I-5 Transportation Alternatives and Operational Traffic Model Study

Goals & Objectives of Study
Meeting #2 Summary
June 25, 2009

TRC members in attendance:

Forest Sutmiller	WSDOT
Jesse Hamashima	Pierce County Public Works
Jim Moore	Sound Transit
Kelly Hayden	Pierce Transit
Larry Mickel	Fort Lewis Public Works
Minh Vo	Natinal Guard (Camp Murray)
Peter Zahn	City of DuPont
Stephanie Smith	McChord AFB
Tamara Nack	Gray & Osborne (City of DuPont)
Thera Black	Thurston County Regional Planning Council
Thomas Sena	McChord AFB
Yamilee Volcy	FHWA
Project Team	
Bruce Haldors	Transpo Group
Mike Swenson	Transpo Group
Jon Pascal	Transpo Group
Jilma Jimenez	Berger Abam
Shuming Yan	WSDOT
Richard Warren	WSDOT
City of Lakewood	
Dan Penrose	
Mel Perrussel	

Welcome and Introduction

Dan Penrose, Project Manager, welcomed everyone and reintroduced the project team. Dan briefly reviewed the first TRC meeting on April 22nd and touched on the upcoming meetings in September and October.

Status Update

The Project Team members have conducted agency interviews during the past week and have been made aware by agencies on other areas of concern.

Jesse Hamashima asked about the goals and objectives of the study that are alluded to in the project scope. He suggested that the goals and objectives should be tied to the evaluation criteria. Dan responded that the goals and objectives are referenced in the scope of work and that he will find and provide copies. Jesse continued saying that it would be helpful when developing the matrix and show how the detailed study needs to be done. Bruce Haldors then read from the project scope and stated that the study area is broad and that the focus of the study is on military impacts. The underlying idea is to develop a tool that can be used in the future. The study is large with many areas that could be studied and concentrated on military impacts.

Richard Warren then discussed the agencies that have been interviewed. These agencies included Fort Lewis, McChord AFB City of DuPont, Pierce Transit, Sound Transit and FHWA. More interviews will be conducted in the future. Recurring themes and observations included:

- I-5 is more congested.
- Peak periods are spreading
- A temporary decrease in traffic volumes is occurring and is most likely economically based.

Additional input received from the interviews regarding impacts of existing congestion and/or military impacts include:

- HOV impact lanes would help (the federal stimulus package will pay to extend existing I-5 HOV lanes south to the Port of Tacoma).
- No alternative routes parallel to I-5 are available.
- More military personnel are living off base.
- Ramp metering is a possible improvement.
- Areas like DuPont and Steilacoom Rd are used as alternate routes to I-5 (i.e. Exit 118 – Center Drive, Exit 122 – Berkeley Street, 119 – Clark Road gate).
- Pierce Transit – Improving the DuPont Park & Ride (located on Wilmington Drive) would help the DuPont area.
- Railroad crossings & traffic signal improvements would help address the impacts of military personnel exiting the bases.
- Providing transit service to and from the bases and within bases is a challenge. There is interest in providing more on-base transit but would be challenging.

Thera Black identified base entry is a concern from transits perspective. If transit buses go on base this precludes taking non-base passengers onto bases.

Existing Data Collection & Literature Review

Richard mentioned how the collision analysis is used to describe what is currently happening and what type of changes have been occurring in the past several years (2002-2008). The results showed a high number of rear-end collisions due to the stop and go conditions and sideswipe and single vehicle collisions (sideswipe collisions could be with a second car, a barrel, or lane divider). Most of the collision at the Madigan (aka – Camp Murray/Berkeley Street), McChord AFB (aka – Bridgeport Way), and SR 512 interchanges. Between 2002 and 2008 collisions increased from 331 to 507 collisions. This increase in the number of collisions has vastly outstripped the traffic growth. This strongly implies that traffic safety has to be studied.

Dan – SB at Thorne Lane is where it drops from four to three lanes (funneling down).

The number of fatalities is low; one has occurred this year on one of the interchange ramps. Collision data figures will be condensed and presented in the existing conditions summary.

A question was asked as to whether any time of day analysis was conducted. Richard responded by stating that the data would need to be retrieved.

Mike then presented a comparison of I-5 mainline traffic counts at Marvin Road in Olympia, Barksdale Avenue in DuPont, and SR 512 in Lakewood. Between 2002 and 2008 traffic volumes at these locations along the I-5 corridor have grown but not significantly. The existing counts showed typical morning and after peak commuting patterns. However, a large surge in southbound off-ramp traffic volumes also occurs at the Berkeley Street interchange which corresponds to typical military base operation hours (at approximately 6:00 AM). The Thorne, Bridgeport, and DuPont interchanges do not see as significant of a surge in traffic volumes during the morning peak. The northbound hourly volumes show that the DuPont interchange experiences the highest traffic volumes, Berkeley experiences the second highest, and Bridgeport the third highest highest. The main gate does not see as much congestion, but will be discussed within the report.

Historically, gate volumes are highest at Christmas and lowest in January of each year (250,000+ in 2005 and up to 300,000+ in 2008). In addition, a lot of congestion experienced during the AM peak hour is related to signals at the ramp intersections. Bruce observed that a lot of data indicates that it is not crystal clear that the congestion impacts are military related.

Based on May 2009 Fort Lewis average daily entering volumes, the Liberty gate serves 12,400 inbound vehicles, the North Fort gate serve 11,100, the Madigan gate 8,000, and the DuPont gate 5,600. However, a significant number of vehicles exit Fort Lewis through the DuPont gate to avoid congestion along I-5. A question was then asked as to whether information on Camp Murray was available. To date no data has been available.

Another question was then asked as to whether military traffic could be separated from vehicles passing through the study area. Mike responded by stating that this process will be completed later as part of the initial screening criteria.

Existing Environmental Conditions

Richard then summarized the status of the general environmental review. Current maps are being compiled to come up with some evaluation to remedy congestion along I-5. Several different aspects are considered:

- Cultural/ historical designations
- Environmental justice
- Federal/ State lands
- Fish passages
- Flood plains
- Liquefaction (soils)
- Sensitive areas (wildlife habitats)
- Slopes
- Wetlands

Each of these subjects will be examined but in a cursory manner since the current corridor study is not a formal environmental review.

Thera suggested that contact should be made with the Nisqually and other tribes to request any of their available data and to identify their sensitive areas. Richard replied that the project team is currently in contact with local tribes; the City of Lakewood has notified the tribes by letter and email. Maps will be prepared showing all sensitive areas within the project vicinity.

The results of the environmental conditions study showed that liquefaction potential in study area is low to very low. Mike noted that maps have been created to show issues, constraints and where congestion is a problem as well as the highest accident totals. Jesse then asked whether passenger rail operations were factored into the environmental consideration. Mike responded that they will be factored into models. Bruce then noted that in frequent interviews with FHWA, that I-5 is in many ways used as an arterial. Additional routes will need to be examined as alternative ways to circulate traffic. It was then asked whether passenger rail impacts would/were also considered. The project team noted that rail crossings were a concern along the corridor and that rail impact will be examine in later phases of the I-5 corridor study.

Screening Methodology/Evaluation Criteria

Jon returned to some earlier questions regarding the I-5 corridor study purpose and needs. The scope feeds into a 3 tiered system because of the large scale and range of the study. This tiered system will be able to narrow down and better identify study area needs.

SR 512 does have needs, but may fall out because congestion on SR 512 is not entirely military related but is instead more regional. The Thorne Lane interchange may also fall out due to cross base highway designs. A level 2 fatal flaw screening should not be started until a level 1 screening is complete. The level 1 evaluation criteria will need to be less qualitative in lieu of quantitative methodologies. Jon noted that the screening criteria are not as rigid as it seems and

may result in several options, not all of which we can pursue. A discussion of the screening criteria followed.

Bruce noted that beyond the screening criteria, it is important to begin thinking about funding sources for possible improvements and to consider non-traditional funding sources. A discussion of some possible improvements to consider as the project moves forward followed. Suggested things to consider included whether the large civilian base employees could be a van commuter opportunity. This should consider how this might help the TDM plan for the corridor and may be feasible in lieu of widening traffic lanes on I-5.

IJR Process

Bruce noted that the TRC can come up with a set of preferred alternatives but need to think of implementation procedures for the IJR process. Federal studies require a look at local options; a local study is needed on local alternatives that do not focus on freeway operations/alternatives. Dan responded by stating that the current corridor study is not a pre-IJR. The project team will ensure that this process can feed into an IJR if it goes that far.

Closing

A project update will be sent to the TRC later this summer. The next TRC meeting will be held in mid- to late-September with a focus on narrowing options at the interchanges. The project team will whittle interchanges down from the nine being examined. Transpo will send out an expected milestone schedule prior to the next meeting. Currently, the project team is on schedule. Moving forward, the challenge will be to develop the future baseline conditions and consider military operations.

There are two project websites:
WSDOT's at http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/i5/ftlewismcchordtransportation/

Lakewood's at http://www.cityoflakewood.us/departments/economic-development/military-growth/oea-planning-assistance.html.

*Ended 11:30.