



Corridor Program

Summary

I-405/SR 167 Executive Advisory Group Meeting #2

Monday, July 16, 2016
Bellevue City Hall
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Executive Advisory Group members in attendance:

- Mayor Nancy Backus, City of Auburn
- Shiv Batra, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Fred Butler, Sound Transit
- Mayor Suzette Cooke, City of Kent
- Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr, City of Bothell
- Councilmember John Drescher, City of Newcastle
- Jackson Maynard, Senate Republican Caucus, on behalf of Sen. Joe Fain, Washington State Senate
- Ken Feldman, Federal Transit Administration
- Kevin Fenton, on behalf of Sen. Steve Litzow, Washington State Senate
- Rep. Mark Hargrove, Washington State Legislature
- Lindsey Handel, Federal Highway Association, on behalf of Dan Mathis
- Emmett Heath, Community Transit
- Peter Heffernan, King County Department of Transportation, on behalf of Harold Taniguchi
- Libby Hollingshead, on behalf of Sen. Cyrus Habib, Washington State Senate
- Rep. Patricia Kuderer, Washington State Legislature
- Rep. Chad Magendanz, Washington State Legislature
- Rep. Joan McBride, Washington State Legislature
- Hester Serebrin, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Rep. Larry Springer, Washington State Legislature
- Mayor Amy Walen, City of Kirkland
- Councilmember Kevin Wallace, City of Bellevue
- Derek Zable, on behalf of Rep. Roger Goodman, Washington State Legislature

Presenters and I-405/SR 167 Project Team and Staff in attendance:

- Anne Broache, WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Communications
- Allison Camden, WSDOT Director of Intergovernmental and Tribal Relations,
- Lorena Eng, WSDOT Northwest Region Administrator
Kim Henry, WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Project Director
- Ric Ilgenfritz, Sound Transit Executive Director – Planning, Environment and Project Development
- Erica Jacobs, King County Eastside Rail Corridor Regional Trail Project Manager
- Roger Millar, WSDOT Acting Transportation Secretary
- Caitlin Morris, WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Communications
- Emily Pace, WSDOT Toll Division Communications
- Patty Rubstello, WSDOT Assistant Secretary, Toll Division
- Amy Scarton, WSDOT Assistant Secretary, Community and Economic Development, WSDOT
- Charla Skaggs, WSDOT Toll Division Communications
- Craig Smiley, WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Communications
- Wendy Taylor, WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Karl Westby, WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Project Team



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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. Welcome and Introductions

Acting Secretary of Transportation Roger Millar welcomed the I-405/SR 167 Executive Advisory Group, highlighted members who had not attended the previous meeting, and reviewed the agenda. Acting Secretary Millar provided historical context for the upcoming discussion by revisiting the 2002 EIS Record of Decision and the original goals of the I-405 Master Plan, which includes new highway capacity, transit and transportation choices, and environmental enhancements. He also reviewed progress on completing I-405 Master Plan elements. He closed by reminding the group that the purpose of this meeting is to share information and hear from stakeholders, so the EAG members and affiliated agencies can respond accordingly.

I. ST3 Adopted Plan Update

Sound Transit Executive Director for Planning, Environment and Project Development Ric Ilgenfritz provided an update of the Sound Transit 3 (ST3) proposal, with a focus on the I-405 Corridor projects. The Board adopted the final ST3 plan on June 23, and ST3 will appear on the ballot in fall 2016. Ilgenfritz walked the group through the changes between the draft plan and the final plan. Changes included the addition of light rail in South Kirkland, Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) station on I-405 at Northeast 44th Street in Renton, and a North Sammamish park and ride facility.

Ilgenfritz noted that during the ST3 public comment period, Sound Transit heard the message that eastside communities want to be connected to each other, as well as to other areas in the Puget Sound region. Ilgenfritz reviewed the ST3 Adopted Plan Eastside projects and highlighted the eastside cities the plan serves. The adopted I-405 BRT plan would serve Lynnwood to Burien with a 10-minute frequency in peak hours and 15-minute frequency in off-peak hours. It also offers new stations in Kirkland and Renton, as well as connections to existing transit facilities as well as SR 522 BRT. Sound Transit will work in close coordination with WSDOT on implementing the I-405 Corridor Master Plan, Ilgenfritz explained.

Ilgenfritz showed the I-405 BRT north and south routes, explaining which lanes and stations the BRT routes will use. The I-405 BRT routes include a mixture of the express toll Lanes, general purpose lanes, as well as bus-only shoulders. Ilgenfritz ended by noting that the combination of facilities within the BRT plan should achieve significant travel time savings.

Discussion

Acting Secretary Millar facilitated a discussion in response to Sound Transit's presentation.

Representative Mark Hargrove asked if Sound Transit has population heat maps to determine if ST3's proposed service correlates with the most population-dense regions.



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Acting Secretary Millar answered that he has served on many boards in the process and that density is taken into consideration in the planning process.

Councilmember Kevin Wallace asked about how the different transportation agencies are working together on BRT.

Acting Secretary Millar explained that coordination between WSDOT and ST is a part of the ongoing planning process.

Ilgenfriz added that on the capital project side, collaboration between began by aligning project schedules. On the service side, he said Sound Transit works with each of its partners to update schedules and routes three times a year. He also noted that ST is beginning to collaborate with other agencies on the next generation of the ORCA transit pass.

Emmett Heath, CEO of Community Transit, said interagency coordination between Community Transit and the other transit agencies is strong, adding that the agencies meet regularly to discuss regional issues, citing the ORCA program and Sound Transit's regional express service as examples.

Amy Scarton, WSDOT's Assistant Secretary of Transportation, said that WSDOT has been meeting regularly with transit agencies as it works on its own long range plan.

Peter Heffernan of King County said that Metro has closely coordinated with Sound Transit regarding U-Link service.

Councilmember Wallace requested that any BRT vehicles selected can accommodate wheelchair needs. He also voiced concern that Sound Transit's plan lacks adequate BRT stations to serve Bellevue's needs. He also expressed concern that there is no funding for a second express toll lane to I-5.

Councilmember John Drescher, City of Newcastle, said he was pleased to see Sound Transit's plans for the NE 44th Street station and asked for more details about which routes that station will serve.

Ilgenfritz replied that the station and BRT would serve the communities along the I-405 corridor between Burien to Lynnwood. He noted that he buses will operate every 10 minutes during peak, and connect with key hubs along the corridor.

Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr, City of Bothell, thanked Sound Transit for adding a BRT station in Bothell, and that she seconded Councilmember Wallace's comment. She asked Sound Transit to do whatever possible to help BRT and provide in-line stations in Bothell. She added that she was appreciative of the opportunity to work with WSDOT on planning for future projects to improve traffic congestion in the Bothell area. She also voiced concern about the lack of a second express toll lane in Bothell, and noted that she has been impressed with WSDOT's proactive approach in working through the capacity issues with Bothell.

Ilgenfritz replied that the I-405 and SR 522 interchange in Bothell presents a challenge, and until WSDOT gets funding to do the projects, ST will have to rely on the infrastructure they already have.

Acting Secretary Millar added that the Legislature funded analysis for the I-405/SR 522 interchange area, and that WSDOT will report back in the fall.

Rep. Magendanz asked if WSDOT has a contingency plan in place if the legislature mandates that the express toll lanes to return to HOV lanes.



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Acting Secretary Millar responded that WSDOT does not currently have a contingency plan in place, however, the agency is learning as much as it can from the existing express toll lanes and will share those findings with the Legislature.

II. Eastside Rail Corridor Regional trail and WSDOT I-405 Project Coordination

Erica Jacobs, King County project manager for the Eastside Rail Corridor Regional Trail, provided the group with an update on the trail master plan process, focusing on the Wilburton Gap. The Wilburton Gap is an area in which WSDOT previously agreed to rebuild a bridge over I-405 that will ultimately connect segments of the ERC trail.

Jacobs reviewed recent milestones for the project. The Eastside Rail Corridor Regional Trail's Master Plan and EIS were released July 18. King County, the City of Bellevue and WSDOT held a workshop on June 8 to discuss the Wilburton Gap. The workshop's objectives were to achieve agreement amongst the agencies on the purpose and function of the Wilburton crossing over I-405 and also to identify a small number of design concepts to meet this purpose and these functions.

Two options emerged from the workshop. The first option is a bike/pedestrian trail bridge on a concrete girder, measuring 16-feet wide and 6.5 to 10-feet tall. The second option is a landscaped bike/pedestrian land bridge with a wildlife crossing function, measuring approximately 30-feet wide and 7.5 to 9-feet tall.

Jacobs explained that the conversation about the two options is ongoing. She noted that the design and construction schedules for the ERC trail's Wilburton segment and the I-405 Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lane project have been closely aligned. Jacobs said that WSDOT, King County and the City of Bellevue would meet in July or August to reach a consensus about proceeding with one of the two bridge options.

Discussion

Acting Secretary Millar facilitated a discussion about King County's presentation.

Rep. Larry Springer asked if changing the project skew between the two different options will affect right of way acquisition and trail operations.

Jacobs answered that changing the skew does not change the operations of the trail or preclude the potential reintroduction of rail uses in the corridor. However, the trail's centerline alignment may need to move.

III. WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Update

Patty Rubstello, WSDOT Toll Division Assistant Secretary, presented an update on I-405 express toll lane performance and operations in the nine months since opening. WSDOT data shows growing express toll lane use, and many sections of the general purpose lanes are experiencing faster speeds. Currently, the express toll lanes are meeting their legislative goal of 45 miles per hour, 90 percent of the time.

Rubstello said there is still room for improvement. She noted that the toll rates continue to reach \$10 more often, and section of I-405 with a single express toll lane in the Bothell area continues to be more congested than before the express toll lane system launched. WSDOT also continues to study the effects of the express toll lanes on local arterial traffic, although it has not observed any major differences so far.



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Rubstello noted that more than 11 million trips have occurred in the express toll lanes in their first nine months of operations. The number of trips decreased in March, most likely because of the policy change that opened the lanes to all drivers on nights and weekends. Because usage of the express toll lanes has increased, the average toll rates have increased over time.

Rubstello said new forecasts project an increase of about \$20 million in gross toll revenue and fees in each biennium compared to the initial forecast. WSDOT is able to cover the operating costs of the express toll lanes and reinvest that money back into the corridor.

Rubstello reviewed sample commutes to demonstrate that experiences in the express toll lanes vary with location, distance travelled and the time of the trip. The legislature has directed WSDOT to report on travel times and other metrics for specific northbound and southbound segments.

Rubstello asked transit agency representatives to speak to transit performance since the express toll lanes opened. Peter Heffernan of King County provided an update on how the express toll lanes have affected transit. Since the express toll lanes have opened, ridership has increased 8.2 percent and the average time travel savings have increased. In the morning, the average trip is over two minutes faster and in the evenings, the average commute is over five minutes faster.

Emmett Heath of Community Transit also spoke to the performance improvements that CT has seen as a result of the I-405 express toll lanes. He echoed Heffernan that the north end still experiences slowdowns, but that ridership continues to grow.

Rubstello closed by providing a summary of a Peer to Peer workshop on the I-405 express toll lanes in June 2016. The workshop included three transportation agencies and the FHWA, all of whom provided feedback and key takeaways for WSDOT to consider moving forward. Suggestions included developing a regional concept of operations for how all “managed” capacity will integrate together.

Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 Corridor Program Director, provided an update and overview of the I-405 operations and adjustments. So far, WSDOT has been identifying and tracking challenging areas, as well as completing a number of adjustments to the express toll lanes. He noted that most of the remaining operational problems stem from insufficient roadway capacity.

Henry described a few future projects under evaluation to address these capacity challenges. These projects include building a northbound auxiliary lane between SR 520 and Northeast 70th Place, implementing a general purpose hard shoulder running lane on northbound I-405 between SR 527 and I-5, and exploring other ways to address the limited capacity in the single express toll lane section between SR 522 and I-5.

Henry further explained the Hard Shoulder Running project, which is targeted to begin construction in 2017, and was initially funded by the 2016 Supplemental Transportation Budget. The project will implement a traffic management strategy that uses a shoulder as a general purpose lane to provide additional capacity when needed (peak periods). The shoulder lane will not be used when traffic volumes are low. However, when congestion is high, the dynamically controlled electronic signs will alert drivers that they can use the shoulder, adding capacity to the highway when needed. The scope will include a new northbound general purpose lane, a new noise wall, and other spot improvements.

Henry then showed a potential phased approach to building SR 522 and SR 527 that is designed to provide the most benefits at a reduced cost. This preliminary concept included widening the SR 522 interchange, extending the dual express toll lane system north between SR 522 and SR 527, and building



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a partial direct access ramp to the express toll lanes at SR 527. This project would improve general purpose lane speeds and result in increased throughput for the express toll lanes north of SR 522. He walked through modeled traffic congestion contours simulating the effects of the Hard Shoulder Running and express toll lane extension projects, noting that the projects would not eliminate congestion entirely but would provide some relief at key bottlenecks. He noted that the project team continues to explore these future projects and

Henry closed with an overview of the next projects slated for I-405, including the I-405 Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes project, the I-405/SR 167 Direct Connector project, and the recently-funded SR 167 SR 410 to SR 18 Northbound HOV Project. He provided a delivery schedule for Connecting Washington-funded I-405 projects throughout the corridor.

Discussion

Acting Secretary Millar facilitated a discussion about WSDOT's presentation.

Councilmember John Drescher of the City of Newcastle asked when the additional lane between Renton and Bellevue will be complete.

Kim Henry said WSDOT expects to complete the lane in 2024/25. He said WSDOT expects that incorporating lessons from the north-end project will create smoother operations between Bellevue and Renton.

Newcastle Councilmember John Drescher responded that his community is frustrated that I-405 traffic appears to be worse since the implementation of express toll lanes. His constituents would prefer only one express toll lane from Renton to Bellevue.

Rep. Chad Magendanz said his residents strongly dislike the I-405 express toll lanes and the concept of tolling. He suggested a system where drivers can use the lanes based on occupancy, rather than tolls.

Kirkland Mayor Amy Walen said express toll lanes have been a success, especially in terms of managing limited highway capacity, and that she has seen improvement in the corridor. Walen asked where new direct access ramps for transit be located on the second lane between Bothell and Lynnwood.

Henry replied that right now, WSDOT is studying the area and working with Sound Transit on the best transit routing to make sure they design and implement the most effective ramps.

Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr asked if it would be possible for transit to use hard shoulder running at all hours.

Henry said that option has not yet been discussed but could be possible if there is a need.

Acting Secretary Millar added that because hard shoulder running uses dynamic messaging, its operations hold a lot of possibilities.

Deputy Mayor Duerr expressed concerns that Bothell and unincorporated Snohomish County are the fastest growing areas of Washington State, and requested to know how WSDOT plans to address this growth.



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Acting Secretary Millar responded that the future projects are planned, but that they are not funded by last year's sixteen-year Connecting Washington plan. He acknowledged that the needs for projects are greater than the available funding.

Emmett Heath, Community Transit, asked Assistant Secretary Rubstello to talk about tolls as a revenue source.

Assistant Secretary Rubstello answered that because the I-405 express toll lanes are generating more revenue, WSDOT will be able to fund more projects. Acting Secretary Millar added that WSDOT is working with the Legislature and its transportation committees about using toll revenue to fund future projects.

Rep. Magendanz asked if WSDOT's Toll Division could plan to improve WSDOT's profits from tolls, specifically to improve how much WSDOT is making on the dollar and reduce operational costs.

Emmett Heath asked for clarification about the rumors that the majority of I-405 tolling revenue is going to a contractor in Texas.

Assistant Secretary Rubstello explained that the payments to the contractor are fixed and do not increase when toll prices increase.

Acting Secretary Millar added that the toll rates are set to manage demand, and WSDOT is actively monitoring the new system.

Rep. Larry Springer said he would like to know more about how fast traffic slows down traffic elsewhere. He emphasized that policymakers need as much data as possible. He added that because the system is so complicated, that data is not easy to access.

Councilmember Kevin Wallace, City of Bellevue, complimented WSDOT on its achievements and said that it is exciting to see the I-405 express toll lanes generate revenue and reinvest it in the system. He suggested that the discussion of 3+ carpools should end, and also asked if the Legislature will determine how the new revenue will be used.

Acting Secretary Millar confirmed that the Legislature determines how tolling revenue will be used.

Councilmember Wallace asked if elected officials should be prepared to lobby for the projects that meet their community's needs.

Acting Secretary Millar replied that WSDOT is continuing to do is reevaluate the I-405 Corridor's needs. WSDOT's intends to be transparent and to get advice from stakeholders and communities along the I-405 corridor. WSDOT brings that advice to the transportation committees and the transportation commission.

Councilmember Wallace asked for clarity regarding the presentation's traffic maps. He asked to know the difference between the maps created by conceptual models as opposed to the traffic data maps, pointing out that they appeared to show very different data.

Henry explained that the model graphs are working from a limited amount of data. The model is used as a comparison tool to see how new alternatives compare to each other. It is based only on a snapshot of time that could be effected by a number of variables, whereas the maps of current traffic conditions use actual traffic counts and data.

Mayor Suzette Cooke, City of Kent, expressed skepticism about what can be done to reduce congestion in Auburn and in Pierce County, and asked how to fund the gap in the SR 167 HOT lane extension.



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Acting Secretary Millar responded that WSDOT needs to look at managed lanes regionally. To address this issue, WSDOT has been talking to and working with its partners.

Mayor Cooke replied that she hopes WSDOT can find timely solutions to meet the growing needs of the region.

Acting Secretary Millar said WSDOT will change its course based on what is happening on the ground. He hopes that the I-405 express toll lanes demonstrated how saw problems with a new project and immediately took action to fix issues as they arose.

IV. Public Comment

Anne Broache, I-405 project team communications, facilitated a public comment period. The group heard from the following members of the public:

Will Knedlik said that tolling and gas tax revenue should be used for projects that benefit cars. He cited the state Constitution's 18th amendment to support his case.

David Hablewitz spoke on behalf of the group Stop 405 Tolls. He stated that the express toll lanes promote single occupant vehicle trips and discourage carpooling. He critiqued the survey taken of *GoodToGo!* customers and questions the results of the statistical analysis.

Vic Bishop introduced himself as the Chair of the Eastside Transportation Association. He said that WSDOT has created a system in which the bond holders control the I-405 corridor, which is a policy concern.

Assistant Secretary Millar responded that WSDOT would be happy to present to the ETA about Vic Bishop's concerns. The legislature has a roll in the bonds as does the treasurer. WSDOT does not control bond operations.

Bill Popp said that when implementing the I-405 express toll lanes, WSDOT added capacity and then took it away with tolling. He said that the improvements WSDOT sees in travel times are due to the added capacity, not the managed lanes. Contrary to popular belief, the HOV lanes were not crowded; rather, the HOV lanes were projected to be crowded.

V. Wrap Up

Acting Secretary Millar said that he would like the Executive Advisory Group to meet quarterly to discuss meaningful topics, with a next meeting expected in November or December. He thanked the members for attending and noted that WSDOT looks forward to continued interagency coordination. He reminded the group that if they have any questions, they can talk to Assistant Secretary Patty Rubstello and Kim Henry. He urged the group to contact WSDOT with questions in the interim. He closed by saying that together, the group will make the corridor work.

Adjourn