



ISLAND REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ORGANIZATION

TECHNICAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE - MINUTES OF THE MEETING

October 14, 2021

TAC Member Attendance List

Todd Morrow, Executive Director - Island Transit
Brian Tyhuis, Community Planning and Liaison Officer - NAS Whidbey
Sharon Sappington, Executive Director – EDC
Elizabeth Sjostrom, NW Region Mt Baker Area - WSDOT
David Kuhl, Development Services Director – City of Oak Harbor
Alex Warner, City Engineer – City of Oak Harbor
Don Meeham - District 1 Citizen Representative
Stan Reeves, Executive Director - Port of South Whidbey
Bob Monize – District 3 Citizen Representative
Randi Perry, Director of Public Works – City of Langley
Chloe Bosen, Current Use Planner – Island County
(360) 387-9888 Camano – unknown
(360) 678-5111 Coupeville – unknown
Ed Sewester, Assistant County Engineer – Island County

Interested Parties in Attendance

Sky and Tara Rudolph – Whidbey Airpark owners

Facilitators

Nikki Davis, Interim IRTPO Planner/Traffic Engineer – Island County
Heather Bickford, New IRTPO Planner/Transportation Planner - Island County

Nikki Davis called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm and hands the meeting over to the new IRTPO Planner, Heather Bickford. Todd Morrow needs to leave by 1:30 pm, so it's decided to move his agenda item to the beginning of the meeting.

1. Approval of Minutes

Todd Morrow made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of August 12, 2021, as written. Seconded. All yeas, motion passed.

2. Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP)

Island Transit's Todd Morrow updates us on RTIP projects 17 and 18: Island Transit has two new projects to be added to the RTIP: the South Whidbey Transfer Center and the Transition to Zero Emissions Vehicles. The South Whidbey Transfer Center has been in the RTIP before, in the form of examining the need for it. This new part of the project is moving into planning and design. The project includes the creation of a Transit Center that makes it possible to move to zero emission vehicles and improves the service on the south end of the island, including the possibility of having some on-demand service to possibly supplement or replace some of the fixed routes we have. We need a new facility to do both projects. With the on-demand service, we need a place where vehicles can come together and transfer people off the street and into a safe environment. That means we need a larger footprint area than we currently have at the south end of the island. With regard to transitioning our fleet to zero emissions, if we choose to go electric, we'll need a place to charge our vehicles. We're hoping to have a site that's on or close to SR 525, within two to five miles of the ferry landing. This will also be a park and ride facility that adds capacity to WSF and Island Transit. If there is a passenger-only ferry service, people could park at the new Transfer Center and we would have a bus service that is cost free to take people directly to the dock, so they could have a place to leave their car behind and walk on the ferry. We would also include charging stations, and a small building to serve our operators and the public. We are about to kick off our property acquisition, and we anticipate using federal dollars. Senator Murray has asked that our project get three million dollars in Congress' annual appropriation process; this is not the infrastructure bills that are currently being talked about, this is the normal yearly appropriations bill. We also have local funds to help us, but we will be asking for additional funds along the way, including for the zero emission buses. The other project is just to show on the RTIP that we are moving to zero emission buses. Early next year we will undertake a process that will help us to determine which technology will be the predominate one for our agency. There are several options out there, including battery, electric, and hybrid fuel cells and we need to find which option works best for Island Transit in the unique operating environment we have in Island County. We want to make sure the RTIP and STIP and other plans show we're moving in that direction, so when funding opportunities become available we can take advantage of them.

Question: Did you figure out how much it's supposed to cost to charge each bus?

Answer: No, we don't know. Those are things we'll figure out in our feasibility study. Most people will tell you if you go the electric route, the electric charge will be a little less than fuel cost. There are other infrastructure costs that will add up, so we're not doing this for financial purposes - it's to meet climate goals - goals most people in Island County share.

Question: Do you have any specifics about what area you're looking at [for the Transit Center]?

Answer: Property acquisition hasn't started yet. It makes the most sense to be on our main north-south route where the buses can easily and safely access SR 525 and be close to the ferries. Once we complete the negotiations, I'll obviously be able to tell you where that is.

3. Camano SR 532 Data and Analysis Update

Heather: We had our first stakeholder's workshop with WSDOT on the SR 532 project, which most of you know runs from I-5 to Terry's Corner. Since John Shambaugh could not join us at this meeting, I asked Nikki Davis to summarize the meeting. *Nikki:* John Shambaugh is running this particular project and we had our first two hour meeting on it. We discussed the scope of work. John asked that each stakeholder take questions back to their teams to see how each stakeholder would like to participate in the project. Secondly, what data do we need to obtain versus what data do we have? How do we obtain that data and what platform do we use? For example, I'm not sure how we'll obtain bicycle and pedestrian traffic in the corridor. We're going to meet again on November 8 and discuss the questions the stakeholders answered.

Question: What kind of roundabout are you going to have at Terry's Corner?

Answer: I don't think any part of this project has been specifically chosen yet because we're at the stage of gathering data that would allow us to understand where the problems lie. We're looking to prioritize the projects that might occur along the corridor. However, Island County has a roundabout happening on East Camano and Cross Island, which has been awarded preliminary engineering grants through STBG. That part is planned for 2025.

Question: Is that going to be a four-legged roundabout?

Answer: Yes, two legs at East Camano, one on Cross Island and we're bringing Arrowhead into the roundabout. If you look at WSDOT standards, the intersection of Arrowhead with the traffic signal does not meet minimum requirements. So we're looking to improve that.

Question: So you're going to start that in 2025?

Answer: Yes, STBG has awarded funding to begin for preliminary engineering to start in 2025.

4. Continue discussion on long range improvement projects

Nikki: This discussion is to think about long range plans that we would like to incorporate in our RTIP for the future. So if there is something that comes to mind, or something your elected officials are talking about, this would be a great time to bring them up.

Sky Rudolph: This is Sky and Tara Rudolph from the Whidbey Airpark. We are looking for the right time to jump in and talk about aviation planning and introduce ourselves to the group. We think a lot about long range planning. For the last couple of years we've been looking for where the appropriate forum is for us as private owners of public transportation infrastructure. We've chatted a bit with Island County's Engineering and Planning Departments about this, to see what kind of projects they have that intersect with the airport. Island County is unique in their aviation infrastructure, in that all of the public use airports are privately owned, and most typically airports are owned by municipalities or ports, so it seems that aviation doesn't have a seat at the table in some of the big picture transportation and long range planning. We're hoping to change that. If there is somebody at the county with an eye on the airports, we would love to know who that is and interface with them directly. We hope to keep an eye on where airports are in the priorities for transportation, and offer up opportunities for aviation infrastructure and

coordination. As an airport we have a very long view, we think in a 50 year timeframe. We were wondering about the County's long term vision in how aviation plays in with the rest of transportation infrastructure. Like what the priorities are, what the opportunities are and what areas can be improved? Also in improving some of the Codes to better clarify aviation infrastructure protection. The current Codes are a little vague. We're looking for an insertion point to these larger discussions. We can offer up our services, so that our priorities are lined up with the County's priorities as far as improving quality of life, economic opportunities, and all the benefits an airport brings. We want to be an organization that doesn't come around asking for money or handouts, so we can take that stressor off the table, and look for opportunities to collaborate with the County that won't cause the County to spend extra money.

Heather: I think another reason to bring small airports into this conversation is for emergency situations. Maybe the bridge goes out, maybe ferry service isn't available. Small airplanes may be the only way we can shuttle every day supplies, medical supplies, and people to and from the County.

Sky: We have a background in search and rescue, and large scale disasters is something we think about in the airport's role of let's say, a Cascadia event. We would be there for supplies and support. We definitely want to bring those benefits in an emergency situation.

Don Meehan: I'm an advocate for airports and Sharon Sappington will recognize that I've dragged her into the Oak Harbor airport issue a time or two, in trying to help that airport become more of a service to the community. Presently the airport is up for sale, so we're working on some government agency finding value in owning that airport for economic development. It is part of our multi-modal system, because I made sure of that in working with previous planners through the years. I would be happy to sit down with you guys and make sure I understand what you want to see happen. I'm on the Committee as a citizen, so I can help represent your airport.

Sharon Sappington: I can join you in a meeting with Don as I've been trying to keep up with our airports. We have Camano Island, Eisenberg, and your airport, so I would like to be part of the conversation to see how we might put some ideas together.

5. RTP/HSTP Combined Update for 2022

Heather: We put out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant update of our Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and combined Public Transit (PT) and Human Services Transportation Plan (HSTP), which is a programs and planning document that needs to be updated by December 2022. This RFP went out to ad and is currently running in four newspapers from October 5 through October 20, with the due date being October 27. I've had several consultants email me, and that includes the group that did the first update.

6. UPWP Year-End Report Update

Heather: This is the year-end report on what the IRTPO has accomplished. You might have heard there was a problem with a \$769 overture in this report, and it is my understanding that this has been taken care of by Bill Oakes and the Commissioners. *Nikki:* To add some clarity here, Bill has agreed to use road funds to cover the \$769.

7. Member Roundtable

Alex Warner: We've done some paving throughout the City, and it's our second year of our [recording interference], so it's exciting to see. We have paved Oak Harbor Road, Whidbey Avenue and some other local streets. We have our NE 7th Avenue Reconstruction Project that's funded through the IRTPD and were moving towards 60% design completion. We've had some input from our City Council, and they prefer bike lanes and sidewalks over a shared use path.

David Kuhl: While Cac Kamack was gone, he gave us a number of things to work on in our Active Transportation Plan. We scrambled a bit to get our grant out on time because there were some deadlines we weren't aware of, but WSDOT was very helpful - they helped us through the process and gave us all the information we needed.

Sharon Sapp: The EDC is a member of the Island County Tourism Committee, and Sherrye Wyatt is a consultant with the Tourism Committee; she's the talent behind all of the successes. She is currently going through a program that interacts with people all over the world, talking about tourism and moving forward in this new Covid age. They are strategizing into this next year. This program talks about everything that touches tourism: housing, jobs, and transportation. It will be interesting when she finishes what might come out of this.

Brian Tyhuis: The Department of Defense has a community funding program called the Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) to fund infrastructure adjacent to military installations. The program just went through what they're funding this year, which is mostly utilities, but I have seen transportation infrastructure in the past. We've all mentioned alternative funding sources and this is a potential one - the nexus being how it links to nearby installations to support access. But we have seen it occur away from military installations. We've been able to get some money for the Oak Harbor School Districts for some planning level efforts. We have a good relationship with the Duty Office that manages it, so I want to remind you that this is out there and I can connect you with those point of contacts.

Question: Does that program require matching funds or will it cover a whole project?

Answer: It typically funds rural communities like ours and will cover 80% of the project. The community will have to come up with 20%. But the State of Washington has already established their own Defense Community Compatibility Account which can be leveraged to pay for that 20%. So in essence, if you combine both of them, you won't have to pay for anything. The State is still working through the first year of their pilot program, and most of that is going to Joint Base Lewis-McChord. But the intent and the way it's written into law, it does allow you to apply for the 20% commission match.

Bob Monize: I don't mean to be disrespectful, but are there any problems, political problems, involving your office? It seems to me that we're going through a lot of Directors in a short amount of time. Can you tell me why?

Ed Sewester: Director's where? In what part? I've been here two and a half months now and I know my boss [Public Works Director Bill Oakes] is retiring at the end of the year. I'm not sure of any other Director's departing in the near future.

Bob Monize: It seems about six months ago, we were going through a lot of people in our group, at the head of group. I think Heather's the newest one. My question is why are we going through so many people? Why are they leaving?

Ed Sewester: My boss is retiring after 20 years. And my predecessor moved out here from the East Coast, and for family reasons, he moved back to the East Coast.

Bob Monize: I'm talking about Heather's position. I don't know her exact title.

Ed Sewester: She's the Transportation Planner for Public Works.

Bob Monize: My question stands. Why are we going through so many people?

Heather Bickford: Well, this job is complicated. I could see where there would be burn out because there's so many moving parts. But that's a guess on my part.

Nikki Davis: I've been with Island County for about four years and I'm the Traffic Engineer. I worked in the background on some of the IRTPO projects when Connie Bowers was with us, and Brian Wood. Brian Wood left us three years ago, at which point it took us a little while to find Susan Driver. Connie Bowers handled the IRTPO business in the meantime, and possibly someone from Planning filled in. Susan Driver was with us for two years and she moved on, so I stepped in to fill the position while we were looking for a Transportation Planner and a new Assistant County Engineer. As Ed mentioned, our Assistant County Engineer had to move back to the East Coast, which was unfortunate for us. But we're fortunate to have Ed and Heather on our team now. I can understand when you see staff members moving through, it might give you some heart palpitations, but I think it just happened to be that perfect storm, where people were just moving on. But we seem to be getting our team back on its feet and I think we'll represent Island County well.

Bob Monize: Well then, I have a request for Heather. Please give me a call or email if you decide to leave and you can't say why.

Heather Bickford: Okay, I will.

8. Adjourn

Heather Bickford adjourned the meeting at 1:45 pm.

Next Meeting: November 18, 2021 due to the federal holiday, Veterans Day, falling on November 11

Acronyms:

EDC – Economic Development Council
HSTP – Human Services Transportation Plan
IRTPO – Island Regional Transportation Planning Organization
NAS – Naval Air Station
PT = Public Transit
RFQ – Request for Qualifications
RTIP – Regional Transportation Improvement Program
RTP – Regional Transportation Plan
SR - State Route
STBG – Surface Transportation Block Grant
TAC – Technical Advisory Committee
UPWP – Unified Planning Work Program
WSDOT – Washington State Department of Transportation
WSF – Washington State Ferries