



## Summary

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

Tuesday, Dec. 6, 2016  
Renton Community Center  
9:30 – 11:30 a.m.

#### Executive Advisory Group members in attendance:

- Mayor Nancy Backus, City of Auburn
- Shiv Batra, Washington Transportation Commission
- Councilmember Randy Corman, City of Renton
- Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr, City of Bothell
- Linda Gehrke, Federal Transit Administration
- Rep. Mark Hargrove, Washington State House of Representatives
- Peter Heffernan, on behalf of Harold Taniguchi, King County Department of Transportation
- Dean Moberg, on behalf of Dan Mathis, Federal Highway Administration
- Councilmember Dana Ralph, City of Kent
- Mayor Bernie Talmas, City of Woodinville
- Secretary Roger Millar, Chair

#### Executive Advisory Group staff in attendance:

- Don Cairns, on behalf of Mayor John Marchione, City of Redmond
- Paul Cornish, Sound Transit
- Jennifer Fay, on behalf of Rep. Patty Kuderer, Washington State House of Representatives
- Erin Leonhart, City of Bothell
- Kate March, City of Bellevue
- Joel Pfundt, City of Kirkland
- Carl See, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Jim Seitz, City of Renton
- Kevin Snyder, City of Auburn
- Ariel Taylor, on behalf of Councilmember Claudia Balducci, King County Council
- Andrea Tull, Sound Transit
- Lacey Jane Wolfe, City of Kent
- Derek Zable, House of Representatives, on behalf of Rep. Roger Goodman

#### Presenters and WSDOT staff in attendance:

- Hannah Britt, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Anne Broache, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Jennifer Charlebois, WSDOT Toll Division
- Amy Danberg, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 Project Director
- Ric Ilgengritz, Sound Transit
- Erica Jacobs, King County
- Amy Scarton, Assistant Secretary, Community and Economic Development, WSDOT
- Charla Skaggs, WSDOT Toll Division
- Craig Smiley, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Wendy Taylor, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Karl Westby, I-405/SR 167 Project Team



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, asked members around the table to introduce themselves and reviewed the agenda. He provided an overview of the I-405 Master Plan to provide context for the rest of the meeting, emphasizing that it is multiagency and multimodal.

## II. WSDOT I-405/SR 167 Update

Jennifer Charlebois, Director of Toll Systems and Engineering at WSDOT Toll Division, provided a brief overview of how the express toll lanes operate. She noted that the 17 miles of express toll lanes on I-405 between Bellevue and Lynnwood opened Sept. 27, 2015. Since the lanes' opening, WSDOT has been continually monitoring the system and making improvements such as adjusting the algorithm and access points.

Charlebois provided a one-year update on the performance of the express toll lanes. Major points included:

- More drivers are using the system than originally anticipated.
- The system is hitting the maximum toll rate (\$10) more often than expected.
- Speeds in the general purpose lanes have improved in most areas.
- During the first six months of operation, the lanes met the goal of speeds greater than 45 miles per hour, 90 percent of the time during peak periods. But as more drivers choose to use the lanes, speeds have fallen below the metric in the single-lane section, resulting in the overall system not meeting this performance standard.

Charlebois framed the presentation in terms of three goals that the express toll lanes sought to achieve. The first goal was to offer drivers a new choice to use the express toll lanes. During the first year of operations, drivers made a total of 14.5 million trips in the express toll lanes, compared to the anticipated 12.1 million trips. WSDOT also expected that drivers would not use the express toll lanes every day, but it would be an option when they need it most, and 70 percent of express toll lane commuters use the lanes between 1 and 5 times per month. Charlebois noted that the average peak period, peak direction toll rate for the first year of operations was \$2.50.

The second goal of the express toll lanes is to provide a faster and more predictable trip. The average express toll lane trip saves 13 minutes over the general purpose lanes. The previous HOV lane moved traffic at 45 mph on average 60 percent of the time during peak periods, but in the express toll lanes,



traffic has been moving at 45 mph on average 85 percent of the time. That is because of performance issues in the single-lane section north of SR 522 that increased during the second six months of operations. The dual-lane section is meeting the performance standard of 45 mph, 90 percent of the time during peak periods. Speeds in the general purpose lane have also improved in most areas, with the exception of the area north of SR 522, where lane capacity was not increased. In most areas, vehicle volumes have increased even where pavement has not.

The third goal of the express toll lanes is to fund future corridor improvements. Charlebois reported that higher utilization of the lanes in the first year have produced higher than anticipated revenues. This revenue allowed WSDOT to proceed with building a new peak-use shoulder lane on I-405 between SR 527 and I-5 ahead of the expected legislative schedule. Toll revenue from the corridor is covering operating costs, as required by the Legislature, and is also expected to support future I-405 improvements.

Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 Program Director, gave a status update on active projects along the I-405 corridor. He started by describing the I-405 peak-use shoulder lane project. This project is expected to help with congestion during the afternoon northbound commute.

Through this project, WSDOT will open the shoulder for added general purpose capacity during peak commute times. The shoulder will be preserved during off-peak commute times when traffic volumes are lower. Drivers will know when the shoulder is available by dynamically controlled overhead electronic signs. He noted that construction is expected to begin in winter 2017, and the lane is expected to open ahead of schedule in spring 2017.

Aside from the peak-use shoulder lane project, Henry noted that WSDOT also received legislative direction earlier in 2016 to identify and prioritize other future improvements for the north end of I-405. As part of this process, the I-405 project team hosted a two-day charrette in November with WSDOT, transit agencies, counties, and cities to discuss funding and phasing for north end capacity projects. The group gathered input on challenges and considerations for phasing I-405 improvement projects in the north end while developing recommendations for prioritizing the next Master Plan improvements. Henry said the project team will continue to collaborate with Sound Transit and is evaluating charrette outcomes to report to the Joint Transportation Committee on Dec. 15.

Henry then provided an update on currently funded I-405/SR 167 projects. The I-405/SR 167 Interchange Direct Connector, a new flyover ramp that will provide direct access from the north and southbound HOT lanes on SR 167 to the HOV lanes on I-405, had a ceremonial groundbreaking in September 2016, and utility relocation is underway. The project is expected to be complete in mid-2019.

He also noted that tolling on the southbound SR167 HOT Lane Extension was scheduled to go live Dec. 17, 2016.

Henry said the next phase of express toll lanes between Renton to Bellevue is currently in the environmental review and design phase and on track to start construction in 2019. He described plans for building a direct access ramp at the Northeast 44th Street interchange in Renton to support future Bus Rapid Transit operations contained in the Sound Transit 3 package recently approved by voters.



Henry concluded by showing the current project schedule, noting that the Renton to Bellevue project is scheduled to open at the same time as the new I-405 Bus Rapid Transit system.

### **III. Executive Advisory Group Discussion**

Washington State Transportation Commissioner Shiv Batra asked what will happen if the toll lanes are taken away.

Charlebois pointed out there are two metrics for evaluating the express toll lane program. The lanes must move at 45 mph at least 90 percent of the time during peak commute times. They must also generate enough revenue to cover their operating costs. If the lanes do not meet both of these metrics, the Legislature will evaluate whether to remove them. Secretary Millar added that it is a two-year pilot project and there is another year before the Legislature will make a decision. Henry added that the peak-use shoulder lane is expected to help improve express toll lane performance.

Batra added that we need to do everything possible to increase performance within the pilot program timeframe. Secretary Millar noted that the pilot is achieving goals in other areas, but not in the north end.

Renton Councilmember Randy Corman stated that Renton was originally hesitant to endorse express toll lanes. But since then, the city has come to understand that in order for Bus Rapid Transit to be effective, there needs to be an uncongested lane. He said if the lane needs to be a 3-person carpool lane in order to keep moving, they are willing to support it. If the Legislature eliminated the express toll lanes, it would leave the area with a dilemma.

Bothell Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr stated she is excited about the peak-use shoulder lane. She also voiced support for BRT in helping reduce congestion, noting that there are two commuter colleges in Bothell with thousands of students traveling to the area.

Woodinville Mayor Bernie Talmas asked whether there was money in the budget to accommodate changes to technology and what will happen over the period of construction.

Secretary Millar responded that WSDOT staff participate in nationwide discussions to stay ahead of the technology curve. As an example, he pointed to Challenge Seattle, a group led by former Governor Chris Gregoire, to develop world leading infrastructure. He also pointed to Governor Inslee's subcommittee on autonomous vehicles.

Mayor Talmas asked if money can be allocated to account for unanticipated changes in technology.

Secretary Millar responded that the budget is created by the Legislature. If more money is available based on the previous tolling revenue forecast, WSDOT can evaluate this idea.

### **IV. Sound Transit**

Ric Ilgenfritz provided an overview of the next steps for implementing Sound Transit 3. He emphasized that the theme is intra-Eastside connectivity as well as connectivity to other regions. Sound Transit will coordinate with cities along the corridor where there will be new stations. I-405 BRT is expected to be implemented by 2024. Ilgenfritz listed the 15 Eastside light rail stations, BRT stations along I-405, SR 522



and SR 518, as well as two express bus and park-and-ride projects. Highlights of I-405 BRT include ten-minute frequency during peak hours and 15-minute frequency during off-peak hours. The plan gives Sound Transit authority to partner with WSDOT, and Ilgenfritz emphasized that Sound Transit is committed to that partnership.

Ilgenfritz discussed implementation planning with the Sound Transit board of directors. Sound Transit will hire project leads and consultants and has already started staffing and advertising for early program deliverables. Sound Transit participated in the north end charrette with the I-405 project team, and they would like to leverage resources. He brought up Mayor Talmas's previous question about a technology fund. Ilgenfritz acknowledged the inevitability of change, which is why ST3 included a \$75 million fund for research and development.

#### **V. Executive Advisory Group Discussion**

King County Intergovernmental Relations manager Peter Heffernan stated that the King County Department of Transportation also had staff attend the charrette for the north end of the corridor, which included discussion about BRT connections on SR 522. He would like to continue the conversation about how King County Metro can continue to be a part of the progress being made.

Mayor Talmas stated that it is important for local residents to have access to local bus service connecting to transit centers and park-and-ride facilities.

Batra said one criticism of ST3 is that it will take too many years to complete. Since the region is growing rapidly, he asked whether there are opportunities to speed up this timeline.

Ilgenfritz said there are many variables that go into project schedules, such as right-of-way acquisition, reviews and approvals. Sound Transit is looking to be efficient in project delivery.

Mayor Backus commented on the pros and cons now that ST3 has passed. She said we need to assess the jobs that are created by the initiative and ensure we have a trained workforce in the region to hire for such positions.

#### **VI. King County**

Erica Jacobs provided an update on the master plan for the Eastside Rail Corridor. Once the SEPA process is complete, the master plan will begin implementation. Jacobs described the Valley, Wilburton, and Lakefront segments of the trail, highlighting the opportunity for a Sound Transit partnership at the May Creek Gateway of the Wilburton segment. King County is working closely with Sound Transit and the City of Bellevue on this coordination opportunity for trail parking and amenities.

The preferred trail alignment is on the former railbed with a few exceptions for wetland avoidance and alignment coordination with Sound Transit light rail and a Puget Sound Energy project.

Jacobs explained that the next step is for the King County Council to approve the trail's master plan. Stakeholder and community engagement will continue in 2017 during the design phase.



## **VII. Executive Advisory Group Discussion**

Councilmember Corman commented that the Renton City Council received an Eastside Rail Corridor briefing about a month ago, and he is pleased with its progress. He noted benefits for bicycle commuters in the area.

Batra asked whether this trail will accommodate commuter bicyclists. Jacobs answered that the interim gravel trail can be used, but it is not ideal for road bikes. The future asphalt trail will be more comfortable for bike commuters.

Councilmember Corman provided a clarifying comment that while Renton was hesitant about tolling, they are now more accepting with BRT.

## **VIII. Public Comment**

Charles Thomas spoke in opposition to the peak-use shoulder lane. He expressed concerns that there would be no room for vehicles to move out of the way if there is an accident or disabled vehicle, potentially creating more traffic issues.

Vic Bishop spoke about new lanes envisioned by the I-405 Master Plan. He suggested restriping the existing express toll lanes to general purpose lanes. He expressed doubts about the number of three-person carpools using the express toll lanes and has requested more data on this subject from WSDOT staff. He said the Washington State Transportation Commission should consider adjusting the toll rates. He noted there are currently two direct access ramps, but every interchange needs direct access ramps for Bus Rapid Transit to operate efficiently.

David Hablewitz expressed opposition to tolling on I-405 and said two-person carpools have now moved to the general purpose lanes.

King Parker, a retired Renton City Councilmember, applauded the Executive Advisory Group for coming to a consensus on actions for the I-405 corridor. He has worked on this project for many years, and this Executive Advisory Group meeting will be his last. He thanked the group for their work.

## **IX. Wrap Up**

Secretary Millar thanked the group for attending and previewed upcoming events, including a report-out at the next Joint Transportation Committee meeting in Olympia on Dec. 15 and the start of construction of the peak-use shoulder lane. He said WSDOT will continue to work with Sound Transit and King County on multimodal transportation projects. He said he plans to convene the Executive Advisory Group meetings quarterly, and there would be follow-up on the next scheduled meeting date.

## **Adjourn**