting NEXUS appointments to see the geography of applicants and how many are in the Sumas/Abbotsford area. Terry Schulze replied he would look into this.

Greg Alvarez noted that he'd like to explore the feasibility of a NEXUS-only port in the future.

Greg Alvarez said that when delays hit Peace Arch (which is the one port that processes the most I-94 entries), the traffic does trickle east, meaning people use the ATIS signs. John Schnablegger commented that many people may be avoiding the Sumas crossing because of Highway 1 construction, but when that completes that may change.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 12:10pm.