

CLARK COUNTY HIGH CAPACITY TRANSIT SYSTEM STUDY

Steering Committee Meeting #10

4-7 p.m. Thursday, July 10, 2008

WSDOT Southwest Region

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)

Jerry Oliver (Port of Vancouver)

Deb Wallace (State Representative)

Staff

Dean Lookingbill (RTC)

Dale Robins (RTC)

Bob Post (URS)

Seth Gallant (URS)

Jeanne Lawson (JLA)

Kalin Schmoldt (JLA)

Members absent

Steve Stuart (Clark County)

Don Wagner (WSDOT)

Joe Zarelli (State Senator)

Others

Jeff Hamm (C-TRAN)

Jim Quintana (C-TRAN)

Mary Legry (WSDOT)

Purpose of Meeting:

- Federal funding update
- Report on HCT System Plan findings
- Steering Committee discussion and direction

Welcome/Committee Business

Review agenda – Jeanne Lawson explained that the meeting goal is to obtain direction from the committee regarding the starting point for the next phase of the study as RTC begins to refine the system plan. The committee is expected to identify concerns and questions to address for the fall. Based on findings from the Sounding Board, survey results, and the last Steering Committee meeting, a draft system plan map has been created as a basis for discussion. Bob Post will update the committee on federal funding guidelines to provide a sense of feasibility in comparing the corridors.

Approve of 6/25/08 meeting summary – There were no comments. Lookingbill reminded the group that summaries will be posted on the study website once approved by the committee.

Public Involvement Update – Kalin Schmoldt provided a brief summary of the Sounding Board event held on June 26. Eighteen people attended the Sounding Board. Attendees were given an overview presentation before viewing the alignments, modes, and analysis information which was also presented at the last Steering Committee meeting. Attendees were provided with a response form to indicate which alignment and mode combinations they considered to be the most promising to include in a system plan. Though only seven forms were collected at the Sounding Board, the survey is being continued online through the end of the summer. So far,

about 120 responses have been collected. A complete summary of the survey findings will be available at the next Steering Committee meeting.

Respondents to the survey were almost entirely from Clark County and represented a mix of Zip codes. The most favored mode and alignment was LRT on I-5. Respondents liked the speed, one-seat ride, and connections to the Portland system. The five BRT options were the next most favored, with BRT on Mill Plain and Fourth Plain as the favorites. These were followed by the remaining LRT options and the Streetcar options. Respondents acknowledged the costs associated with LRT and indicated that the BRT options appeared more feasible. Streetcar was generally not perceived as a cost-effective option.

Lawson noted that respondents appeared to be well informed and many of the respondents indicated that they were previously involved in the other surveys or study related activities.

Tim Leavitt noted that the results seemed to reflect the committee discussion to date and asked whether there were any surprise findings. Lawson said that the popularity of LRT was somewhat surprising, though Lookingbill said that it was not surprising that people would be attracted to the potential one-seat ride to downtown Portland.

Deb Wallace suggested that interest in LRT could shift as people are made aware of the various tradeoffs. Lawson said that respondents have appeared well informed. Schmoldt noted that comments from the survey respondents indicated an awareness of the inherent tradeoffs.

Jerry Oliver asked whether the number of responses received was typical. Lawson said that the number of responses to the survey was typical for a study like this. Jeanne Harris asked how people had been informed about the survey. Lawson said that the event had been advertised in *The Columbian*, notice had been sent to the study email listserv, a note was posted on the study website, and *The Oregonian* ran a news article based on a study press release.

Federal Funding - New Starts Update

Bob Post explained that New Starts is a competitive program for assigning discretionary funding to projects throughout the US. Projects are funded through a grant agreement and contract with the federal government. Because the schedule for delivery of federal funds is variable, potential projects must be able to demonstrate that they can keep the project on schedule with funding from sources outside of the federal government.

Projects fall into three funding categories: New Starts, Small Starts, and Very Small Starts. The Small Starts and Very Small Starts funding categories were created so that smaller projects did not have to compete with very large ones.

Currently, 330 projects are in the pipeline for New Starts funding. Small Starts involves projects that seek less than \$75 million from the government and requires 50/50 local matching funds. Very Small Starts is for projects seeking less than \$50 million. Some Very Small Starts projects are funded at 80/20.

Post highlighted several example Very Small Starts projects funded at 80/20 in the Pacific Northwest. Post noted that the BRT alignment from Tukwila to Federal Way was built in a corridor that is eventually slated for LRT.

The New Starts and Small Starts programs evaluate projects based on various criteria. The FTA focuses on a detailed model that includes categories such as cost effectiveness, transit supportive land use, future patterns, a history of transit support, and local financial commitment. “Commitment” is based on the ability to pay for capital and long term operations. “Local” commitment refers to the availability of non-federal funding.

Leavitt asked about maximum possible funding from New Starts. Post said that it would be unusual to receive more than \$80-\$100 million per year. Jeanne Harris asked whether it was necessary to prove cash flow during construction. Post said that such requirements often depend on the congressional delegation. The Oregon delegation was able to use a letter of credit to qualify for interim financing for MAX. Lookingbill noted that the CRC Project will bond against bridge tolling.

Post said that it could take from six to twelve years to progress from the Alternatives Analysis to transit operations. Small Starts projects could take less time. For this study, an Alternatives Analysis would follow the selection of a priority corridor.

Deb Wallace asked what the request will be for the next phase of CRC funding. Lookingbill said that a small amount of transit money was being requested for the preliminary engineering (PE) step, though FTA money is not fully requested until a funding agreement is reached. Wallace said that it would be good to know whether the transit piece of CRC has enough funding to get through preliminary engineering for the next legislative session.

Post noted that funding authorization bills typically happen every five to six years.

HCT System Plan Findings and Map

Lookingbill noted highlights from the early findings memo included in the packet. He noted three study principles that emerged from the discussion at the last meeting. 1) HCT is premised on travel time savings, and needs to be faster than bus; 2) transit supportive land use choices need to be identified in order to support HCT; and 3) HCT needs balance service for both intra-county and bi-state riders. Additionally, HCT is intended to resolve transportation problems.

Lookingbill noted the list of system findings derived from the Steering Committee and Task Force.

Jeff Hamm confirmed that the system findings applied for the next 20 years. Lookingbill said that they were based on the 2030 GMA. Wallace requested that the timeframe be clarified early in the memo. Hamm suggested stating that LRT is too expensive to consider *for the next 20* years. Lookingbill clarified that the memo was intended to explain how the figures for LRT make it infeasible to consider as part of a 2030 system plan. He noted that circumstances may change in such a way that a different recommendation becomes feasible to consider before 2030.

Ganley said that he felt the existing bus system was inadequate to serve HCT. Lookingbill said that the memo assumes that a substantial bus system is in place that feeds HCT as well as the corridors that HCT does not serve. Hamm noted that the investment in HCT was an attempt to improve the long term cost-effectiveness of the system.

Harris noted the variability inherent in ridership trends and planning for a transit system, and questioned why the plan was not pursuing HCT more aggressively. Lookingbill acknowledged the changes over time, and explained that they were working with a snapshot of each corridor in order to move forward with the system plan with the eventual goal of moving into a more dynamic system. Current figures do not support FTA New Starts eligibility.

Wallace said she felt that no part of an HCT system would be eligible for federal funding if the deficiencies of the current bus system are not addressed. Wallace stated that there was also a need to evaluate latent demand for park and rides. Wallace also asked to see how the C-TRAN long range plan fits into the decisions being made today. Hamm noted that the progress of the C-TRAN 20 year plan was slowed to make considerations for the HCT Study and the CRC Project. Wallace said that it would be good to relate how the study serves the outer Clark County cities such as Battle Ground, Ridgefield, and Camas through the C-TRAN 20 year plan.

Steering Committee Discussion

I-5/Hwy 99 Corridor – Gonsalves briefly explained the recommended use of BRT-Hybrid on Highway 99 in the corridor. The character of the alignment on Main Street would be similar to Interstate Avenue in Portland.

Hamm asked whether BRT would use LRT stations in downtown Vancouver. Gonsalves said they would not, though it could connect on the sidewalk side. There would likely be one to one and a half blocks between BRT and LRT stops.

Gonsalves noted that the alignments would use the median on Main Street. Because a structure crossing I-5 would be too expensive, BRT would cross the existing structure in shared traffic. Above 99th Street, BRT enters mixed traffic, picks up trips at the hospital and terminates at the Salmon Creek Park and Ride. Dale Robins noted that the alignment did not connect to the 99th Street Park and Ride. Lookingbill said that the alignment would likely serve more intra-county trips than bi-state trips and express service would likely continue for this reason.

Hamm asked how existing service might be reduced. Gonsalves said that if BRT were to replace bus, then stops would be extended from 1/4 mile apart to 1/2 mile apart. If bus service is retained, stops would be placed at one mile apart.

Gonsalves noted that the question for the transit corridor is threefold: 1) is the alignment correct? 2) is the mode appropriate? Does it preclude other options in the future? and 3) What service plan should be used? Could existing services be removed when HCT is added?

Wallace said that she had less of a sense of the BRT-Hybrid alignment on Highway 99. Lookingbill said that more ridership would likely come from the Hwy 99/I-5 alignment, though

the Task Force strongly favored the Highway 99 alignment. Wallace said that she would like more information on the implications of a Highway 99 BRT alignment, but said that she was leaning towards supporting that option depending on the level of community support. Tim Leavitt noted support from Team 99 for Streetcar, though Lookingbill noted that the citizens on the Task Force opposed it. Lawson noted a recent meeting with the Three Creeks group which emphasized a desire for “high functioning” transit on Hwy 99. Robins reminded the group that leaning towards one option doesn’t mean that alternatives won’t be revisited in the future.

Mary Legry said that she mostly liked the concept, but abstained from stating her preference.

Bill Ganley said he liked the concept, especially the connection to the hospital and city offices. He expressed concern about the lack of connection to the 99th Street Park-and-Ride, but suggested that it could also serve express buses. Gonsalves noted that a potential Park and Ride area was available along Highway 99 just north of 78th Street. He noted that the I-5 alignment offered less room. Ganley said that he was considering how the alignment creates jobs and mobility for the community, which appeared more likely on Highway 99.

Lawson asked the committee whether it was a goal to select an alignment that would not preclude the long term possibility of LRT. Jerry Oliver cautioned that it was not appropriate to raise expectations for LRT without making it clear that it is a long term goal. He agreed that long term LRT development should not be precluded. Oliver said that he favors a Highway 99 alignment over I-5 because of the intra-county emphasis.

Jeanne Harris noted that the alignment serves intra-county and bi-state trips. Harris said that she didn’t like the required mode change in downtown or the potential effect of two types of transit on downtown. She suggested that the east/west corridors were more appropriate for an intra-county focus and that she preferred LRT on Highway 99. She admitted that she was looking at function over numbers and felt that the interim step of BRT wasn’t necessary for the corridor. Wallace suggested that LRT on Highway 99 would likely be the last corridor to be completed as part of a system. Harris disagreed, noting that the corridor could benefit from including Portland jobs and ridership to meet FTA funding eligibility. She noted that other cities have liked LRT and added more. Harris also noted that she was concerned about not connecting to the 99th Street Park and Ride, but said that a 78th Street Park and Ride could address the issue. Harris asked to see urban style LRT that was not strictly focused on commuters.

Jeff Hamm said that he supported Highway 99 which makes sense from a land use perspective. Hamm agreed with Harris on the concept of LRT in corridor, though he saw LRT ready BRT-Hybrid as a more practical short term solution. Harris questioned why cost was even being considered as a factor at this phase. Lookingbill reiterated that LRT was not perceived as being competitive for federal funding within the scope of projected 2030 land use numbers. Harris raised the question of what land use changes would be needed to achieve the needed land use thresholds and whether the mode should be driven by land use or whether the land use should be driven by the mode.

Tim Leavitt said that he felt that there should be LRT throughout the community. However, given the information on projected land use and densities, the proposed mode seemed the most

feasible for receiving federal support within a 2030 timeframe. While LRT on Highway 99 would be preferred, BRT on Highway 99 would serve appropriate land use and the community. Leavitt said he did not like the lack of connection to the 99th Street Park and Ride and noted that it was somewhat confusing for a Highway 99 alignment to not connect to a 99th Street facility. Leavitt said that he would like to provide the option for people to take HCT or express bus from the same station. Lookingbill agreed that not connecting to 99th Street Park and Ride was a tradeoff and that discussion of transit center locations will come later. Leavitt agreed with Harris about the use of BRT in downtown and suggested that BRT could be more disruptive than LRT.

Oliver warned that the system should not be constrained by existing park and rides.

Lawson reminded the committee of the original study goals and objectives, one of which was to look for a feasible system. Lawson said that they would look at impacts to downtown Vancouver. She confirmed that the lack of connection to the 99th Street Park and Ride was acceptable, and that flexibility with regard to the eventual use of LRT was important. The group agreed that Highway 99 was the right alignment as a holding place for the system plan. All members supported the use of BRT-Hybrid except for Harris who supported LRT.

Fourth Plain Corridor – Gonsalves described the alignment which connects to downtown on Fort Vancouver and McLaughlin and extends to 162nd. The current service plan is for 10-12 minute headways. There will be a park-and-ride at the end of the line and there are many opportunities for smaller park-and-rides throughout the corridor.

Harris asked whether BRT and LRT would operate on McLaughlin. Lookingbill said it would, so as to avoid the need for a transfer to reach downtown destinations. Lawson reminded the committee that HCT would replace some bus service in downtown, so the net bus service would not increase. Gonsalves noted that it was typical for HCT modes to operate in mixed traffic in downtown areas because there is usually inadequate right-of-way for exclusive lanes.

Lookingbill noted that the alignment wouldn't be as fast as LRT, but could help to capture transit riders from the I-205 travel shed into downtown Vancouver.

Leavitt, Harris, Oliver, and Ganley approved of the alignment and mode choice. Wallace said that she was fine with the alignment, but requested further consideration of the connections to CRC and suggested looking at a station planning area from the Clark College visitor's center to Fourth Plain.

Hamm requested more detail on how the alignment would interact with Van Mall. Gonsalves explained that the alignment crosses SR 500 on its own bridge structure, touches down at a mall station, and then uses a new structure to fly over I-205. The new I-205 structure could be modified to eventually connect to an I-205 alignment. Gonsalves explained that surface travel service would be too out-of-direction. Lookingbill offered to study the connection further.

The committee approved the connection to the mall.

I-205 Corridor – Gonsalves described the availability of space in the I-205 median. The service described on the map functions as an express bus during peak hours and as regular bus in off-peak hours. The alignment could employ bus-on-shoulders technology which would allow the bus to operate on the freeway shoulder when traffic flow slows to a certain threshold. Bus-on-shoulder has worked successfully in Minneapolis. Another possible technology is Free Ranging on Grid (FROG) which allows the bus to use magnets in the roadway as a guidance system without the need for a track. Hamm noted that C-TRAN had issued a letter to WSDOT regarding the use of bus-on-shoulder on I-5 south and SR 14. Legry said that WSDOT was working on a response though the federal response has been that shoulders cannot be used. More research on the matter is proceeding to determine what conditions prohibit shoulder use. Wallace suggested the possible need for legislative action on the subject. Gonsalves suggested that it may be easier to acquire approval for use of the right-hand shoulder. He offered to provide offline comments.

Gonsalves said that the service plan includes more service and connections to the 18th Street park-and-ride and Fishers Landing. A connector bus could be included to connect central county to Van Mall and Mill Plain. The alignment would tie into the Portland system at Gateway. Lookingbill explained that the service plan had been backed down from BRT Lite in order to show basic transit demand before providing more improved services. Exclusive treatments on I-205 do not appear necessary at this point. The map currently shows ridership figures for the existing limited express bus service. Wallace suggested that incremental bus may be inadequate given potential latent demand. Lookingbill explained that they had not yet modeled the new incremental bus ridership which could triple the existing 1,550 ridership figure. Wallace also noted the contradiction between the 1,550 ridership figure and the \$15 million/mile cost estimate that reads as a bias against I-205. Lookingbill agreed and explained that they were challenged to list ridership figures for incremental service which were not available. Wallace suggested the need for a level of service between BRT and incremental bus that could be used in phases to achieve BRT full. Lookingbill noted that BRT-Full was perceived as somewhat infeasible at this time, though enhanced incremental bus could be effective and could provide higher levels of service. Lawson noted that enhanced bus would fit the Task Force recommendation for providing basic service first. Wallace requested full operating costs for I-205 to compare with I-5, noting that the Task Force may have recommended against I-205 because the difference in operating costs with HCT seemed high compared to the difference in operating costs on I-5. Lookingbill noted the challenge to BRT-Full posed by the I-205 crossing.

Legry passed on making a recommendation, though she said she personally preferred LRT on I-205.

Ganley said it was important to have a realistic starting point and a long term plan in place. Ganley said that connections to the airport were important and suggested that perhaps the alignment should consider ending there. Ganley thanked WSDOT for good planning in the county. Lookingbill confirmed that the HCT system plan would affirm WSDOT's preservation of the I-205 median. Robins noted that the alignment was modeled across the bridge, though to Gateway and not the airport. The transit market analysis indicated that connections to Gateway were a better transit hub.

Oliver noted that the demand for the airport retail area was increasing. He stated a need to preserve existing right of way and agreed with the use of BRT-Lite at this time.

Harris said she agreed with Ganley that the airport is becoming an important destination. She approved of BRT-Lite with the eventual goal of LRT on I-205. She noted the perception by the public that LRT could go across the I-205 bridge.

Hamm asked why BRT-Full was not being considered. Gonsalves explained that it was due to mixed traffic operations at the I-205 bridge. He clarified that the alignment being discussed by the committee referred to BRT-Hybrid which would use the freeway median and operate in mixed traffic on the bridge. The bridge section could also be bus on shoulder.

Ganley raised the question of how the alignment would continue into Oregon. Lookingbill said that they were assuming an optimistic perspective, including potential use of bus on shoulder on the Oregon side. Lawson said that ODOT appeared willing to discuss the concept.

Lawson summarized the concerns of the issues raised by the committee: not underestimating demand; possibly upgrading to BRT-Lite or BRT-Hybrid; preserving the I-205 median; and exploring service opportunities in Oregon, especially to the airport.

Mill Plain Corridor – Gonsalves briefly summarized the alignment, noting that BRT would operate in mixed traffic in the right lane because congestion is not yet extensive enough to warrant a separate lane. A reversible lane would be used over I-205 which would require widening the existing bridge structure to maintain sidewalks. This structure addresses congestion at Chkalov Drive. Hamm asked why building two lanes was not being explored. Gonsalves said that they were looking at the minimal way to address the problem, and that the existing right of way could not be maintained with two lanes. The issue may be raised at a later date, though using only one lane helps keep Mill Plain affordable. Harris questioned how the use of two lanes might affect potential Small Starts funding.

Lawson offered to revisit the use of the bi-directional lane and consider whether two lanes could fit within the thresholds for Small Starts funding. Legry suggested exploring cost-sharing options with WSDOT.

Hamm noted that the data summary seemed to indicate that all of the options were more than \$3 million/mile and above the Very Small Starts threshold. Gonsalves noted that the figures included vehicle costs. Seth Gallant said that the Mill Plain alignment came closest to qualifying for Very Small Starts funding at \$5.3 million/mile. Robins noted that a phased approach could help meet the Very Small Starts threshold. Lawson offered to revisit the issue in the fall. Lookingbill said they would also look into whether incremental bus improvements could meet the needs of the corridor.

Hamm asked how the projects in the Seattle area qualified for funding. Robins said that dedicated lanes and HOV lanes were already in place.

Next Steps

Lookingbill said that the committee comments would be incorporated into the memo. The memo will note the process to date and will serve as a backdrop for the July 22, RTC conversation on CRC.

Staff will refine the modeling per the committee suggestions and return in the fall with two meetings of the Task Force and Steering Committee to complete the study. The Steering Committee will meet on September 25 and October 30. The revised analysis will be complete in advance of the September 25 meeting which will be oriented towards a full system recommendation. Based on the September 25 meeting, a priority corridor will be selected at the October 30 meeting. Fundability will be a part of selecting a priority corridor. Lawson said that phasing would be discussed as well.

Hamm noted that C-TRAN would need to know the HCT system plan by February 2009 in order to guide the C-TRAN 20 year plan and get reactions from public. Lookingbill confirmed that the system plan would be selected at the September 25 meeting. Lawson suggested that the committee would have a sense of which corridor was likely to be the priority selection at the September meeting as well.