



Corridor Program

Summary

I-405/SR 167 Executive Advisory Group Meeting

Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2017
Bothell City Hall
10 a.m. – noon

Executive Advisory Group members and elected officials in attendance:

- Secretary of Transportation Roger Millar, Chair
- Dave Berg, City of Bellevue Director of Transportation on behalf of Councilmember Kevin Wallace
- Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr, City of Bothell
- Councilmember Randy Corman, City of Renton
- Mayor Rich Crispo, City of Newcastle
- Rep. Mark Harmsworth, Washington State House of Representatives
- Emmett Heath, Community Transit CEO
- Rep. Shelley Kloba, Washington State House of Representatives
- Dan Mathis, Federal Highway Administration
- Sen. Guy Palumbo, Washington State Senate
- Mayor Bernie Talmas, City of Woodinville
- Peter Heffernan, on behalf of Harold Taniguchi, King County Department of Transportation
- Mayor Amy Walen, City of Kirkland

Executive Advisory Group staff in attendance:

- Diana Hart on behalf of Rep. Springer, Washington State House of Representatives
- Carol Thompson, Community Transit Service Development Manager

Presenters and WSDOT staff in attendance:

- Hannah Britt, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Anne Broache, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Ed Barry, WSDOT Toll Division
- Bruce Brown, PRR Director of Research
- Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 Project Director
- Lisa Hodgson, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Chris O'Claire, King County Metro, Assistant General Manager of Planning and Customer Services
- Meredith McNamee, WSDOT Toll Division
- Victoria Miller, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Peter Rogoff, Sound Transit CEO
- Wendy Taylor, I-405/SR 167 Project Deputy Director
- Karl Westby, I-405/SR 167 Senior Traffic Manager



Note: These meeting notes are intended to capture the discussion at the meeting, including questions and comments from the group. This is not intended to be a formal testimony or a complete transcript of the meeting. Meeting materials including the PowerPoint presentation are available on the web at: <http://wsdot.wa.gov/tolling/eastsidecorridor>

I. Introductions and Agenda Review

Secretary of Transportation Roger Millar welcomed the I-405/SR 167 Executive Advisory Group and provided an overview of the meeting topics. This meeting focused on express toll lane performance between Bellevue and Lynnwood at the two-year mark, potential phasing and funding of improvements between SR 522 and SR 527, results of a recent express toll lanes business user survey, and updates from the three major transit agencies regarding express toll lane performance and their services. He also reminded the group that WSDOT continues to build toward the long-term I-405 Master Plan.

II. WSDOT Update

Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 program administrator, started his presentation with a history of the I-405/SR 167 Executive Advisory Group. In 2010, the EAG endorsed WSDOT's plan for a 40-mile system of express toll lanes on I-405 and SR 167. This recommendation came just before the Legislature authorized express toll lanes between Bellevue and Lynnwood in 2011, and that project opened to traffic in 2015. In 2013, the EAG recommended a funding scenario for the Renton to Bellevue segment to create continuous express toll lanes that connect the existing HOT lanes on SR 167 in Renton to the express toll lanes between Bellevue and Lynnwood. The EAG's funding scenario consisted of \$960 million from traditional sources and \$215 million from toll revenue.

Henry provided a brief update on construction progress over the past several months for the I-405/SR 167 Interchange Direct Connector. He also reminded the group of WSDOT's I-405 project delivery schedule for currently funded projects, highlighting their commitment to open portions of King County's Eastside Rail Corridor trail by 2020 and complete the Renton to Bellevue widening and express toll lanes project by 2024 to coincide with Sound Transit's implementation of I-405 bus rapid transit.

Ed Barry, WSDOT Toll Division director, provided an update on the latest information about express toll lane performance between Bellevue and Lynnwood. He explained that overall vehicle volume throughput has increased in both the single lane and dual lane sections of express toll lanes during peak travel times. He reminded the group of the Legislative performance metric for the express toll lanes, which is 45 miles per hour, 90 percent of the time during peak periods. He reported that between April and September 2017, the express toll lanes moved 45 miles per hour or faster 85 percent of the time during peak periods. Three out of the four segments of express toll lanes operated above the 45 mile per hour metric more than 90 percent of the time during that time period, but the southbound single lane section is not meeting that standard, bringing down the average. Previously, the HOV lane met this standard 56 percent of the time. Barry reported that at the two-year mark for express toll lanes, they are not quite meeting this speed standard but are far exceeding the revenue requirement, which says the express toll lanes must cover their operating costs. Of the \$38.6 million dollars of total revenue in the first 21 months of operations, WSDOT spent \$13.6 million on operating costs and reinvested \$25 million into I-405 improvements such as the peak-use shoulder lane.



Barry reported that an independent study from the University of Minnesota will analyze the express toll lanes' performance data to recommend near and long term improvements for traffic performance in the corridor. The report out to the Joint Transportation Committee is Dec. 14, 2017 and the final report is due to the JTC on Jan. 8, 2018. Barry concluded with a recent I-405 driver opinion survey that 60 percent of respondents like having the option to use the express toll lanes for a faster trip, which is an increase from 2016. He said this rebound in support is consistent with trends in public opinion about other toll systems across the country.

Bruce Brown, PRR director of research, presented findings from a recent *Good to Go!* business customer survey. More than half of business survey respondents reported that they mostly or always use the I-405 express toll lanes or SR 167 HOT lanes during tolling hours. Sixty percent of respondents said their company benefits from having the option of using the express toll lanes or SR 167 HOT lanes. Nearly two thirds of respondents reported they find toll lanes helpful for work purposes with 24 percent reporting they are "very helpful." When asked whether they support using toll revenue to fund improvements to SR 167 and I-405, 79.5 percent of people said yes. About 55 percent of respondents support extending the express toll lanes between Bellevue and Renton with 27.7 percent of those identifying as very supportive.

Discussion

Rep. Harmsworth referenced the slide about the two year anniversary of the express toll lanes and the legislative intent when creating the performance metrics. He said that the only way to generate enough revenue is to slow down the general purpose lanes to force people to use the express toll lanes. He stated the statute is clear the express toll lanes need to meet both performance metrics. He requested that Secretary Millar send the Attorney General's opinion on the statute to his office. Secretary Millar said he would follow up on this request regarding the Attorney General's interpretation of the statute and that the Legislature will ultimately decide on the future of the express toll lanes.

Rep. Kloba asked whether the operations and maintenance costs will go down after WSDOT procures a new customer service vendor. Ed Barry said as more projects are tolled and join in the share of cost toward the vendor, some of the operations cost will be absorbed. He said the actual operations cost that goes toward the vendor is under 8 percent. Secretary Millar added that most of the *Good to Go!* customer service staff are located in Washington State. Barry expanded this by saying that the toll vendor employs more than 100 people in Washington to answer customer calls.

Karl Westby, I-405/SR 167 senior traffic manager, presented a traffic analysis to help support why express toll lanes are more effective at managing traffic than HOV lanes alone. He said because of the tremendous growth in the region, the actual 2017 daily traffic volumes on I-405 have already exceeded the 2020 master plan projections for the corridor. He presented a speed-flow graphic that shows that speeds in lanes that are not managed start to slow as volumes starts to reach maximum lane capacity. He said the express toll lanes operate at the tipping point to manage demand and speed. He provided a graph of a section of northbound I-405 near Northeast 85th Street in Kirkland to show how the two express toll lanes are moving 300-700 more vehicles per hour and operating at 20-30 miles per hour faster than the previous HOV lane in the same section.

Westby then compared performance during rush hour on segments of I-405 and I-5 that both have five lanes and similar daily traffic volume. A chart showed that both I-405 express toll lanes and general



purpose lanes move higher volumes of cars and people compared to the HOV and general purpose lanes on I-5.

WSDOT has been asked by some legislators to remove the express toll lanes and replace them with a 2 person HOV lane. Westby presented modeled traffic data that congestion would worsen in both the HOV and general purpose lanes without express toll lanes. He also presented a scenario of converting the existing dual lane express toll lanes to a single express toll lane, which would also result in increased general purpose congestion in the single-lane section and increased express toll lane congestion with higher toll rates throughout the corridor. Westby summarized the effects of removing the express toll lanes by saying that overall traffic performance would degrade, transit reliability would suffer, and the revenue source for north end improvements and other I-405 Master Plan elements would disappear.

Discussion

Rep. Harmsworth referenced a slide that said traffic growth has exceeded 2020 predictions and asked if the I-405 Master Plan numbers are incorrect because the Puget Sound Regional Council assumed a higher level of transit use. Westby responded that they projected a higher transit ridership compared the existing numbers, but did not have the exact numbers.

Councilmember Corman noted that when WSDOT says that express toll lanes help manage demand, it sounds like they are trying to discourage people from using cars. However, this presentation shows that the express toll lanes aim to move more vehicles, including cars, within the existing roadway. He said WSDOT could do a better job spreading the message that express toll lanes move more cars.

Sen. Palumbo said the current timeline of funding for the north end improvements is inadequate because the north end cannot wait for direct access ramps and bus rapid transit. He said he is willing to work with everyone in this room for a solution that accelerates the north end improvement.

Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 program administrator, presented a graphic showing the predicted traffic flow of the morning commute between Renton and Bellevue. Without the improvements of the I-405 Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes project, traffic would worsen in both the HOV and general-purpose lanes. However, the implementation of express toll lanes saw a significant increase of free flowing traffic in both the express toll lanes and general-purpose lanes.

Henry presented the projected long-term revenue from express toll lanes for the entire I-405 corridor between Renton and Lynnwood. He noted that WSDOT must reinvest toll revenue back into the corridor and estimates indicate nearly \$500 million in I-405 net toll revenue after the first five years of the Renton to Bellevue project opening. Henry presented two potential scenarios for funding improvements between SR 522 and SR 527: Phase 1a is an early delivery schedule based on funding that has not yet been identified, and Phase 1b is a later delivery schedule based on "pay-as-you-go" projected express toll lane revenue. Phase 1a combined improvements to southbound capacity, northbound capacity, and transit, which could be complete by the end of 2024. The phased approach based on existing express toll lane revenue could begin the first phase in 2024 and begin the second phase in 2031.

Discussion

Rep. Harmsworth asked whether the project team has done modeling for the I-405/SR 522 interchange to account for the three intersections at SR 522 and possible backups. Henry



responded that the team works with the city's public works staff, and will make sure the intersection has adequate turn lanes.

III. Transit Agency Updates

Chris O'Claire, assistant general manager of King County Metro, presented data that transit travel times have decreased between Bellevue and Lynnwood since the implementation of express toll lanes. The route between Woodinville and Bellevue has an average time savings of more than 10 minutes in the afternoon trips, which is 29% faster than before express toll lane implementation. For comparison, Metro routes that use the HOV lanes on I-5 have increased travel times on a system that O'Claire says is at capacity. She said Metro has had to alter schedules for one route in order to maximize the flow through the existing system on I-5. She said that we have the fastest transit ridership growth in the country, and she thanked Secretary Millar for WSDOT's focus on the movement of people and timesaving.

Emmett Heath, CEO of Community Transit, said transit customers experience a faster more reliable trip since the implementation of the express toll lanes on I-405. Heath contrasted the speed and reliability on I-405 routes with I-5 routes. Community Transit added \$2.6 million worth of service on I-5 between Snohomish County and UW in Seattle to offset the adverse effects delay due to congestion. However, they have not had to make similar investments in service on I-405 because speed and reliability have improved, which he attributed to the express toll lanes. He concluded by saying he is excited to see the implementation of Bus Rapid Transit on I-405 through Sound Transit 3.

Peter Rogoff, CEO of Sound Transit, echoed the previous transit speakers' point that the express toll lanes have benefited transit reliability. He said that bus performance on Sound Transit's system has deteriorated on average 6 percent with population grown and they expect it to worsen. However, routes that operate on I-405 have improved performance by 1 percent with ridership growth at 4 percent. He said Sound Transit's investment in bus rapid transit includes over \$800 million for I-405, such as funding inline stations or direct access ramps. This funding relies on WSDOT's ability to maintain adequate speed and reliability through the current I-405 express toll lane system. He said, "If the traffic is not going to move, there will be no rapid in bus rapid transit, there will be no high in high capacity transit, and we would have to completely rethink the investment as a Board." He said he wants to communicate this to anyone making decisions about removing the existing express toll lanes on I-405.

Discussion

Newcastle Mayor Rich Crispo pointed out the importance of local bus service and the need for more park and rides to intercept traffic before vehicles enter I-405. He said potential transit riders begin their trip in their cars and continue driving on I-405 because there are not enough park and ride stalls. He encouraged King County Metro and Community Transit to increase local service to connect to Sound Transit.

Renton Councilmember Randy Corman thanked the transit agencies for presenting. He said that the citizens of Renton are counting on BRT working efficiently, and the current I-405 Widening and Express Toll Lanes Project is going to work the way it is engineered now. He said he supports WSDOT's current plans between Renton to Bellevue that are designed to keep traffic flowing more freely, and he wants to make sure to keep the project moving forward.



Bothell Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr reminded the group that EAG members commented about the lack of park and ride spaces at the last meeting. She expressed concern about projections map that show increased congestion in the north end of the corridor if the express toll lanes were converted back to a 2+ HOV lane. She echoed Sen. Palumbo's previous comment that current funding and phasing plans for north end improvements are insufficient and not fast enough. Woodinville Mayor Bernie Talmas reiterated Mayor Crispo's comment that Eastside residents are not able to access mass transit on I-405. He suggested there needs to be improvements to transit connections before they get to the I-405/SR 522 interchange.

Kirkland Mayor Amy Walen said we should not talk about eliminating the existing express toll lanes because we are committed to the longstanding plan for the I-405 corridor and the voters decided to make a major investment in BRT on I-405. She said she appreciates that we need improvements in the north end, but we cannot have a major change in direction. She expressed Kirkland's support for the current plan.

IV. Public Comment

David Hablewitz thanked WSDOT for completing the Peak-Use Shoulder Lane. He also said he likes Community Transit's double decker buses. He said WSDOT is in the process of dismantling the Eastside Rail Corridor, and he would rather dedicate this corridor to transit instead of a trail for bicycles and pedestrians. He said HOV lanes have been failing because they should have a four-foot buffer between them and the general-purpose lanes. He said I-405 traffic performance has increased because WSDOT added direct access ramps and capacity in the peak-use shoulder lane.

Susan Gardner thanked Mayor Crispo for sharing her concerns. She said express toll lanes and transit penalize Eastside and South King County residents when those people cannot travel where they need to go. She said express toll lanes are not conducive to freight mobility because freight trucks are not allowed in the lanes. She suggested WSDOT convert the lanes to one HOV lane and the rest to general-purpose lanes.

Bill Popp said the Texas Transportation Institute analyzed data from WSDOT and approved the plan for two express toll lanes based on an anticipated 66 to 200 percent increase in HOV lane use. However, he said that HOV lane use increase did not materialize. He Dr. Westby's traffic modeling could be correct that congestion will increase if WSDOT converts the express toll lanes back to a single two person HOV lane, but he suggests WSDOT should try it with a buffer for protection between the HOV and general purpose lanes to see how it works.

Vic Bishop spoke on behalf of the Eastside Transportation Association. He said their stance is that the original I-405 Master Plan did not include express toll lanes. He said any benefits that occurred between Bellevue and Lynnwood from the \$300 million spent are related to the additional lane in a portion of the corridor and the peak-use shoulder lane. He said I-405 has shifted focus from capacity improvements to implementing Sound Transit improvements. He said once Sound Transit implements light rail, it will carry 0.25 percent of trips in the region. He said WSDOT should spend money on adding I-405 capacity.



V. Wrap Up

Secretary Roger Millar said the EAG will continue to work with partners on the multimodal improvements discussed today. The next EAG meeting will be in December or January and will focus on where the group's members stand on the 40 mile express toll lane system as we move into the legislative session and recommendations for funding north end improvements. He wrapped up with an example of the Katy Freeway where the Texas Department of Transportation spent five years and \$2.8 billion to expand it from an 8 to 23 lanes, the widest in the world. It initially opened with decreased travel times, but within three years, the travel times were longer than the original times before the project began. He said we need to think of different ways to address congestion than adding unmanaged capacity. He thanked the group for their participation.