

Clark County High Capacity Transit System Study
Steering Committee Meeting #7
5-7 p.m. Wednesday, February 28, 2008
WSDOT Southwest Region Office, Conference Room 124
11018 NE 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA

DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

Members present

Jack Berkman *for* Don Wagner (WSDOT)
Bill Ganley (City of Battle Ground)
Jeanne Harris (C-TRAN)
Jerry Oliver (Port of Vancouver)

Members absent

Tim Leavitt (City of Vancouver)
Steve Stuart (Clark County)
Don Wagner (WSDOT)
Deb Wallace (State Representative)
Joe Zarelli (State Senator)

Staff

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

Others

Jeff Hamm (C-TRAN)
Ross Montgomery (Task Force Member)
Thayer Rorabaugh (City of Vancouver)
Janeen Loughin
John Hoefs

Purpose of Meeting:

- Review the corridor technical analysis and comparison with CRC methods
- Review corridor evaluation
- Develop System Plan Strategy and discuss potential scenarios

Welcome/Committee Business

Review agenda – Jeanne Lawson acknowledged the low committee turnout but noted the importance of the milestone meeting. Dean Lookingbill and Dale Robins will meet one on one with absent committee members to gather their input. Lawson introduced Jerry Oliver, the new Port Commissioner who is replacing Arch Miller.

Since the last Steering Committee meeting, the corridor evaluation has been completed and presented to the Task Force and Sounding Board. Lawson explained that the Sounding Board took the form of an open house that allowed the general public to provide feedback on the potential corridors and how they could fit into a system. The Task Force also provided feedback. The goal of this meeting is to further develop the system strategy scenarios.

Approve of 11/28/07 meeting summary – There was no action on the meeting summary because of the low attendance.

Project update – Dean Lookingbill said that CRC continues to move forward and is working to release their DEIS by the end of March. CRC and the HCT study will continue to be closely coordinated.

Technical Analysis Review

I-5, I-205, Chelatchie Prairie Findings – John Cullerton summarized the technical analysis review for the I-5, I-205, and Chelatchie Prairie corridors. The information was originally intended to be presented at the cancelled January meeting.

I-5/Highway 99 – The corridor has high ridership and good travel times. Ridership is largely based on park-and-ride users and bi-state trips. Surprisingly, the job growth forecast within the corridor is quite low. There are good opportunities for park-and-rides.

I-205 – The corridor also has good overall ridership and trips are mostly bi-state oriented. The corridor creates a high level of new transit riders because it establishes a new service. Travel times are good, though pedestrian access is poor due to the median alignment. Service to activity centers is poor. There are unresolved issues regarding how the Glen Jackson Bridge can serve as a connection to the Portland system.

Chelatchie Prairie – The corridor would provide peak hour only commuter rail service. Ridership is relatively low and station area access is limited. The corridor lacks dense residential or commercial activity. While the capital costs are lower for the corridor, the service would have higher operating costs relative to other corridors.

Ridership & Cost Comparison – Cullerton explained that the HCT study methods for determining ridership in the I-5 corridor are different than the CRC methods. The HCT study considers potential daily ridership based on boarding at each station along the route. CRC considers the total daily trips cross the Columbia River, including express bus ridership for their BRT model. The CRC assumes that bus and express bus feed LRT ridership.

Cullerton showed ridership figures by alignment and mode. LRT on I-5 and Highway 99 have the highest ridership. The east/west alignments tend to serve the most intra county trips.

Order of magnitude costs were based on data from recent similar projects. Operating costs were based on HCT mode costs and assume that the supporting bus network is maintained.

Cullerton explained that HCT study cost methodology looks at the cost to operate a line between 219th and the Expo Center (for the I-5 corridor). CRC considers the cost to operate the overall system vs. a no-build alternative. CRC also assumes that bus connections feed into to LRT at the river.

Average cost for LRT is \$40-50 million per mile. Alignments on SR 500 are more expensive because of the structures necessary to avoid wetlands and maintain space for future widening. LRT on Fourth Plain is also constrained by right of way in some sections. Costs for I-205 LRT do not include the river crossing.

Jeff Hamm asked for information about the ability of I-205 to accommodate LRT. Jack Gonsalves said that while there are currently no fatal flaws, no policy decisions have been made and there has not been an institutional response. The weight overages are not dire and it may be possible to include a median track at the expense of some shoulder width. Some structural adaptations would be necessary. The costs for the I-205 alignment do not include the costs added by a crossing. Lawson noted that assumptions regarding ridership assume a connection to Cascade station. Lookingbill noted that the assumptions were the same as for the I-5 corridor which also does not include the costs of a river crossing. Jack Berkman noted that WSDOT has not taken an official position, although taking a lane or shoulder space would make the option unfavorable. Gonsalves emphasized that although some inside shoulder reduction might occur, there were never any plans to take a lane on the bridge.

BRT Full also has higher costs on SR 500 because of the structure needs. BRT Full on I-205 does not include bridge crossing costs. Use of an exclusive guideway is assumed for the crossing.

A Chelatchie rail alignment assumes the replacement of all rails and ties between Highway 99 and Battle Ground. Operating costs are \$6-10 million/year.

Corridor Evaluation

Method – Cullerton noted the summary matrix that had been distributed before the meeting. The matrix uses the study Goals and Objectives to establish measureable criteria for each alignment. The criteria and evaluation methodology sheet explains the scoring. The summary matrix reports averages of the findings by individual goal so as to give a general sense of performance.

Cullerton explained the Task Force Consensus map which shows “red” alignments that should be incorporated as part of the mid-term strategy (pre 2030) and “blue” alignments that should be preserved as part of a long term strategy. The I-5 corridor to the north of Salmon Creek was deferred due to the development patterns along that section. All exclusive and shared guideway options on Highway 99 and I-5 were kept. SR 14 showed some ridership merit, though Mill Plain offered better pedestrian access and is being recommended for a BRT line. Fourth Plain is similar in character to Mill Plain and is being left open for both exclusive and shared guideway options. Staff had recommended that SR 500 be dropped, though the Task Force recognized potential improvements and business centers along SR 500 as well as the future need for a higher speed alignment that would not be satisfied by Fourth Plain. The Task Force requested that SR 500 be considered as a blue alignment that could include BRT service at some point in the future. Staff had also recommended that I-205 north of Padden Parkway be designated as blue, though the Task Force felt it was important to complete the connection to Salmon Creek and re-designated the section as red. LRT was deferred as long range strategy, with the idea that BRT could be converted to LRT at some point in the future. It was recommended that the Chelatchie corridor be preserved within freight and trail plans so it is not precluded from any future passenger service.

Jerry Oliver asked whether the Chelatchie alignment was wide enough for freight-rail and dedicated BRT. Cullerton said that there is probably enough physical right of way, though Robins noted that the corridor needs to accommodate a trail as well. The trail effort is still in

motion along some portions of the corridor, though it would likely diverge from the rail line in urban areas.

Ross Montgomery commented that the Task Force had reviewed the I-205 corridor and felt that it would be prudent to back off from an LRT alternative contingent with assurances from C-TRAN that express bus service would still be an option.

Jeff Hamm expressed concern that no gaps should be left in the analysis if the CRC MOS (Minimum Operable Segment) is determined not to extend all the way to Lincoln and a connection is required between the two. Gonsalves noted that the CRC DEIS does include a Lincoln terminus. Hamm noted that a MOS is looking more and more likely. Lookingbill suggested beginning with Lincoln as the starting point. He said that the next steps involve launching a system analysis to determine how the corridors interact. MOS segments will be addressed when a system is selected. Community outreach to determine the form of the connection will also be necessary. Hamm noted concerns that residents might have a preference about the mode types through their neighborhoods depending on the MOS. Gonsalves noted that the CRC work to date has involved Kiggins Bowl, and it makes sense to use as a starting point. Lookingbill noted that conversations would occur with Vancouver to determine what does and does not make sense for alignments. Jeanne Harris warned against characterizing anything too soon and forming a precluded decision before involving the public. Thayer Rorabaugh said that it is important to nail down the facts regarding what is meant by an MOS, where it goes, and what the implications are so that they can be presented to the community. Harris noted the need for clear communication about the system and how it will be phased if an optimal corridor is selected.

Bill Ganely asked whether the study is intended to create a sense of new development that could occur with the new alignments. Lookingbill said that the goal is transit supportive policies and the preservation of corridors. Jack Berkman noted that agreement on alignments is helpful for WSDOT.

Kalin Schmoldt noted the preliminary findings from the Sounding Board comment forms. The forms collected demographic information to help categorize responses and asked attendees to provide their opinion as to whether each alignment should be considered for analysis as part of a system plan. Although explanatory statements were not yet available, the preliminary judgments about the corridors were fairly consistent with the Task Force's recommendations and acceptance was fairly widespread. Lookingbill noted that the findings appear to generally support intra county travel. Lawson said that the comments should be taken as informal and not as a statistically valid record.

System Plan Scenarios

Lawson asked the committee for their impressions of the Task Force Consensus map. Bill Ganley said the map looked good, but raised questions about how well the system would relieve points of congestion within the county. Ganley said that he thought of LRT as a long term mode because of the expense. He noted that he visualized streetcar as being helpful to Clark County and liked the I-5, Fourth Plain, and Mill Plain alignments better than I-205. Lookingbill said that while the system might not relieve congestion, it could help manage it and become a vehicle for

affecting land use. Thayer Rorabaugh cautioned against saying that transit will alleviate congestion. Transit serves manages congestion, constrain congestion, and keep it from overflowing into other areas. He said that he anticipated more transit ridership as gas prices increase.

Lawson clarified that they were seeking guidance on what should be tested, not what goes into the final plan. She noted that the Task Force had discussed starting with a minimal system that includes I-5/Highway 99 and Fourth Plain as a baseline and then adding various iterations. The concept system maps were the result of PMT and Sounding Board input. Gonsalves cautioned against abandoning the blue corridors too quickly. He also noted reliability and predictability as considerations, particularly when Streetcar and BRT Lite are more problematic in terms of those issues. Lookingbill encouraged the committee to consider policy and what the implications are of not improving one corridor or another. Robins noted that interim solutions were possible, such as using BRT Lite now and BRT Full later.

Jerry Oliver said that he liked the notion of giving people options and was more favorably disposed towards BRT than to LRT. He indicated a preference for Scenario 3 because of the high ridership potential. He noted that he expected growth in the county to come faster than it has over the past 20 years. He noted a preference for taking smaller steps and preserving options. He agreed that the six alternatives should be carried into analysis.

Jeanne Harris noted concerns that the system should provide complete connections via I-205, though she said the strategy maps looked good. Lookingbill noted that support from east county would likely be affected by the presence or absence of service. The Task Force also expressed concern about reaching voters to the east of I-205 and raised questions about how well the east-west corridors would serve the east part of the county. Lawson noted that people often want something in return for their support. A system analysis would create answers to questions about whether the use of I-205 creates substantial ridership or not. Cullerton noted that the nature of the east county market will make it harder to serve than downtown markets.

Jack Berkman noted that every map provides a link to Salmon Creek and asked when there should be discussion of connections to the south. Lookingbill said that the connection depends on the CRC discussion and what happens regarding an MOS. The study team has assumed connections at Lincoln. The system scenarios will be developed along with the supporting transit network, accumulated ridership information, and cost. Results should be available by late May. Elements of each option could then be compiled to form a system that makes the most sense. He said that it would not make as much sense to consider a whole new level of connection permutations until the system is refined to one or two options. Rorabaugh noted that comments on the CRC DEIS will help guide the conversation.

Jeanne Harris emphasized the importance of lining up the system study with CRC so people are aware of their choices in the future. She said that the decision is made in a void if they don't have adequate information about the MOS. Janine expressed concerns about leaving a gap in the modeling. Gonsalves said that the issue of what technology connects Kiggins Bowl/Lincoln to downtown is not that big of a concern yet. Lookingbill emphasized that the only question for this process is how a gap affects ridership; the location of a transfer is not a numbers issue. Cullerton

noted that the data to address the gap is available either from the HCT study or the CRC EIS and would not be a big issue from a modeling standpoint. Lawson assured the committee that the team will pursue the issue.

Lawson asked for Rorabaugh's and Berkman's input on the maps. Rorabaugh said he liked the streetcar option for Fourth Plain providing a cross-town connection. He encouraged consideration of the land use discussion from the Fourth Plain subarea study and the overall goal of creating a denser international district. Robins cautioned that streetcar could end at Vancouver Mall. Rorabaugh suggested a connection to the park-and-ride at Padden Parkway.

Berkman said that WSDOT would like it to be clear that the I-205 bridge issue is not being addressed. Lookingbill said that BRT is assumed to be capable of crossing on the existing bridge, possibly using bus on shoulder technology. Berkman encouraged that expectations be made clear.

Wrap-up/Next Steps

Lookingbill said that they were proposing no more than six systems scenarios. Lawson encouraged the committee to get back to the team with their thoughts. Robins said that a decision about which systems scenarios to run would be sent back to the committee.

Cullerton said that there would be work with C-TRAN to determine strategies for changing bus routes and other issues. Jeff Hamm requested information about the modes and their potential locations as C-TRAN begins their 20 year plan.

Close

- Next meeting: 4pm, Wednesday, May 28.