

CLARK COUNTY HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT SYSTEM STUDY

Steering Committee Meeting #9

4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Wednesday, June 25, 2008

WSDOT Southwest Region Office, Conference Room 124

11018 NE 51st Circle, Vancouver, WA

Draft Meeting Summary

Members present

Bill Ganley (City of Battleground)

Jeanne Harris (C-TRAN)

Tim Leavitt (City of Vancouver)

Jerry Oliver (Port of Vancouver)

Steve Stuart (Clark County)

Deb Wallace (State Representative)

Members absent

Don Wagner (WSDOT)

Joe Zarelli (State Senator)

Staff

Dean Lookingbill (RTC)

Dale Robins (RTC)

Bob Post (URS)

John Cullerton (URS)

Sharon Kelly (URS)

Seth Gallant (URS)

Jack Gonsalves (PB)

Jeanne Lawson (JLA)

Kalin Schmoltdt (JLA)

Others

Jeff Hamm (C-TRAN)

Mary Legry (WSDOT)

Purpose of Meeting:

- Findings from scenario technical analysis
- Committee discussion of Policy Issues

Welcome/Committee Business

Review agenda – Jeanne Lawson explained that the meeting is intended to present more detailed findings on the performance of each corridor within the study scenarios. The committee will begin to discuss which alignments and modes could be part of a preliminary system plan that will help inform upcoming planning decisions. Lawson reminded the group that any preferred alignments and modes will still need to be studied as part of a NEPA process that will revisit the potential options again. Feedback from the Steering Committee will be passed on at the June 26, Sounding Board open house.

Approve of 5/28/08 meeting summary – There were no comments.

Scenario Analysis – Technical Findings

John Cullerton noted how the study had begun by looking at corridors on a broad level and is now looking at how the corridors operate as part of potential systems.

Ridership – Cullerton reviewed the five system scenarios and showed the comparative ridership differences between the baseline MTP ridership and CRC ridership for each potential system. He noted that the numbers given are estimates for the entire transit system, not just HCT ridership.

Capital Cost – Cullerton presented capital costs by order of magnitude in order to demonstrate the system package costs. The range of costs for Scenario 2 included distributed costs both with and without a new bridge next to the I-205 crossing.

Operating costs reflect potential savings that may be possible by reducing or eliminating redundant transit services. For example, the assumption was made that operating costs along the I-5 corridor could be reduced by eliminating express bus.

The FTA also considers land use and density when considering funding. Cullerton showed existing and projected densities relative to the FTA threshold of 6,667 persons per square mile. Cullerton noted that the numbers were higher than previous figures because downtown Vancouver is now being considered as part of the corridor for analysis. None of the corridors cross the FTA threshold even with the addition of downtown. Cullerton noted that the projections do not include density increases due to the Fourth Plain Revitalization Plan or Team 99 planning efforts. Those plans may contribute to future increases in density.

Deb Wallace asked about the term “medium ranking” as applied by the FTA. Cullerton explained that the FTA requires a medium ranking to qualify for New Starts or Small Starts funding. He noted that additional qualitative assessments based on transit supportive plans and policies are also considered. Cullerton noted that the FTA threshold is based on existing densities – not projected figures. Wallace asked about a timeline for implementing policy decisions on zoning and density. Bill Ganley noted that changes for the Highway 99 corridor will occur as part of a long range process, though zoning changes and code amendments may be reviewed annually. Lookingbill noted that plans to reach the necessary thresholds will be part of the land use “story” related to the FTA. Lawson reminded the committee that the HCT plan is aspirational and intended to inform future plans.

Cullerton noted the FTA threshold of 125,000 jobs within ½ mile of the alignment. While Clark County does not reach the threshold in any of the potential corridors, the FTA may allow the corridors to include the connection to downtown Portland. Whether or not Portland jobs can be included to reach the required threshold will depend on the quality of the ride and whether a transfer is required or not. The I-5/Hwy 99 and I-205 alignments produced lower jobs figures because of the amount of freeway within the corridor.

Jeanne Harris asked about current job figures within downtown Portland. Cullerton said that downtown Portland had about 130,000 jobs in all. The FTA looks at total existing jobs – not just the number of people who commute to jobs within the corridor.

Tim Leavitt observed that potential funding for the transit options appeared unlikely. Lookingbill noted that land use is only one measure that is considered. He noted that the TSUB (Transit System User Benefit) ranking is more important. Sharon Kelly noted that funding calculations might be applied differently during the next administration. Cullerton explained that they had devised a system for comparing cost-effectiveness across the corridors, but he cautioned against giving the numbers too much weight. The study’s cost-effectiveness rating is based on operating costs and capital costs as a function of the number of boarding rides. Actual TSUB calculations are more complicated.

I-5/Hwy 99 Corridor Policy Issues/Discussion

Technical findings – The LRT scenarios performed the best and the Hwy 99 Streetcar option performed the worst. The team assumed that HCT would eliminate the need for express bus in the corridor. Under this assumption, each mode within the corridor had an overall reduction in annual operating costs except for Streetcar which is assumed to have different operating hours than the other modes.

Jeanne Harris confirmed that the alignments use Main Street in downtown Vancouver. Cullerton said that they did. He explained that LRT assumes that CRC capital improvements are in place and consequently only require consideration of operating costs from the Mill District north. Busses and Streetcar were assumed to run all the way into downtown in order to avoid the need for a transfer at the Mill District. Lookingbill cautioned that the study estimates are in 2008 dollars and are not directly comparable with the projected CRC costs. Jeff Hamm noted that CRC is already assuming connections with local buses. Tim Leavitt expressed concern about using so many transit vehicles in downtown at the same time. Lookingbill explained that HCT would be replacing existing transit services from the north and not adding additional services over and above the CRC assumptions.

Cullerton showed the cost-effectiveness figures, noting the low cost for BRT-Hybrid and the higher costs for Streetcar. He reiterated that BRT-Hybrid performs well because of the assumptions about removing redundant services.

Wallace asked whether BRT could be considered for Small Starts funding. Jack Gonsalves said that it could. He noted that Very Small Starts doesn't require a fixed guideway, though a candidate alignment cannot cost more than \$3 million per mile (excluding vehicle costs). Very Small Starts also requires 10 minute headways, 14 hour daily service, a branded service, and cannot exceed \$75 million in total capital costs. Wallace suggested that Fourth Plain was already close to meeting those criteria. Gonsalves noted that the BRT alignments were closer to \$6 million per mile including vehicles. Shorter BRT alignments may be eligible.

Jeanne Harris cautioned that mixing modes could lead to reduced ridership by forcing transfers. Lookingbill noted that the BRT figures already assume the need for a transfer and that this does affect ridership. The ridership differences are largely driven by the appeal of a one seat ride.

Lawson noted that the Sounding Board would be asked whether or not they considered each mode/alignment worthy of inclusion in this system plan. Wallace suggested that people may not understand the extended timeline for the options. Lookingbill acknowledged the perception that LRT is the only HCT transit mode, but noted that BRT has emerged as a good alternative. Lawson said that the Task Force and the Sounding Board members have not focused on LRT as the only HCT mode. Steve Stuart cautioned against fostering unrealistic expectations.

Leavitt asked whether it was reasonable to eliminate Streetcar from consideration. Stuart noted that Team 99 found the use of Streetcar to be a popular option and suggested that it not be removed at this time. Lawson noted the importance of letting the findings from Team 99 and the HCT Study inform each other.

Policy Issues – Lawson noted the pros and cons listed in the corridor evaluation summary. She reminded the group that a full NEPA process will be necessary to select an alignment and asked the group for thoughts on whether to pursue Hwy 99 or Hwy 99/I-5 as the HCT alignment. Leavitt felt that the alignment should stay on Highway 99 because of redevelopment potential. Harris and Stuart agreed. Lawson said that the Task Force felt similarly. Lookingbill noted that the Task Force did recognize the tradeoffs between an intra-county and bi-state emphasis.

Leavitt asked whether it was possible to connect to downtown without using Main Street. Lookingbill noted the need to connect to the CRC, and said he was not aware of other options.

Stuart said that it did not seem to make sense to consider Portland employment as a reason for high-speed commuter travel if the goal is redevelopment. He suggested that the modes were trying to serve incongruent goals. Harris said that some modes can behave differently in order to accomplish different goals. She cited MAX in downtown Portland as an example and suggested that LRT could function like Streetcar but have the added advantage of a one-seat ride. Stuart countered that LRT tends to create hub to hub development and does not effectively serve local development needs. Gonsalves agreed that speed-oriented corridors do not contribute as much to economic development, though they may still be liked by customers. Wallace asked whether express bus or LRT would have faster travel times if LRT behaved as a Streetcar. Kelly said that travel time depends on a number of factors. Lawson offered to bring more information on the subject to the next meeting.

Gonsalves noted that BRT could be incrementally improved to LRT and help to preserve the corridor. Wallace asked why the viability of the BRT options was not questioned. Lawson said that they wanted to get the committee perspective on the outlying options, though the public will be asked about all of the options separately. Stuart suggested that Team 99 may need more information about Streetcar logistics and feasibility.

Lawson briefly noted that the Task Force largely felt that express bus should be maintained in order to serve locations outside of downtown Portland. The Task Force was more comfortable with removing express bus under the LRT scenarios. Cullerton noted that that the Task Force was primarily interested in maintaining a one-seat ride and Robins noted that the committee was attracted to the longer service hours offered by HCT. Lawson noted that the Task Force was only providing feedback for the Steering Committee to consider, and not full recommendations.

Fourth Plain Corridor Policy Issues/Discussion

Technical findings – Cullerton noted that LRT had again the highest ridership and Streetcar had the lowest. Because I-205 is routed through Clackamas Town Center and requires a transfer at Gateway, good service on Fourth Plain was found to effectively capture much of the I-205 market. Cullerton noted that the bi-state market could be served by either corridor.

Leavitt asked whether express bus was included in the Fourth Plain Streetcar scenario. Cullerton said that it was not. Lookingbill said that the 44 Limited was not included either.

Leavitt noted a recent council decision against removing capacity from the Fourth Plain Corridor for single occupancy vehicles. Lookingbill noted that the alignment under consideration did reduce automobile lanes in some sections so as to reduce the needed right of way. Cullerton noted that the Task Force did not perceive that Streetcar would serve an HCT function well.

Cullerton noted the higher annualized operating costs on Fourth Plain due to the fact that HCT would not replace as many existing services as HCT on I-5/Highway 99.

Policy Issues – Lawson noted the balance between serving through trips and local trips. Harris said that she was inclined to let east/west travel corridors have an intra-county focus, but she acknowledged the demand for inter-county travel. Lawson noted that the Task Force acknowledged the importance of serving east county and how Fourth Plain helps serve that market.

The committee generally agreed with the Task Force with regard to providing access to Van Mall. Lawson noted that the Task Force felt that Streetcar and LRT were too expensive at this time.

I-205 Corridor Policy Issues/Discussion

Technical findings – Cullerton noted that the major finding for I-205 deal with how ridership is reduced by Fourth Plain. He noted that operating costs and annualized costs are significantly higher for LRT than BRT. Robins noted the additional cost from including an LRT river crossing.

Hamm questioned how CRC found LRT operating costs to be cheaper than BRT. Cullerton said that the cost was influenced the lower ridership in the corridor. Cullerton noted that ridership would be higher without LRT on Fourth Plain. He noted capacity questions raised by TriMet and reiterated how an I-205 alignment would not be a one-seat ride to downtown Portland.

Wallace asked whether express bus ridership was modeled on I-205. Cullerton said that it would likely have ridership similar to BRT Full.

Policy Issues – Lawson noted that the Task Force had suggested expanding express bus in the corridor and trying to preserve geographic equity. The Task Force also wanted to preserve right of way for future HCT. The Task Force did acknowledge the untapped east side transit market.

Mill Plain Corridor Policy Issues/Discussion

Technical findings – Ridership on Mill Plain was found to be consistent across the scenarios. Lookingbill noted how Mill Plain does not interact with the other corridors and cited the poor connections to I-205. Robins reminded the group that the alignment is predominantly BRT-Lite except for a small section used to bypass traffic at I-205. Cullerton noted that the corridor was a good candidate for Very Small Starts.

Policy Issues – The committee indicated that they were comfortable with the Task Force recommendation.

Harris noted the apparent short term viability of the corridor and expressed interest whether a project could be started relatively soon. Lawson said that a recommendation on a priority corridor would be sought in the fall and offered to bring information on Small Starts and Very Small starts fundability to the next meeting.

Ganley noted the Mill Plain improvements currently being made over I-205. Gonsalves said that the improvements had been accounted for.

Lookingbill noted that the Very Small Starts program has no TSUB requirement and is primarily focused on travel time savings. This might be a disadvantage for Mill Plain, as it is relatively uncongested and unlikely to see significant travel time savings from HCT investments. Harris suggested that ridership on Mill Plain might help the TSUB numbers on other corridors.

Wallace said that she was interested in serving the most people and supporting C-TRAN's transit vision. Harris noted the issue of realigning operating costs if savings result from HCT. Lawson noted that committee members have been involved in coordinating both efforts.

Wrap-up/Next Steps

Lawson explained that the next meeting will require the committee to provide guidance to staff on what to include in a system plan. The preliminary recommendations from this meeting will help to inform CRC and other interim planning decisions, and the final recommendations on a system and priority corridor will come in the fall. A priority corridor is not needed at this time. Wallace requested a consolidated information sheet at the next meeting to help guide the discussion.

Harris asked whether the system plan include normal bus service. Lookingbill said it does, but it is not being addressed. Harris suggested that it could be important to see how HCT would alter existing services. Lookingbill said that assumptions about the amount of transit have been generally fixed. Hamm confirmed that information from the study would be incorporated into C-TRAN's alternatives. Lookingbill offered to find a better way to better illustrate impacts to existing transit. Wallace asked to see the transit connections from each alignment.

Leavitt requested a presentation or memo on the study for the July 10, City Council meeting. He noted that he would need to gather approval from the council before making any recommendations. Lookingbill reiterated that the Steering Committee would only be making a preliminary recommendation. Wallace cautioned that the council members may be under impression that LRT is the only option being considered. Robins noted plans for city council outreach in August. Harris suggested that it come sooner. Lawson explained that RTC board wants a recommendation from the committee before they make a CRC recommendation on July 22nd. She noted that the recommendations produced at the next meeting will be informed by council values but will not be presented as a formal, final recommendation.

Close

Next Meeting: **4 p.m. - 7 p.m.** Thursday, July 10, 2008