

CLARK COUNTY HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT SYSTEM STUDY

Steering Committee Meeting #8

3:00 to 5:00 p.m. Wednesday, May 28, 2008

WSDOT Southwest Region Office, Conference Room 124

11018 NE 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA

Draft Meeting Summary

Members present

Bill Ganley (City of Battle Ground)

Jeanne Harris (C-TRAN)

Tim Leavitt (City of Vancouver)

Don Wagner (WSDOT)

Deb Wallace (State Representative)

Joe Zarelli (State Senator)

Staff

Dean Lookingbill (RTC)

Dale Robins (RTC)

Bob Post (URS)

John Cullerton (URS)

Jack Gonsalves (PB)

Jeanne Lawson (JLA)

Kalin Schmoldt (JLA)

Members absent

Jerry Oliver (Port of Vancouver)

Steve Stuart (Clark County)

Others

Jeff Hamm (C-TRAN)

Mary Legry (WSDOT)

Purpose of Meeting:

- Review the HCT Concepts
- Review Initial System Scenario Findings

Welcome/Committee Business

Review agenda – Jeanne Lawson reviewed the last Steering Committee meeting where the committee had begun to piece the corridors and modes into system scenarios. The study team is developing analyses of the scenarios and will present preliminary findings at this meeting. More developed findings will be presented to the public for review and a recommendation will be sought from the Steering Committee at the June 25, meeting. The study schedule is structured to correspond with the CRC process.

Approve of 2/28/08 meeting summary – There were no comments.

HCT/TDP/CRC Schedules – Dean Lookingbill provided a list of dates relating to the adoption of a CRC Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA). The goal is to have a draft recommendation in place by the July 22, RTC board meeting that is supported by the Task Force and Steering Committee. This July 22nd meeting is intended to inform the RTC Board about the system analysis so that Board members can make a CRC recommendation based on preliminary information about how the two systems will work together. The HCT study will call for final recommendations and selection of a priority corridor by the fall so as to be in sync with the TDP. The selection of a CRC LPA is still a general project decision that will leave many details undefined. The HCT study findings will likely become a part of C-Tran's long range plan.

Jeanne Harris asked what would happen if the decision makers don't agree on one LPA. Lookingbill noted that the decision at this point is basically a "go" or "no-go" decision on whether or not to replace the bridge, what transit mode will be used, and where the terminus will be. More specific details will be discussed after the project is defined.

Jeff Hamm reminded the committee that HCT Study would form the basis for the HCT system plan that will be part of the C-Tran transit funding plan that will go to voters.

Tim Leavitt asked about the Task Force deliberations. Lookingbill said that the committee was in a good place and will meet on June 2, and June 16. Lawson noted that the committee understands the issues and their role. Task Force input will be collected and taken to the next Sounding Board meeting and to the Steering Committee. Leavitt asked whether the Task Force will take an advocacy role in the community after the committee stops meeting. Lawson said that they generally promote neutrality but she noted that there are individuals on the committee who could be good advocates at some point.

Jeanne Harris questioned the CRC schedule and how the RTC board would meet before representative members had the opportunity to hold their own meetings. Don Wagner explained that the CRC was not asking Task Force members to represent their boards, but only to offer their input. The boards will make their decisions regardless of the opinions of their CRC representative and the sequencing of the meetings is based on the meeting times for the various boards. Wagner cautioned the committee that the public needs to be clear that comments provided to the various boards-while potentially helpful in shaping their recommendations-will not be considered as part of the official CRC NEPA process record unless addressed directly to CRC itself. Leavitt asked whether comments could be forwarded from the boards to CRC. Wagner said he was not sure about the process for forwarding comments.

Public Involvement Update – Dale Robins described efforts to reach the Vancouver west side neighborhoods and clarify the relationship between the HCT Study and CRC. The public has been generally agreeable with the system strategy and other committee recommendations. Public responses have generally been positive.

Review of System Plan Scenarios

John Cullerton reminded the group of the different system scenarios. Scenario 1 involves a limited investment strategy that uses three BRT-Hybrid alignments. Scenario 2 is a higher investment option that uses LRT and BRT alignments and tests the scenario with and without express bus services. Scenario 3 is Streetcar oriented with one BRT-Hybrid route. Scenario 4 is BRT oriented and uses both BRT-Full and BRT-Hybrid. Scenario 5 is the same as Scenario 1 but with the addition of BRT on I-205.

Jack Gonsalves explained that BRT-Hybrid refers to BRT that operates as BRT-Lite where projected volume to capacity (V/C) ratios allow for smooth operation, but switches to BRT-Full to bypass congested areas. Combining the types helps to optimize cost.

HCT Concepts

HWY 99 BRT-HYBRID – The alignment begins at the north terminus of the CRC project and passes over I-5 using the existing structure. The BRT-Full section of the alignment can be accommodated with minimal widening. The BRT-Lite section begins at 104th and includes standard treatments such as queue jumps and signal timing. The alignment connects to the hospital before crossing I-5 to the planned Salmon Creek park-and-ride. In the event of a different CRC MOS, this alignment would connect to downtown Vancouver on Broadway.

Don Wagner asked how the link would work if a Clark College terminus is selected. Gonsalves explained that the alignment would still connect from the north using a T-junction.

HWY 99 STREETCAR – Although similar to the BRT-Hybrid alignment, the use of streetcar is complicated by the need to add tracks to the existing roadway. Streetcar could share tracks with LRT in downtown Vancouver.

Tim Leavitt asked whether BRT might continue into downtown instead of connecting at Clark College and expressed concern about the extra transit traffic. Lookingbill said that the exact amount of downtown service is a policy question for future discussion, but acknowledged that they are assuming more busses in downtown. Gonsalves noted that CRC is already considering a north south feeder system so the additional HCT traffic is not being double counted.

I-5 LRT – The alignment uses Highway 99 until 88th street because of inadequate room on I-5. After 88th, the alignment crosses the freeway and becomes side-running up to the planned Salmon Creek park-and-ride. The alignment can be extended further north if needed in the future.

Jeanne Harris said she had been told that streetcar works better in traffic than LRT. Gonsalves explained the two types of streetcar: a lower capacity, lower speed circulator system as in Portland or Seattle; or enhanced streetcar being proposed here, with its own guideway and with similar capacity and speed to BRT. Operating costs for streetcar are slightly lower than for LRT, but not in proportion to the lower capacity. LRT typically includes a form of signal preemption that could impact side-street operations more than streetcar, although LRT is not designed to run in mixed traffic while streetcar uses shared lanes. Streetcar on I-5 would require a transfer to reach downtown Portland. Deb Wallace asked about the advantages of streetcar in the scenario. The team noted previous community interest, slightly lower operating costs, and appealing vehicles. Cullerton said that the analysis was stretching the application of the mode to see if it could serve commuter needs, though there are not many examples of streetcar operating on exclusive guideway in this manner. Don Wagner questioned whether the FTA would accept the modified streetcar version as HCT. Lookingbill said the FTA would be more likely to accept enhanced Streetcar. Gonsalves noted that economic development benefits could help funding eligibility. Cullerton said that no such system has received FTA funding yet.

Wagner noted that the I-5 cross section only depicted two traffic lanes in each direction, and he asked that it be corrected to show three.

I-5 BRT FULL – The alignment is the same as for LRT, and includes full exclusive lanes. Robins noted that this alignment would connect to the 99th Street park-and-ride while the Highway 99 alignments would not.

FOURTH PLAIN BRT-HYBRID – The alignment assumes a connection to CRC at Clark College, followed by a median running segment to the east that takes away one travel lane in each direction but does not require further widening except at stations. The section may require traffic U-turns and right in/right out movement from driveways, but will still allow left turn pockets. The lane reduction appears compatible with the commercial character of the area and would be similar to Interstate Avenue in Portland. Additional crossing structure at Andresen would be necessary. After reverting to BRT Full, the alignment returns to mixed traffic at 131st.

Don Wagner noted that the 117th street intersection cannot handle any capacity reduction. Gonsalves said that the proposed alignment should not affect any of the through or turn movements.

FOURTH PLAIN STREETCAR – The alignment would operate as enhanced streetcar from downtown to Andresen before switching to mixed traffic and terminating at Vancouver Mall. The alignment would tie into downtown stations and operate on CRC tracks.

FOURTH PLAIN LRT – The alignment is similar to BRT-Hybrid, but uses exclusive lanes only.

Deb Wallace asked about extending streetcar only as far as Van Mall. Cullerton explained that they were trying to optimize each mode. In this case, the choice was made to operate streetcar as a circulator in the Vancouver Mall area and retain underlying bus service. Wallace noted that connecting Clark College to the Mall is an important section and would be appealing to the broader community.

Tim Leavitt said that he did not feel that streetcar fit the alignment well and he preferred a true HCT mode. Wallace noted that much would depend on a supportable CRC decision. Lawson reiterated how this version of enhanced streetcar has been specifically modified to help optimize its function and fundability.

MILL PLAIN BRT-HYBRID – The alignment is intended to maintain good flow by using queue jumps and other cost effective treatments while minimizing capital investments. The alignment would require adding an additional bi-directional lane by widening the crossing structure at Chkalov Drive. The alignment would then split, continuing along Mill Plain and to Fisher's Landing.

I-205 LRT – The alignment uses the I-205 median and would require a new bridge at the Columbia River.

I-205 BRT – The alignment is similar to I-205 LRT but does not invest in exclusive lanes north of Padden Parkway. The alignment assumes a BRT crossing of the I-205 bridge, either within a fixed guideway using lateral guidewheels to allow for reduced lane width, as bus on shoulder, or

in mixed traffic. A new structure would not be built. Lawson noted that no assumptions have been made regarding ODOT or WSDOT approval of the crossing.

Tim Leavitt asked about the shared lane north of Padden Parkway. Gonsalves said that traffic forecasts show good travel times without extra capital investments. The exclusive lanes could be extended in the future if needed.

Leavitt noted that the Fourth Plain alignments don't seem to connect with the Clark College park-and-ride. Lookingbill said that while a station is being considered at Fort Vancouver or on McLoughlin, there are still refinements as to the final location. Jeanne Harris emphasized that there needs to be more conversation regarding the connection.

Initial System Scenario Findings

Cullerton explained that ridership forecasting and costs were still being produced. He summarized the preliminary findings. Scenario 1 had the lowest ridership, moderate development opportunities. Scenarios 2A and 2B had the highest ridership increases with good development opportunities. The model did not consider the presence of express bus in Scenario 2B to make a significant difference. Scenario 3 had moderate to high capital costs and good land use and development opportunities. Scenarios 4 and 5 both had moderate ridership increases and development opportunities.

Joe Zarelli asked what "development opportunities" implies. Cullerton explained that rail based modes have been found to attract development beyond what a bus based system would attract. Lookingbill said that rail appears to support investments, but will not create a market where none exists. Leavitt asked whether BRT has similar benefits. Cullerton said that the favorable reaction is often based on permanency, looks, and the environment created.

Cullerton observed that I-205 tends to perform poorly when LRT is used in the Fourth Plain corridor. This is because LRT on Fourth Plain is assumed to be a one seat ride to downtown Portland, which makes I-205 a circumferential route that only connects via Clackamas. Streetcar behaves relatively poorly in attracting ridership relative to the faster modes. Scenarios 2A and 2B have similar ridership, though express bus costs \$2.5 million extra to maintain. Fourth Plain LRT serves a higher proportion of intra-county trips than any other LRT route.

Joe Zarelli observed that congestion issues tend to affect north/south movements, and HCT ridership on Fourth Plain would consist largely of existing riders changing transit modes. Lookingbill pointed out that serving north/south corridors tends to serve the bi-state market, while east/west service is more intra-county. HCT would also lead to ridership increases, changes in land use, and density.

Deb Wallace said that it would be helpful to see the raw data and background information. Cullerton said that the detailed information would be available at the next meeting. The committee asked for clarification on the group decision. Lawson explained that the team was seeking a preliminary recommendation with the understanding that circumstances may change by September based on the CRC outcome. The group will be asked for recommendations on which scenarios generally make the most sense, what changes might be necessary, what the

priority corridor should be, and what short term iterations may be feasible with a long term goal in mind.

Wallace asked whether HCT effects on land use over time are considered in the land use projections. Lookingbill said that the current land use plan does not specifically look at the effect of HCT on projected growth. Wallace encouraged cost effectiveness. Lookingbill said that they would look at cost effective examples, and LRT may not work. Jeanne Harris noted that conversations about economic development do not directly answer concerns about how transit helps individuals. Lookingbill noted that generally the higher the cost, the lower the net benefit. He said that while the long term vision should not be denied, there is a need for real, implementable solutions.

Bill Ganley suggested that the bus system is going to be the key system to develop in the face of rising gas prices. Lookingbill noted that the question at this point is whether it makes sense to introduce exclusive treatments. Ganley observed that streetcar tends to have more stops, while LRT has fewer. Tim Leavitt noted that while LRT may not be faster than driving, the travel times would be more consistent. Lawson said that they would discuss policy recommendations to include with the system recommendations. There is no data for modeling current gas prices yet.

Don Wagner asked to see a consumer reports style matrix that shows how well each scenario matches the study Goals and Objectives. He noted that Mary Legry would be replacing Jack Burkman as the interim WSDOT Planning Manager.

Tim Leavitt said that he did not feel that gas prices were making significant changes yet. He noted that the city has considered redevelopment opportunities on Fourth Plain and raised the question of whether to provide more buses or HCT. Lookingbill noted that they would have to prove to the FTA that HCT is faster and warranted. Jeanne Harris noted questions about what needs to be addressed today in order to support future improvements. Leavitt said that voters should be allowed to vote based on sub-districts. He suggested that it would not be fair to ask for a vote from people who wouldn't benefit from the service.

Wrap-up/Next Steps

Lawson encouraged the committee to attend the Sounding Board meeting. Feedback will be brought back on June 25. A consumer reports matrix will be available as will C-Tran cost reductions from removing redundant services.

Jeff Hamm suggested that as a recommendation is considered, the committee should consider how to phase between systems over time. Lookingbill said that they would try to form a balanced recommendation based on the data. Hamm suggested revisiting express bus options. Lookingbill said that they were trying to reduce redundant services, but feeder express buses could be included.

Close

- Next Meeting: Wednesday, June 25, 2008, 4-6 p.m.
- If needed: Thursday, July 10, 2008, 4-6 p.m.