

International Mobility & Trade Corridor Program Steering Committee Meeting Summary

February 20, 2014

Meeting packet available at: theIMTC.com/meetings

Meeting location

The meeting was held at the Canada Border Services Agency's Douglas Port-of-Entry in Surrey, British Columbia.

Meeting attendance

B.C. Ministry of Transportation (Simon Leung); **B.C. Trucking Association** (Pedram Mohseni); **Border Policy Research Institute** (David Davidson); **Canada Border Services Agency** (Daniela Evans, Brad Valentine); **Canadian Consulate, Seattle** (Kevin Cook); **City of Surrey** (Kristen Tiede); **SmartRail** (Kenneth Jones); **Transport Canada** (Chris Hoff); **U.S. Consulate, Vancouver** (Peter Broadbent, Andreas Hovland); **U.S. Customs & Border Protection** (Jose R. Ortega); **WA State Department of Transportation** (Todd Carlson); **Whatcom Council of Governments** (Hugh Conroy, Melissa Fanucci)

Current event updates

Daniela Evans reported that Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) headquarters have NEXUS top of mind and have authorized additional enrollment blitzes to help with the backlog of NEXUS applications and interviews. They now receive 4-5,000 applications a month. The newest blitz location is Canada Place in Vancouver. They will conduct 240 additional interviews in advance of the cruise ship season. That operation will continue until March 21.

Daniela Evans said the Blaine blitz will be adding 36 additional daily interview slots January 12 – April 11. They are also looking at other staffing models. It is hoped the new enrollment center in Blaine will be moved away from the border, which would allow CBSA to possibly hire officers that they currently can't re-assign to the NEXUS office at its current location.

Daniela Evans informed the group that a third NEXUS flex lane has been installed at Pacific Highway. They have permission for a fourth NEXUS flex lane but currently its for Douglas, although they'd prefer it at Pacific Highway. Since Douglas is the primary route for those using GPS devices CBSA likes the idea of directing NEXUS traffic to Pacific Highway, and would like to have

the fourth flex lane there – but this has yet to be confirmed with Ottawa. Flex lanes allow CBSA to process either regular passenger vehicle traffic or NEXUS traffic.

David Davidson asked if the notion of making Pacific Highway the focus for NEXUS lanes is shared by U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP). Daniela Evans responded that this strategy has been discussed at their Border Planning and Operations Committee (BPOC) meetings.

Hugh Conroy commented that over the next few Steering Committee meetings the group would be reviewing and updating the IMTC project list. He encouraged any additional projects identified by CBSA or CBP in their efforts to evaluate and improve NEXUS to be added to the list.

Hugh Conroy also noted that the impacts of policy decisions like potentially moving all NEXUS to Pacific Highway may impact the advanced traveler information systems (ATIS). If, say, an entire crossing was made NEXUS it would reduce the need for booth-status data from the inspection agencies to determine if a lane is NEXUS or not.

Hugh Conroy updated the committee on this issue, noting that CBP headquarters has restarted their efforts to export select booth level data. It is hoped that by the end of March B.C. Ministry of Transportation's (BCMOT) contractor will have some data to integrate into their algorithm for testing.

Jose Ortega provided a summary of issues at the Sumas/Abbotsford-Huntingdon crossing to discuss the southbound approach on B.C. Highway 11, which is currently dangerous given driving behaviors of impatient NEXUS travelers trying to access the NEXUS lane. He noted that when he arrived as the Port Director in April of last year there were 4,000 vehicles using the NEXUS lane at Sumas, and now the throughput is around 16,000. He changed the hours of operation based on what he saw the patterns being, so now operates NEXUS from 8am-11am Monday through Friday only, and makes the lane a Ready Lane 11am – 6pm every weekday. On weekends it is only a Ready Lane.

Jose Ortega added that he foresees a 30-40 percent increase in NEXUS traffic once the lane is lengthened. Until the infrastructure is improved, however, he is looking to upgrade some of the technology in the cargo lanes to allow routing NEXUS and RVs through the cargo booths when there is a long delay of passenger traffic. They are discussing this with the Duty Free store and he has written an issue paper on this.

David Davidson asked if this would re-route NEXUS through the commercial staging area off Highway 11. Jose Ortega confirmed this, it would be the same as the cargo approach. They already have a high/low primary booth in place, they just need the proper software and technology. BCMOT has agreed to help with signage.

Hugh Conroy brought along samples of NEXUS promotional flier and fliers for all RFID programs. He asked if anyone would be interested in them, otherwise they will be recycled. Kevin Cook volunteered to take some boxes for distribution at the Canadian Consulate in Seattle.

Melissa Fanucci shared just-released monthly volumes collected for all Cascade Gateway ports-of-entry for 2013 (see meeting packet). Interesting trends show increases in NEXUS volumes, with

decreases of standard passenger vehicles. Passenger traffic and commercial traffic have both increased since 2012.

Jose Ortega noted that the decrease in NEXUS numbers at Sumas is likely more a reflection of the fact that the NEXUS cars are being counted in the Ready Lane, and not specifically as NEXUS.

Jose Ortega mentioned that there wasn't a choice in opening the NEXUS booth but in retrospect it would have been better to wait for the lane to be completed. Todd Carlson added that this sort of thing is what a five year infrastructure plan for the border might be useful for.

Kevin Cook announced a lunch being held March 5 in Seattle to discuss Columbia River transportation issues and the treaty review. There are a few seats still available.

Kevin Cook informed the group that a border tour is being organized for U.S. Congressional staff. This will take place March 17-20.

Kevin Cook noted that the Treaty of Gent that ended the war of 1812 was signed in Belgium in 1815, one year from now and so next year will be the bicentennial anniversary. An event is being considered to celebrate 200 years of peace between the U.S. and Canada. For the centennial celebration the Peace Arch was built. As planning goes forward for an event there is interest in having IMTC be part of the discussion and showcase.

David Davidson summarized the ongoing winter survey collection effort as part of the Passenger Vehicle Intercept Survey being completed by Border Policy Research Institute (BPRI) and Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG). Today is the ninth day of winter wave surveying. The weather has been bad and there have been a few cancellations that will be made up later in the schedule.

Hugh Conroy added that the compressed winter schedule and shorter hours of daylight also meant the winter wave will not collect as many survey responses as the summer wave. 10,500 surveys were collected last summer. Hopefully 3-4,000 will be collected for winter. There have been higher refusal rates in the winter as well, likely because of bad weather.

Hugh Conroy reminded the committee that WCOG and BPRI will be working with Destination BC to pilot the administering of short surveys to U.S. drivers returning from Canada. This will be done on three days during the week following the IMTC survey work. BPRI and WCOG had been talking to Destination BC about ways they might provide ongoing border survey support if a pilot were successful. BPRI and WCOG have both decided that this would be a difficult fit for their organizations. Destination BC is still interested in conducting the pilot though.

Todd Carlson asked why BPRI and WCOG are not interested. Hugh Conroy replied that the survey would need to take place every month for 3-4 days and given the small staffs of each agency, it would require a good half of a person's time. But neither agency has the budget to fill the rest of that person's schedule and it would be hard to complete consistently if there was a lot of staff turnover.

Todd Carlson informed the group that the WA – B.C. Joint Transportation Executive Committee (JTEC) first meeting is being organized after all of the staff changeovers since the last meeting. There is also the potential for a joint cabinet meeting in late spring or fall of this year.

Simon Leung reported that the B.C. budget has been released which has ten key priorities. The balanced budget includes a 10-year transportation plan to prioritize projects in greatest need for investment. There is a window of opportunity to illustrate the importance of multi-agency border requirements in the upcoming plan. Agencies need to work with the province as a whole to better convey. Unlike highways, border investments can be planned separately but agencies need to work with the province as a whole to better convey the longer term environment and needs.

Simon Leung mentioned there is a New Building Canada Plan from Infrastructure Canada with funding associated with it. The province will be monitoring for funding opportunities for the border region.

Aldergrove facility replacement update

Brad Valentine reported that the public communications plan is not yet ready to be shared but it is in development. In terms of project phasing CBSA is now getting technical proposals and prices in advance of the March 3rd submission date. Once the design-build contractor is identified in April, CBSA will start developing more detailed traffic plans.

A question was asked regarding the size of the Aldergrove port-of-entry. The main passenger building will be 1220 square meters and the commercial facility 75 square meters in a separate facility. This is almost ten times the size of the current facility.

Todd Carlson announced that the WA State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) will be going to bid on March 10 for the State Route 539 widening that is occurring in conjunction with CBSA's project. They are awaiting final real estate purchases and plan to start this construction season. The project will widen the north end of Guide Meridian to create a separate truck shoulder for storage that traffic can get around. A NEXUS lane will be constructed back to H Street.

Todd Carlson added that WSDOT has a draft communication plan and is working with other agencies involved to time the messages appropriately. It's important to let the traveling public know the project is being staged, and there will be new lanes in place prior to the completion of the facility. Four agencies are involved in this, including some work from U.S. General Services Administration (GSA).

SHRP2 initiative

Hugh Conroy confirmed with the committee that the March 20 IMTC Steering Committee meeting will instead be a specific all day workshop for specific IMTC partner agency representatives for the Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP 2) initiative.

This workshop will be an opportunity to assess the IMTC process and how it may be improved, as supported by tools developed with U.S. Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) as part of an effort to maximize reliability. This effort ties in well with other national initiatives.

Prior to the March 20 workshop there will be a senior leadership meeting for one to two hours, during which time the FHWA organizers will discuss the program goals will be about and what actions might emerge that they could support. Those invited to participate are senior management representatives from Transport Canada, FHWA, B.C. Ministry of Transportation (BCMOT), WSDOT, CBP, and CBSA.

Pacific Highway northbound evaluation

Hugh Conroy asked agencies that participated in last month's planning workshop for improving northbound traffic flow at Pacific Highway to provide updates. There was some interest at the last meeting in collecting more data on the distribution of trucks and bus arrivals over the course of the typical weekday and weekend day.

Todd Carlson reported that he is working with those in WSDOT's traffic department to develop feasibility and costs, and do some preliminary design. However it's a little difficult given the workload of the traffic folks and downsizing in the agency.

WSDOT/BCMOT Joint Transportation Executive Committee

Hugh Conroy reviewed a preliminary spreadsheet developed by John Schnablegger at BCMOT regarding estimated reductions in greenhouse gases that could be attributed to increased enrollment in and successful operation of the FAST and NEXUS programs. He noted that while there is a high-profile anti-idling zone established to reduce carbon emissions, the benefits of NEXUS in reducing overall queuing seems to have a much greater impact. A separate memoranda exists between B.C. and WA State on collaborating on greenhouse gas reductions, and this ties in well.

Todd Carlson informed the group that a new border video is under design. The goal is to make it only two minutes long and relay a succinct message.

FHWA National Gateway and Corridor Concepts

Hugh Conroy reviewed a recent publication from FHWA that is a high-level policy paper completed to examine objectives in MAP-21 and compare what other countries have done to strategize freight corridor investments. It looks at programs like Canada's Gateway Pacific program and similar efforts in countries like China, India, and Brazil. It gleaned strategies and convened a stakeholder group of sector representatives to review ideas. The fact that borders play a role in this effort suggest there may be some interest in recognizing the strategic importance of borders in a future transportation act.

Highlights and relevant parts of the report are marked in the copy provided in the meeting packet.

Todd Carlson commented that the older Coordinated Border Infrastructure (CBI) program did not include rail, but this policy seems to suggest an openness to examining freight movement on different modes.

He added that there hasn't been a national freight policy with a significant direction in the U.S. for some time, as money is tied to specific outcomes as compared to an overall plan.

Hugh Conroy noted that Travis Black from FHWA is one of the authors mentioned on the report and he will give him a call to find out how this document relates to the advice being passed on to congressional committees regarding the next transportation bill.

April IMTC Core Group meeting

Hugh Conroy reminded the committee that there will be no meeting in March, so the next IMTC meeting will be April 17 and is scheduled to be a Core Group meeting. He asked for those with specific topics they'd like to see on the agenda send him an email for inclusion.

WCOG has spoken with the WSDOT rail office and since their draft rail plan should be finalized by that point, they are planning to attend and review it.

It is also hoped that WCOG will hear back regarding the ICM planning grant by then, and have results from the March SHRP2 workshop.

Todd Carlson suggested having JTEC on the agenda and that it might be a good opportunity for Bob Steele from BCMOT and Amy Scarton from WSDOT to attend and see firsthand what IMTC is about.

Kevin Cook mentioned that there has been a request in the budget for 2014-2015 to support an IMTC General Assembly focused on Beyond the Border and new initiatives. Timing-wise, June or July would be a good season to shoot for since it will be 30 months from the original Action Plan. Ideas include looking at the successes of the last 30 months, look at what issues are still outstanding (i.e. rail pre-clearance), and an update on trusted trader and traveler programs. He'd also like to have a discussion on where to go next. He should know by April if the funding is available.

Hugh Conroy agreed this sounded like a good idea. If so, the June 19 meeting is already scheduled for the Bellingham Cruise Terminal and would be an excellent venue for a larger event.

Hugh Conroy adjourned the meeting at 11:50am.