

Clark County High Capacity Transit System Study
Steering Committee Meeting #2
4-6 p.m. Thursday, January 4, 2007
WSDOT Southwest Region Office, Conference Room 302
11018 NE 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA

MEETING SUMMARY

Members present:

Bill Ganley (City of Battle Ground)
Jeanne Harris (C-TRAN)
Tim Leavitt (City of Vancouver)
Arch Miller (Port of Vancouver)
Don Wagner (WSDOT)

Staff:

Dean Lookingbill (RTC)
Dale Robins (RTC)
John Cullerton (URS)
Jeanne Lawson (JLA)
Kalin Schmoldt (JLA)
Bob Post (URS)
Jack Gonsalves (PB)

Members absent:

Deb Wallace (State Representative)
Joe Zarelli (State Senator)

Purpose of Meeting:

- Review information on coordination with other major planning efforts, the federal New Starts process, and high capacity transit modes.
- Begin development of evaluation framework

Welcome

Jeanne Lawson and Dean Lookingbill welcomed the group. Jeanne Lawson noted that there would be no formal actions or significant decisions at the meeting. Staff will be reporting on CRC, C-TRAN coordination, the New Starts process, and HCT modes. Work will begin on developing the evaluation framework, which will be a fundamental part of future decision-making.

Committee business

There was some discussion of distributing meeting materials. Jeanne Lawson said that an attempt would be made to send meeting materials in a single email if feasible. She also noted that minutes will be posted through the RTC website. To ensure timely distribution of materials, Jeanne Lawson proposed including delivery receipts in subsequent emails. Jeanne Lawson noted that it will become increasingly important to conduct some of the committee business via email and wanted to make sure the committee was comfortable working online and sending feedback to the entire group.

Meeting Summary from October 24, 2006

Jeanne Lawson encouraged group members to send comments on the summary from the Oct. 24 Steering Committee meeting ASAP.

Follow-Up Items from Previous Meeting

Protocols - There were no comments on the revised protocols, task force charges, or purpose statement.

Task Force - Dale Robins distributed a draft Task Force membership list. He noted that most of the potential members have been contacted and received the offer positively. He noted that they have had some issues in making business contacts. Some candidates have yet to respond, and a recommendation is being sought from Legacy. He said that because it's been difficult to locate a young community leader, they were recommending seeking a representative from Leadership Clark County instead of Youth Commission. Dale said that they were looking for someone willing to make a long term commitment, and could include a current student or a recent graduate who has remained active in the county. Jeanne Harris emphasized the importance of involving members from a younger demographic.

Arch miller noted a lack of representation from Camas, Washougal, or Ridgefield. Dean Lookingbill said that they were expecting some representatives to serve double duty, and he noted that Laura Caine could also serve as a representative of Ridgefield. Staff will work to add a Camas/Washougal representative to the Project Management Team.

Steve Stuart requested a representative who is involved in the Highway 99 redevelopment. Dean Lookingbill said that they were expecting Legacy or WSU to serve that purpose.

Jeanne Lawson encouraged the group to contribute ideas on how to fill the holes in the list. She noted that the first Task Force meeting date is targeted for January 16, from 6-8 p.m. Dean Lookingbill said that they were planning to issue a news release announcing the study, publicizing the project website, and using the first Task Force meeting as acknowledgment that the study is underway. Jeanne Lawson added that the first Sounding Board meeting will be in February and will involve a range of individuals not serving on the Task Force.

Tim Leavitt asked whether Task Force representatives who can't make the first meeting will be sending stand-ins. Dean Lookingbill explained that absent representatives would have an opportunity to receive pertinent information at either the first Task Force or Sounding Board meeting.

Logo/Branding - Jeanne noted the final slogan and logo being used on the study materials.

CRC/C-TRAN 20-Year Plan Coordination

Jeanne Lawson described the CRC/C-TRAN presentation as trying to develop a common understanding of how coordination between the HCT study and CRC and C-TRAN will work. She pointed out that all presentation materials are available in the meeting packet.

John Cullerton noted that CRC seems to be focusing in on Light Rail or BRT, to be selected in early 2008. A question was raised about whether CRC was including express bus. Dean Lookingbill said that CRC was including express buses as an element of both a Light Rail alternative and BRT alternative, but the coordination being referred to is focused on the HCT elements of the CRC.

Steve Stuart asked about modeling to determine how land use can support HCT. John Cullerton said that they were not planning to model different types of land uses at this point. Dean Lookingbill said that they were trying to model everything on the same playing field. He added that when the discussion shifts to specific corridors, there will be consideration of how different land-use assumptions could impact the viability of HCT. He said that the study is being developed based on current land use plans.

Don Wagner expressed concern over CRC, C-TRAN, and the HCT study working on the same subject. He said that it appeared that WSDOT will be put into the position of making the first choice despite being the least suited in terms of knowledge to form a decision. Jeanne Harris said that she felt it is the role of WSDOT to integrate feedback from the various groups. Don Wagner countered that the DEIS will be concluded before WSDOT receives the information it needs. Dean Lookingbill said that the project staff believes that sense can be made of the three studies within the given time-frame. Steve Stuart pointed out that the studies are different, in that while the CRC is only looking at the Bridge Influence Area, the HCT study deals with the interconnectedness of the entire county. Don Wagner expressed concern that decisions made concerning the BIA may not be right with regard to C-TRAN's bus analysis. Jeanne Harris said that she thought it would become clear. Don said that they face a dilemma in that they have comments and letters from the C-TRAN board regarding modeling for the BIA, but as yet no data to support it. He stated that the issue will need to be discussed and resolved at some point. Dean Lookingbill said that they would move on, but noted that they would try to line up as many of the studies as possible when the DEIS starts.

FTA New/Small Starts Overview

Jeanne Lawson introduced Bob Post. He described the purpose of his presentation as giving an overview from the 10,000 foot level of the New Starts process that serves as the primary federal funding source for high capacity "fixed guideway" transit capital projects. He noted that while this current study was not a part of the New Starts process, a system plan is an important step if the region wants to compete for funding.

He emphasized that federal funding funds no projects at 100% and most are funded at about 50% federal and 50% local. Projects are competitive against other projects around the country. He noted that the Small Starts and Very Small Starts were newer processes and intended for projects of a smaller dollar value that would be unable to compete with larger scale projects. Steve Stuart asked about requests for New Starts projects vs. available funds. Bob Post said that he didn't know exactly, but estimated that requests probably totaled around \$50 billion vs. the \$6.6 billion available.

Bob Post noted that the interim rules for Small Starts were not yet streamlined and the final rules will not be out until 2008. He pointed out that no projects have made it all the way through the process yet because of the newness of the program.

He then addressed some examples of projects currently being evaluated for the overall New Starts program (Fiscal Year 2006). Fourteen are light rail, six are commuter rail, four are heavy rail, two are BRT, and there is one monorail project. He did point out that of the 300 proposed

projects many involved BRT projects, and are in the early stages of planning. He noted several New Starts projects in Seattle, Portland, and Eugene/Springfield.

Bob Post emphasized that cost effectiveness was a significant factor in the evaluation process, as was transit supportive land use and future patterns. He described entering Small Starts and New Starts projects as similar processes. He then discussed the typical planning and project development process for a new LRT New Starts Project.

Steve Stuart asked when the federal government would require matching funds. Bob Post responded that federal government will not enter into an agreement unless the local funds are available. He noted that the ongoing commitment is often the hardest part. He said that New Starts is officially considered “Section 5309 Funding” and added that it is important for projects to be self-sufficient if congress fails to appropriate funds on a consistent schedule.

Don Wagner asked how the HCT study lines up with the new reauthorization in the FTA. Bob Post responded that it is always advantageous to be identified as a program and get onto the list. He said that congress will appropriate funds this year, and though the project could get named, he felt it would be premature to go up against other projects.

Arch Miller asked about who would be responsible for going to Brian Baird and pushing for a discussion in congress. Dean Lookingbill said that it could be RTC, but would ideally be the transit entity: C-TRAN. Bob Post noted that in Portland, the various jurisdictions had signed a joint recommendation. Arch Miller emphasized the importance of letting the representatives know about the study.

Steve Stuart asked whether it would be necessary to provide the details such as the type of transit being promoted. Bob Post said that they would not want or expect such detail.

Jeanne Lawson said that the conversation warranted further discussion and will be on the agenda for the next meeting.

Don Wagner pointed out that funding for the HCT study came from Senator Patty Murray, so they are aware of the study.

HCT Mode Overview

Jeanne Lawson introduced Jack Gonsalves from Parsons Brinckerhoff. He introduced his overview presentation and noted that there have been no decisions about specific transit modes yet. Arch Miller asked about the value of looking at unlikely alternatives. Jack Gonsalves indicated that the overview was intended to educate regarding the modes and said that most of the infeasible options will be quickly eliminated.

Jack Gonsalves described light rail and BRT as “Semi-Rapid Transit;” a median between Rapid Transit and Street Transit. He explained a graph that charts the various modes as a function of speed and line capacity. Tim Leavitt asked whether it would be possible to include cost on the chart to provide some indication of the best value. Dean Lookingbill said that it was possible, but would vary from area to area.

Jack described the characteristics of the various modes, including Heavy rail, commuter rail, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, streetcar, and monorail. He noted that BRT can range from BRT “light,” where the buses get signal priority and queuing advantages, to a bus equivalent of Light Rail—but with rubber tires.

Steve Stuart asked whether there was comparative information on development patterns for communities using rail or rubber. Jack Gonsalves said that it was too soon to tell.

Don Wagner asked about operational details for BRT. Jack Gonsalves responded that BRT capacity can approach light rail in terms of capacity. He said that BRT is most effective in places where there are already successful bus routes with good demand. He added that they are not appropriate for areas of new development.

Tim Leavitt asked whether the estimated costs for BRT included right of way and environmental impacts. Jack Gonsalves said that they did.

Dean Lookingbill asked for feedback on the presentation, noting that they were looking to use it as an educational tool in different venues.

Steve Stuart said that he couldn’t foresee an application for heavy rail or a monorail within Clark County. Jeanne Harris agreed that the modes in between those options were the most logical for the area, but providing the extremes as bookends would be good for comparison.

Arch Miller cautioned against employing different modes on every route.

Evaluation Framework

Jeanne Lawson pointed out that a good evaluation framework will not eliminate options before people are ready to move on. She explained the process and committee roles diagram, noting that the “purpose” is not Purpose and Need as within the NEPA process. She said that the group will determine the purpose that will provide overall direction. Information from interviews with each member, along with Taskforce recommendations will guide and shape the goals and objectives based on the designated purpose.

Jeanne Lawson explained the Study Milestones diagram and noted that first step in narrowing modes involves eliminating those that are unworkable. She noted that the goal was not to settle on one specific type of mode and corridor as the FTA process requires some flexibility. Jeanne Harris asked for some further explanation of what “corridor analysis” means. Dean Lookingbill said that they were looking at all corridors in Clark County, such as SR 502 and Mill Plain, and then spending more time looking at land use. Jeanne explained that the cyclical process in the diagram was meant to describe the process of removing the unworkable options.

John Cullerton explained that the evaluation measures were being looked at from a system plan level and gave some examples of potential evaluation criteria. He noted that “corridor” extends beyond the main roadways and includes all traffic within the travel-shed. He added that as corridor options narrow, they’ll be looking at order of magnitude costs based upon initial

conceptual design and site level considerations. He then noted that the fourteen potential travel corridors will be narrowed down to the most promising HCT corridors. He noted that Cascade Park, Orchards, and St. Johns included broad swaths of arterials and “I-205 North” referred to the section of I-205 north of SR 500. Don Wagner suggested including I-5 south from Kiggins Bowl in case CRC takes up a no build decision. There were several questions about what was included for each potential corridor. Dean Lookingbill said that there were generalized maps to go on but said that they would need to fine tune them to better show the options. He said they would try to communicate the corridors more clearly.

Jeanne Harris asked whether Future Corridors was considered a separate study. Dean Lookingbill said that it was, but noted that each study interlaces with the others.

Wrap Up

Jeanne Lawson noted that they were hoping to meet in April, though that would require distributing information on goals and objectives and coordinating with the Taskforce via email. She explained that the group was not being asked to rubberstamp the goals and objectives, but to communicate through email on what needs to be modified. Don Wagner asked whether group members should CC the group with their comments. Jeanne Lawson said that would be ideal, and said that they would be circulating the goals to the group before the Taskforce meeting so there would be time to make changes. She cited the example of a “livable communities” goal that could involve the development of jobs. Don Wagner said that he would appreciate knowing how specific criteria might affect chances for receiving federal funding. He noted that the group will be relying on the consultant team for that information. Jeanne said that they would try to eliminate redundancies and noted that it’s not a completely fatal flaw to take on evaluation criteria that are hard to quantify. She said that they were not planning to use a weighted rating system for alternatives, as there simply isn’t the time. She said that ultimately, the group will be using a consumer report style evaluation system to rank the alternatives.

The next Steering Committee meeting will be April 5, from 4-6 pm.