

Washington Transportation Plan - Progress Report

A monthly news service to keep you informed of new developments and direction of our update to the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP).

April 1, 2005

This edition of the *WTP Progress Report* summarizes another in a series of workshops being held as the Washington State Transportation Commission and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) continues its work on the Washington Transportation Plan update.

At this stage in the WTP process, WSDOT staff is seeking the Transportation Commission's concurrence on whether the guiding principles currently in state law, federal law and Commission policy for setting priorities are appropriate and complete, and whether the department should continue moving forward in its current direction. The workshops are designed to examine policy and investment program proposals in nine issue areas. These discussions will lead to prioritizing investments for the WTP in the summer 2005. As part of the WTP, a 10-year transportation investment plan will be developed. The WTP with its investment proposal will be adopted in December 2005.

Read on to find out more about proposals for the **Safety** and **Transportation Access** issue areas.

March 16 Workshop Summary

Safety:

Discussions related to Safety began in February and carried over to the March Commission meeting. During the presentations Commissioners posed some key questions:

"We all know that we're trying to do what we can with the funds that are available; we also know many of the accidents are off the state highway system - how do we coordinate and integrate safety across all jurisdictions?"

- WSDOT staff described the need for data sharing between licensing and traffic safety agencies, health and trauma care providers, and law enforcement agencies. This proposal would meet a number of goals to increase the accuracy, consistency and timeliness of traffic safety data. The result of this is better data for better decisions.
- Grant programs for cities and counties are being proposed that would help them deal with accident "hot spots" within their jurisdictional borders.
 - For instance, the rate of serious accidents on rural two-lane roads is double that of urban roads. Between 2001 and 2003, 528 fatalities occurred on county roads. This proposal would establish a grant program for counties to implement low-cost improvements such as centerline and shoulder rumble strips, guardrail, and pavement markings.

"Where will we get the biggest bang for the buck? Are most of the safety issues due to driver behavior? Or is it because we have poorly designed roads? Do we need a different focus than where we've been?"

- Steve Lind, Acting Director of the Traffic Safety Commission participated in discussions about the need for behavioral programs that focus on driving under the influence (DUI), seatbelt use and aggressive drivers. Proposals combine enforcement and driver education elements.
- An area of concern is the increasing numbers of motorcycle injuries and fatalities, especially in the over-40 age bracket. Preliminary data show that motorcycle traffic deaths have increased by 22% from 2003 (58 deaths) to 2004 (71 deaths). The Washington Traffic Safety Commission advocates more stringent testing for motorcycle licensing.
- Relating to state highways and local roads - WSDOT staff described proposals to reduce accidents and accident risks in spot locations. This might include wider roadway shoulders, better lighting at intersections and crosswalks, turn lanes and other intersection improvements. It may also include roadside improvements to remove fixed objects and flattening side slopes to help run-off-the-road drivers recover control of their vehicle. Other measures would include centerline rumble strips and median cable barrier to reduce the number of crossover (head-on) collisions.

Other Safety topics that were discussed included:

- Aviation - increasing access to weather information for pilots, and purchasing land at the end of runways to eliminate risks and obstructions
- Rail - preventing injury and death from railroad trespassing through education (Operation Lifesaver), crossing protection and safety devices, and enforcement
- System Security - Following 9-11, WSDOT completed a facilities assessment of our vulnerability to terrorist attack. Proposals that address both surface transportation facilities (buildings, highways and bridges) and Washington State Ferries security would reduce our exposure to terrorist acts.

Transportation Access:

Most major life activities depend on having personal mobility. The elderly, persons with disabilities, people who cannot afford a car, and children may depend on some form of public transportation to go to work, to go to school, visit the doctor, and participate in their communities.

Transportation Access relates to the need for basic transportation services for people who cannot drive or do not have access to a vehicle. Many local transportation planning agencies have not incorporated social service agencies into their planning activities, or specifically into public transportation plans. The state has an interest in developing coordinated transportation access for persons with special transportation needs and is working to identify inefficiencies that exist with the current service. A key policy issue is in understanding what the state's role should be in providing or supporting basic transportation access and intercity transportation.

Recent and developing trends were presented to the Commission for consideration as they begin to the process of deciding on priority investments:

- Recent service reductions by private transportation carriers left 21 cities across the state without scheduled intercity bus transportation.
- Increasing costs in service and a growing elderly population will continue to drive demand for federally required transportation for persons with disabilities for curb to curb service at a faster rate than other transit service.
- Public transportation services are delivered through a variety of public and commercial providers. Each publishes and maintains their own schedule information, and no central repository for this information is available that would allow users to plan a trip that crosses regions or modes.
- State budget cuts have impacted the Agency Council on Coordinated Transportation (ACCT). There is a continuing need to coordinate delivery of transportation services for persons who because of age, disability or income do not have adequate transportation for medical, social, educational or employment services.

WSDOT's proposals include increased coordination between service providers, community coalitions and transportation funding agencies; increased and continued grant funding to service providers; and development of an Internet-based Trip Planner will reduce duplication of services and increase efficiency in trip planning for public transportation users.

What's ahead:

The Transportation Commission's WTP workshops will continue in April with discussion of these issue areas:

April 19

System Efficiencies - How can we get the highest performance out of our existing transportation system? This includes managing traffic flow, information technology, trip reliability, and operational activities.

Bottlenecks & Chokepoints - What opportunities for investment can help address system chokepoints and bottlenecks? What are the most effective near-term solutions for expanding capacity to move people and goods in shorter, and more reliable travel times?

April 20

Moving Freight - How are the special needs of freight movement to be incorporated into the state's transportation plan?

Future visions - What are the visions of transportation system futures that

should shape today's planning to help create pathways to the future?

Coming in May: Workshops on Economy, and Health & the Environment

How can you participate?

- Attend your area's Regional Transportation Planning Organization's meetings
- Visit WTP on the Web: www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/wtp
- Attend the Commission WTP Workshops being held at the Transportation Building, 310 Maple Park Avenue SE, Olympia WA.

To learn more about the WTP, ask questions or provide comments, visit our website:
<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/planning/wtp/>