



Corridor Program

Summary

I-405/SR 167 Executive Advisory Group Meeting

Thursday, July 13, 2017
Kent Commons Community Center
1 – 3 p.m.

Executive Advisory Group members and elected officials in attendance:

- Secretary Roger Millar, Chair
- Shiv Batra, Washington Transportation Commission
- Councilmember Claudia Balducci, King County Council, District 6
- Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr, City of Bothell
- Emmett Heath, Community Transit
- Councilmember Ruth Pérez, on behalf of Councilmember Randy Corman, City of Renton
- Councilmember Dana Ralph, on behalf of Mayor Suzette Cooke, City of Kent
- Linda Gehrke, Federal Transit Administration
- Mayor David Hill, City of Algona
- Sen. Patty Kuderer, Washington State Senate
- 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
- Sen. Lisa Wellman, Washington State Senate
- Joel Pfundt, on behalf of Mayor Amy Walen, City of Kirkland

Executive Advisory Group staff in attendance:

- Ingrid Gaub, on behalf of Mayor Nancy Backus, City of Auburn
- Joyce Nichols, City of Bellevue
- Carl See, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Carol Thompson, Community Transit

Presenters and WSDOT staff in attendance:

- Don Billen, Sound Transit
- Hannah Britt, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Anne Broache, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Ed Barry, WSDOT Toll Division
- Allison Camden, WSDOT Intergovernmental and Tribal Relations Director
- Kate Elliott, WSDOT Toll Division
- Brad Forbes, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Kim Henry, I-405/SR 167 Project Director
- Lisa Hodgson, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Meredith McNamee, WSDOT Toll Division
- Victoria Miller, I-405/SR 167 Project Team
- Wendy Taylor, I-405/SR 167 Project Deputy Director



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 included updates from WSDOT on performance of the peak-use shoulder lane and progress on the Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes project; an update from King County Councilmember Claudia Balducci on coordination between WSDOT, Sound Transit, King County and other transportation agencies on regional construction projects; and an update from Sound Transit on the next steps for I-405 Bus Rapid Transit. Millar also reminded the group of the I-405 Master Plan and progress made toward its goals so far.

II. King County Update

King County Councilmember Claudia Balducci reported on the Eastside Transportation Forum, which she hosted in Bellevue in May. This forum focused on educating stakeholders and the public on planned transportation and transit projects on the Eastside and in Seattle. The forum included numerous Eastside elected officials and city staff as well as representatives from regional agencies, such as King County Metro, Sound Transit, WSDOT, and the Seattle Department of Transportation.

Balducci reported that participants were concerned with timing and sequencing of upcoming construction projects and the potential lack of public awareness. She noted concerns about traffic and mobility challenges for drivers because multiple major projects will occur simultaneously. The stakeholders expressed a desire for more interagency coordination and public information. Balducci said she plans to continue facilitating work in this area to coordinate communications and outreach efforts across agencies.

Discussion

Sen. Lisa Wellman said the public does not know there is a long-term transportation plan for the Eastside. For example, some of her constituents did not know about plans for the South Bellevue Park and Ride despite outreach efforts. She also noted that the Coal Creek interchange and I-90/I-405 interchanges are congested, and that there is congestion in the I-405 general purpose lanes through Bellevue during off-peak hours, contrasted with light use of the HOV lanes.

III. Sound Transit Update

Don Billen, deputy executive director of High Capacity Transit project development for Sound Transit, presented an update on I-405 Bus Rapid Transit. His presentation focused on Sound Transit's collaborative approach to implementing Sound Transit 3 through early partnerships and agreements. He said the goal of this collaborative approach is allow the agencies to deliver projects in a timely manner and reduce the need to revisit prior decisions.



Billen said Sound Transit anticipates that WSDOT will lead design and construction of major infrastructure identified in ST3 for the I-405 Bus Rapid Transit system, including new transit stations at Northeast 85th Street in Kirkland and Northeast 44th Street in Renton, and bus lanes on SR 518.

Billen outlined an 18-month schedule for upcoming work on I-405 Bus Rapid Transit, starting with partnering agreements and selection of a consultant in the last half of 2017. Sound Transit plans to advertise for a consulting firm in August 2017. Environmental review is scheduled to occur in 2018 and the first part of 2019, with selection of the final BRT project to be built by mid-2019.

IV. WSDOT Update

Transportation Secretary Roger Millar outlined WSDOT's recent organizational changes, which took effect July 1. He noted that retirements in several executive leadership positions presented WSDOT with an opportunity to re-examine its structure. He said the goal is to be a nimble agency while delivering \$16 billion of Connecting Washington funded projects and be responsive to ST3 by integrating those projects with WSDOT. He highlighted a few of the organizational changes, including a new Management of Mobility leadership position to focus on construction coordination and the longer-term efficiency and operational performance of the system in place today. He also noted that the I-405 program will become a megaproject at the same level as the SR 520, SR 99 and Gateway programs.

I-405/SR 167 Program Director Kim Henry provided an update on currently funded I-405 corridor projects, with a focus on the performance of the new northbound peak-use shoulder lane between SR 527 and I-5 and progress on the Renton to Bellevue Widening and Express Toll Lanes project. He reported that peak-period traffic performance has improved significantly and average toll rates have declined in the north end of I-405 since the opening of the peak-use shoulder lane. He noted that the peak-use shoulder lane is only an interim improvement, and that the Legislature approved an additional \$5 million in the most recent transportation budget for WSDOT to continue engineering work on permanent new roadway capacity between SR 522 and I-5.

Henry provided an update on the design of the Renton to Bellevue project, emphasizing that WSDOT must complete the project by 2024 to align with the ST3 Bus Rapid Transit timeline. Henry noted that the Renton to Bellevue project must receive toll authorization from the Legislature. He added that WSDOT recently signed a memorandum of understanding with King County to have segments of the Eastside Rail Corridor Trail operational by 2020. Henry provided an overview of where WSDOT plans to make improvements and add new highway capacity as part of the Renton to Bellevue project, including interchange improvements at Coal Creek Parkway, southbound auxiliary lanes in Bellevue and Renton, and a northbound peak-use shoulder lane in Renton.

Toll Division Director Ed Barry presented the existing benefits of express toll lanes between Bellevue and Lynnwood and highlighted the projected benefits of express toll lanes between Renton and Bellevue. He noted that the performance in the I-405 HOV lane between Renton and Bellevue continues to worsen each year, and express toll lanes provide a reliable trip for transit and other vehicles. Data from the existing two express toll lane section of I-405 in the north end shows that each express toll lane moves more vehicles at faster speeds than the previous single HOV lane. The state law that authorized express toll lanes between Bellevue and Lynnwood states that the express toll lanes need to maintain speeds of 45 miles per hour at least 90 percent of the time during peak periods and the revenue from tolls must cover the operating costs. Barry provided an update on these two metrics. During the last federally



required reporting period between July and December 2016, the southbound express toll lanes maintained speeds of at least 45 miles per hour 78 percent of the time during morning peak, while northbound lanes maintained 45 miles per hour 79 percent of the time during afternoon peak, amounting to 78 percent overall across both directions of travel. The draft data from January through June 2017 shows morning peak southbound express toll lane traffic moving at 45 miles per hour 74 percent of the time and the northbound express toll lanes moving at 45 miles per hour 87 percent of the time, for an overall performance of 80 percent. This latest data includes the first two months of operations of the peak-use shoulder lane, which opened in late April 2017. After 18 months of operation, the express toll lanes have generated \$32.8 million in gross revenue with operating and maintenance costs of \$11.4 million, for a net revenue of \$21.4 million.

Barry also summarized the results of recent statistically valid surveys of I-405 drivers and express toll lane users. He noted that 59 percent of drivers between Bellevue to Lynnwood polled for this survey are satisfied or very satisfied with having the option use express toll lanes when they need them. In addition, among drivers who have traveled from Bellevue to Lynnwood in the past month, 56.4 percent supported extending the express toll lanes to connect to the SR 167 HOT lanes in Renton.

Secretary Millar closed the presentation by reiterating the timeline of the Renton to Bellevue project, noting that there will be delays to the construction of the project if WSDOT does not receive toll authorization from the Legislature.

Discussion

Sen. Guy Palumbo asked what WSDOT plans to do if tolling is removed between Bellevue and Lynnwood, and whether removing that revenue source will affect funding of future corridor projects. Secretary Millar responded that removing the existing express toll lanes will create an approximately \$200 million hole in funding for corridor projects. The Legislature assumed this funding source when allocating money for projects in the I-405 corridor. Millar added that there is a concern that Sound Transit may decide to invest money intended for BRT elsewhere if the express toll lanes are eliminated.

Councilmember Balducci asked whether speeds would decrease in the HOV and general purpose lanes if the express toll lanes were eliminated. Henry said WSDOT is in the process of modeling for the effects of converting the express toll lanes to a 2+ or 3+ person HOV lane. Secretary Millar brought up a real-world example of a section of I-5 with four general purpose lanes and one HOV lane (in Fife near Highway 18 similar to sections in Bellevue and Kirkland on I-405) where traffic is particularly challenging and does not provide reliability. Ed Barry added that the previous HOV lane from Bellevue to Lynnwood only met the current Legislative standard of 45 miles per hour, 90 percent of the time 62 percent of the time between January and June 2015.

Sen. Palumbo thanked WSDOT for the relief of the peak-use shoulder lane, but said he is concerned about the lack of park and ride stalls at Canyon Park and UW Bothell. He said he would like to know when he eventually votes on toll authorization for the Renton to Bellevue project whether there is a plan for relief for congestion in the north end. He also asked whether toll revenue from the existing toll lanes went toward their startup cost. Secretary Millar answered that the 2005 Transportation Partnership Program (TPA) and the 2003 Nickel funding package paid for the north end tolling facilities, and WSDOT did not use toll revenue to pay off bonds or construction costs.



Sen. Lisa Wellman asked where vehicles can enter the express toll lanes, who may use the lanes, and what qualifies as peak hours for the peak-use shoulder lane. Henry clarified that anyone can use the express toll lanes for free on the weekend and during weekday off-peak hours. He also noted WSDOT opens the peak-use shoulder lane to traffic only during the highest-volume time periods of the day and needs to preserve the shoulder for emergencies or maintenance at off-peak times. He said WSDOT can adjust the opening hours of the peak-use shoulder lane as appropriate for traffic conditions.

Deputy Mayor Davina Duerr observed that the peak-use shoulder lane is working well. She thanked WSDOT for their work, and stated that what is good for one part of the I-405 corridor is good for the entire corridor.

V. Public Comment

David Hablewitz said he appreciates the peak-use shoulder lane. He said that adding capacity is what makes things better. He asked a number of questions about aspects of WSDOT's express toll lane policies and survey methodology.

Bill Popp spoke on behalf of the Eastside Transportation Association about the Legislature's funding of an independent study by the University of Minnesota relating to express toll lanes on I-405. He expressed that this group is the right group to do this truly independent assessment. Popp said that the study needs more stakeholder involvement and that it should be an unbiased look at tolling. Popp submitted written comments for EAG members to review.

VI. Wrap Up

Secretary Millar reminded the group that the next EAG meeting will be in September or October 2017. One topic will be potential funding options for the next improvements between SR 522 and SR 527. He noted that WSDOT will continue to coordinate closely with members as they start the process of seeking toll authorization for Renton to Bellevue and continuation of the express toll lanes between Bellevue and Lynnwood. He noted that the WSDOT I-405 project office is available to speak to constituent groups, city councils, or county commissions as EAG members receive questions about the Renton to Bellevue project.

Adjourn