



Meeting Summary

JTC State Role in Public Transportation Public Transportation Advisory Panel – Workshop #3

Wednesday, September 29, 2010

10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Puget Sound Regional Council

In attendance:

- Senator Mary Margaret Haugen, Senate Transportation Committee Chair
- Representative Judy Clibborn, House Transportation Committee Chair
- Senator Brian Hatfield, District 19
- Senator Curtis King, District 14
- Senator Dan Swecker, District 20
- Representative Jim Moeller, District 49
- Representative Marko Liias, District 21
- Katy Taylor, WSDOT
- Kelly Scalf, Rural Resources
- Levi Wilhelmsen, rider
- Richard DeRock, Link Transit
- Kevin Desmond, King County Metro Transit
- Dave O’Connell, Mason County Transit
- Martha Rose, Island Transit
- Charlie Howard, Puget Sound Regional Council
- Rick Benner, Western Washington University
- Chuck Ayers, Cascade Bicycle Club
- Jim Stanton, Microsoft
- Ted Horobiowski, Avista Corporation
- Virginia McIntyre, League of Women Voters
- Alice Tawresey, former Transportation Commissioner
- Gladys Gillis, Starline Luxury Coaches
- Tom Jones, Consultant

Not in attendance:

- Representative Mike Armstrong, District 12
- Representative Terry Nealey, District 16
- Joni Earl, Sound Transit
- Karen Stites, Amalgamated Transit Union, 1765
- Page Scott, Yakima Conference of Governments
- Hans Van Someren Greve, Stemilt Growers

The third workshop with the Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) Public Transportation Advisory Panel was held on September 29, 2010. The workshop was attended by 23 of the Advisory Panel members. The Parsons Brinckerhoff team, led by Sheila Dezarn and Barbara Gilliland, introduced the agenda for the workshop. Before beginning the workshop, the members discussed their experiences using public transportation to get to the meeting.

Getting to the Meeting

During Workshop #2, Representative Liias suggested that members try to use the public transportation system to get to the next meeting. Sound Transit CEO Joni Earl offered to do trip planning for Panel members. Comments on their trips included:

- Dave O’Connell took a Mason County Transit bus to a WSDOT Ferry. Connections worked well and it was easy to walk to the meeting.
- Richard DeRock found it too inconvenient to use his itinerary due to multi-modal connections adding to the total travel time – he would have had to leave the day before to make it to the workshop on time.
- Representative Clibborn couldn’t take the first bus in her itinerary due to the lack of a crosswalk to get to the bus stop. This experience has prompted her to follow up on access to the stop.
- Katy Taylor drove in a carpool and bussed.
- Gladys Gillis took a bus.
- Martha Rose took Island Transit to a WSDOT ferry, and finally rode in a rideshare.
- Senator Hatfield had been staying at a hotel at the airport and took the Sound Transit Link Light Rail to the workshop. He noted a flaw that there is no designated space for luggage on Link.
- Representative Liias took a train and then walked.
- Virginia McIntyre had no transit options, but drove most of the way and then walked.

State Role in Public Transportation

Project Manager Sheila Dezarn reviewed the discussions from Workshop #2. Three questions were asked as part of the breakout sessions in Workshop #2:

- Are there current roles that should be reduced or eliminated?
- Are there current roles that should be enhanced or expanded?
- Should the state take on new roles?

Based on the Panel’s comments during breakout session in Workshop #2, it was noted that the Panel did not recommend adding new state roles or eliminating current roles; instead, emphasis was placed on seeking better alignment and predictability in funding and greater flexibility both in the state role and on funding issues. Representative Liias pointed out that, based on the results from Workshop #2, transportation users and providers appear to have different priorities.

Five major suggestions were identified. Sheila Dezarn reviewed each area and solicited additional clarification from the Panel members.

1. Reduce silos

- State could expand its coordination role
- State could assist with interconnectivity
- State grants could focus on coordination between modes or support transit-oriented development
- State could pool dollars more and decide how best to spend those dollars
- State could help leverage federal dollars

2. Streamline regulations

- Review to adjust and align regulations to achieve state goals

3. Provide more flexibility in state programs

- Use of park and ride facilities for private operators
- Deadheading in HOV lanes by private operators
- Airspace leases
- Use of space on state highways (fees, advertisements)

Comments

Regarding the use of space on state highways – The state currently imposes fees for improvements such as constructing transit shelters on the state’s right of way. Shelter advertisement fees must go to the state’s general fund instead of being earmarked for maintenance of the shelter or for meeting other public transportation needs.

- Judy Clibborn questioned if the general fund requirement is linked to federal highway funding instead of being a state issue. Richard DeRock answered that it is only a state issue. Katy Taylor suggested that there has been inconsistent past application of the law and there is a need for better coordination between different divisions within WSDOT.
- Senator Haugen suggested there is an opportunity to generate much greater revenue from advertising. There was additional discussion regarding revenue generating options related to park and ride usage; however either there are restrictions or lack of guidance on the conditions for use.

Regarding the permitting and transit related decision making processes – Senator Haugen noted that it appears that all actions require Olympia resolution or action. She suggested that more decisions need to be pushed to the regional level. Senator Swecker suggested that a more programmatic approach should be designed for guidance to clarify objectives. Several members noted long decision processes that are slowing project implementation: Jim Stanton noted that Microsoft wants to expand a ramp on a state highway and pay for it, but the permitting process is very complicated. Martha Rose said that she needs a permit for one shelter in Stanwood but it has been held up for 2 years.

Relating to access to public transportation services – Kelly Scalf commented that often decisions are made without considering how it affects peoples’ ability to access services. She cited an example where local street parking was converted from parallel (easy for access for persons with disabilities, in wheelchairs, etc.) to pull-in angle parking (hindering access). There was a general discussion about how this also drives costs related to paratransit services and in general affects both capital and health costs. Chuck Ayers commented that every transit trip is a pedestrian trip. Pedestrian issues need to be considered.

4. Align reporting/planning of schedules

- State and federal reporting requirements should overlap for more efficiency
- Biennial reporting instead of annual
- Transit Development Plans could be required for other providers
- Washington Transportation Plan update and rural services out of sequence
- Gray Notebook may be too detailed
- Need for holistic data to allow holistic discussions
- Regarding alignment of reporting, Senator Haugen suggested a “light” version of the Gray Notebook that adds transit information.

Comments

Regarding the need for holistic data to allow holistic discussions – Richard DeRock suggested the need to look at measures on a broader level, not at too detailed a level. Representative Liias suggested that there need to be clear outcomes we are trying to measure against.

Regarding the suggestion for biennial reporting – Richard DeRock noted that there is not agreement among transit members on the Panel on the question of annual versus biennial reporting. The data needs to be reported to the NTD annually anyway, and providers would prefer to use data that is recent.

5. Take year-to-year unreliability out of funding

- Define the baseline level of service
- State must continue to fund rural/special services
- Transit funding balance between congestion and special needs
- Tie funding to state goals
- Level of funding is not in line with state's transportation goals
- Tie funding to performance measures/best practices
- State dollars should be better focused (not spread)

Comments

Regarding a transit funding balance between congestion and special needs transportation – There needs to be a trade-off between providing access or maintaining performance.

- Kelly Scalf suggested a basic level of transportation across the state is important. Charlie Howard said there is an issue of the growing costs of ADA service that eclipses fixed route service when budgets are stagnant. Katy Taylor said she agrees that paratransit is ripe for change with full integration into DOT, adding capacity and managing demand.
- Chuck Ayers said there are unintended consequences of park and rides. Funding levels need to be more flexible to address human health and congestion issues by encouraging more walking and bicycling as access to the public transportation system.

Representative Clibborn also noted that it is difficult to track where savings occur. Often the dollars end up in different locations during the budget process.

The discussion concluded with Kevin Desmond posing the question on how this process might result in a more multi-modal approach to assessing the state's transportation investments. Representative Liias added that while the discussion generally focused on enhancements or relatively modest modifications to the state's role, there is a desire to approach things in a different way. In particular, there is interest in moving away from the "silo" mentality.

Defining Unmet Needs

Larry Sauve provided a short presentation on findings resulting from the research conducted on unmet needs, current challenges and emerging trends. It was noted that unmet needs is a broad term and are not consistently defined or comprehensively described or reported in any document. For purposes of this research, unmet needs were broadly defined as:

- Services or facilities as identified by individual provider policy boards or agencies which could not be provided
- Needs associated with the current recession, where services are being reduced
- Deferrals of system expansion plans also associated with the recession
- Needs identified in various forums or reports (e.g., connectivity) but not systematically documented

Several members noted that the existence of a gap between desired and available service doesn't automatically constitute a "need."

An overview of the public transportation available in the state was provided and the constraints caused by reductions in current public transportation revenues. Outside of revenue constraints, the following service coordination unmet needs were identified:

- Intermodal connections at state ferry terminals
- Connections between modes and systems
- Public information about specialized services that are available

In conclusion, a number of emerging trends and implications for public transportation were discussed.

- *Emerging Trends*
 - Growing demand for public transportation services as population and employment continue to grow
 - Aging population, growing at a faster rate in rural counties
 - Shifts to public transportation due to climate change initiatives and pricing initiatives (e.g., tolling)
 - Continued funding limits and uncertainties
- *Implications for Public Transportation*
 - Higher potential demand at a time of fiscal challenges
 - Prioritization of resources to maximize results

Transit Provider Perspectives

Kevin Desmond, Richard DeRock, and Dave O'Connell made a presentation that provided background and metrics on transit's role in addressing state goals. Each of the six state goals was presented with examples of transit's efforts to fulfill each goal. Transit's partnerships with the state were also highlighted and a point was emphasized that another goal the state might want to consider is access. Access to transit is a key element for making the system effective.

The presentation spurred a number of comments from Panel members.

- Senator King reminded the Panel of the importance of moving goods from Eastern Washington to Western Washington. The current efforts of stopping slides along I-90 help, however tolling SR-520, and modifying the Mercer Island area of the I-90 bridge to accommodate light rail will impact the capacity available on this corridor. Richard DeRock noted that the I-90 bridge and mountain pass are the biggest points of congestion for travelers to Wenatchee.
- Kelly Scalf pointed out that national healthcare reform will increase the number of non-emergency medical trips and increase demand for specialized services.

- Katy Taylor asked what state role would be most beneficial to transit? Responses included efforts to increase transit speed and reliability, such as using transit signal priority, incentives to improve access to transit and the creation of more predictable and stable funding resources.
- There was much discussion about how technology can also be a useful tool. Transit agencies have information that could be used to improve communication and knowledge of passenger flows. However, transit agency representatives noted that the costs for these types of improvements can be very high. There was some discussion about the role of the public versus the private sector in this area.
- Tom Jones cautioned about being overly optimistic about the state's ability to take on too many, if any, new issues or programs.

Revised State Role and Unmet Needs

A chart containing the summary from Workshop #2 augmented with additional information from the research on unmet needs was posted at the back of the room. Panel members were asked to vote for their top two priorities for state focus. The top areas included:

- Funding –
 - Public transit revenues declining (4 votes)
 - Funding – Improve funding reliability (6 votes)
 - Funding – Provide more flexibility in state programs (5 votes)
- Service Provision – Need for improved connections between modes, including bus, commuter rail/light rail, ferries and non-motorized (5 votes)
- Policy/Planning – Streamline regulations (5 votes)

Performance Measures

Eric Roecks presented an overview of how a performance management framework works and introduced the six performance measurement principles, which are that measures should be:

- Linked to goals
- Accepted by stakeholders
- Actionable
- Credible
- Timely, and that there should be
- An appropriate number of measures

It was noted that there is a distinction between performance *measures* versus *metrics* – with measures being broader concepts (*what* do we want to measure), while metrics are the actual calculations, ratios, or percentages (*how* we measure). For this discussion, we were focused on measures.

The group was shown a list of performance measures that could potentially be linked to each of the six state goals and asked to discuss the measures that would provide a good barometer on how the public transportation network is performing.

Major areas of emphasis that much of the group agreed on are as follows. It was noted that in general the Panel agreed that they believe there should be fewer measures and that some measures could serve more than one goal.

Although the panel spent time talking about each goal and suggested some key measures that would be good for each, the majority of the time focused on measures relating to the Mobility and Stewardship goals. At the end of the discussion many members agreed that in addition to these key areas that measures related to economic vitality were also important. The following summarizes the key elements members recommended focusing on:

Mobility – the discussion revolved around access to services and in, the urban areas, addressing congestion.

- Congestion mitigation and chokepoint relief
- Access to the public transportation system
- Connectivity
- Consumption of service – ridership measures

Stewardship – a lot of this discussion focused on getting to the right measures for cost, efficiency and effectiveness. However, it was noted that the “value” should not only relate to cost but also to the intrinsic value associated with providing basic mobility.

- Cost (passenger miles per gallon, cost per revenue mile)
- Cost and revenue balance (exclude paratransit/Medicaid services?)
- Physical and health environment issues
- Safety (age of fleet and accident data)

Other measures discussed related to environmental and physical health, such as greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction, and safety such as fleet age and accident data.

Developing Recommendations – Initial Observations

Sheila Dezarn discussed eight preliminary recommendations developed by the consulting team. The recommendations and comments on each recommendation are summarized below.

Policy/Planning – Initial Recommendation 1

To address mobility issues in the future, develop policies that require key state services (e.g., health care, human service, etc.) to be located for accessibility.

- Richard DeRock suggested that this recommendation should note also that minority populations are increasing, which use transit at a much higher rate. Also, housing authorities should be linked to transit.

Operations – Initial Recommendation 2

Define what level/elements of connectivity are important to the state network. Clarify roles of different service providers (i.e. state, transit, private, non-profit, etc.). Develop a comprehensive set of policies to guide conditions and circumstances for the usage of supporting infrastructure (i.e. HOV lanes, P&R’s, bus/transit lanes, etc.).

Funding - Initial Recommendation 3

Provide additional local options to ensure more predictable and stable funding, *and/or* establish new state funding source(s) that are directed at state goals and priorities (when feasible).

- Alice Tawresey suggested to the Panel that this recommendation should extend to ferries.

Funding – Initial Recommendation 4

Explore shifting from a grants program to a formula funding program, and/or explore more flexible ways to deliver service.

- Rick Benner said that formula funding can be problematic if the pot of funding declines and it doesn't address the size of the funding source being used.

Funding – Initial Recommendation 5

Place greater emphasis on tying Regional Mobility Fund grants to projects that improve connectivity and system integration: capital projects (e.g., intermodal facilities), service demo projects (e.g., to test and build market), and technology projects (e.g., traveler information systems).

- Richard DeRock commented on the issue of demo projects, noting that this recommendation makes an incorrect assumption that the local agencies would have continuing funding to maintain a service or project, not getting start-up capital.
- Kelly Scalf seconded that stable funding is important to help build ridership.
- Jim Stanton suggested that essential public facilities legislation should be expanded to include public transportation. Transit Now is a good pilot program that should be expanded.

Coordination/Oversight – Initial Recommendation 6

Seek to align reporting in terms of timing and requirements. Consider seeking information from private operators and special needs organizations to provide more robust information on overall system.

- Kevin Desmond asked what happens to the state report (which includes information from the state TDPs and the federal NTD reporting). What is the purpose of having both?
- Katy Taylor answered that the list of requirements has gotten long over time, and the two reports are due at different times of year. WSDOT has been trying to align the processes and that some elements are legislatively mandated.
- Sheila Dezarn noted that the issue related to this recommendation is to minimize data reporting duplication.

Coordination/Oversight – Initial Recommendation 7

Build on and broaden existing OFM Transportation Progress Report. Incorporate public transportation measures systematically into this report. Use TDPs to document how proposed service and capital programs will address system performance.

- Jim Stanton asked how can we look more broadly? He suggested there is too much data reporting and we should choose only the best measures.

Coordination/Oversight – Initial recommendation 8

State could serve as a clearinghouse for providing comprehensive public information on services available.

Other general comments

- Levi Wilhelmsen commented that land use being linked to transportation priorities should be more represented in these recommendations.
- Chuck Ayers recommended that metrics to measure economic impacts should also be included.

Comments and Adjourn

The floor was opened to public comment – former Transportation Secretary, Doug McDonald commented on performance measures. He suggested that it's impossible to create a limited set of

performance metrics to suit everyone's needs. The Gray Notebook was meant to convey facts to the public and legislators. Reports need to be based on more current data. He recommended that the audience look into the quarterly ridership report from Sound Transit (4-page document) and the Community Transit monthly report – both have rich data and tell of challenges and services provided.

The meeting adjourned after confirmation of the final meeting date, October 27. This meeting was originally slated for 10-1 at Sound Transit, but the team hopes to find a new venue so the meeting can be extended later into the afternoon.