Washington State Freight Rail Plan
Advisory Committee Meeting
Commission Board Room, WSDOT Headquarters
310 Maple Park Lane, Olympia, WA 98504
1:30 PM to 4:00 PM, September 30, 2009

Minutes

Welcome

George Xu (Strategic Planning and Research Manager) opened the meeting and provided a brief overview of the planning effort.

National Rail Plan Update

Scott Witt (Director, WSDOT State Rail and Marine Office) provided a summary of the September 9, 2009 National Rail Plan (NRP) meeting. The group discussed plan components, the interface between preliminary plan to a long-range plan, and the interface between state and national plans. Scott mentioned earlier high-speed rail (HSR) workshops and provided a quick recap of the main points. The NRP will address these same points. Standard equipment is a NRP challenge (i.e. ARRA applications specify many types of equipment). Everyone is pushing for a national rail plan. FRA will go to regions, states, and private sector organizations (i.e. WPPA) for more input next quarter to help develop the next update in June-July 2010, incorporating more externalities. Washington is well positioned to benefit from federal assistance. Scott encouraged stakeholders to help in the national planning effort. He will send the presentation to Advisory Committee members and forward their contact information to NRP consultants.

Question: Will HSR locate in the same corridor as freight rail?

Answer: FRA is looking at options.

Question: When was the last plan?

Answer: In past, past history.

Question: Why is ARRA Track 2 submitted before Track 1 is awarded?

Answer: Track 1 projects are covered in the Track 2 application.

Project Survey Summaries

Lynn Scroggins (Senior Rail Planner) provided a project list progress report and summary based on projects submitted through the Projects Survey to date (online and PDF formats). The purpose of the project list is to identify and describe the statewide freight rail needs and to understand the planned investments. There are still a number of projects that haven't been included on the project list. In order to have as complete a statewide project list as possible, WSDOT is open to more projects and stakeholders are encouraged to review the list, point out any duplicates, fill gaps, and submit more projects.

Question: Will the plan include project list summaries (i.e. $$ by mainline, by short lines)?

Answer: WSDOT will present a variety of project list summaries in the plan (i.e. railroads, project types, public benefits, private benefits).

Rail Assets and Profiles

Teresa Graham (Research and Data Specialist) provided a progress report on updated system assets and profiles, including maps and charts about intermodal facilities, ports, railroads, and abandonments. She asked stakeholders to review and verify the information gathered to date. WSDOT will work with stakeholders on revisions.

Comment: On the port map, there are more "dots" than port districts.

Question: How are intermodal facilities defined?

Answer: A national definition and database is used to identify where two modes come together. We will work with stakeholders to further refine.

Suggestion: Break out areas of concentration (i.e. Puget Sound) into its own map.

Question: What is the purpose of the road hierarchy map?

Answer: It is a reference for information purposes only.

Question: What is the unit of capacity on the railroad capacity chart?

Answer: It's the total trains per day, all trains, both directions.

Vision and Goals

Lynn reported on vision and goals development, based on the handouts. She will continue to revise the documents based on stakeholder input.

Comment: In general, the goals are too status quo and need more words like *enhancing* and *improving*.

Question: In this stage unranked goals may be meaningless, open to potential dereliction of duties. Most to least important order is preferable. Will they be ranked?

Answer: Goal ranking may be good, depending on stakeholder comments, other input. Goals will relate to projects, which will be subject to ranking as addressed in this plan.

Question: Will there be performance measurement and tools associated with goal attainment?

Answer: This would be part of freight rail management information system development.

Comment: It is less important to rank goals and more important to rank and measure action item attainment within the goal matrix.

Comment: The vision statement is too long.

Response: We will work with stakeholders (i.e. Thomas Noyes) on the next revision.

Question: There is a passenger rail advocacy group (All Aboard Washington). Is there one for freight rail?

Answer: There are advisory groups, but no advocacy group at the state level. GO21 (www.go21.org) is a regional advocacy group. OneRail (www.onerail.org) is a national advocacy group. The Washington Public Ports Association (WPPA) serves in an advocacy group role from a port perspective.

Review Cost/Benefit Methodology

George reviewed the cost/benefit methodology used to provide a consistent, objective project evaluation method for use by policy makers and other stakeholders for potential investment. It is basically a quantitative analysis followed by several qualitative analyses. The need to develop a methodology was first a recommendation of the *2006 Statewide Rail Capacity and System Needs Study*, then a state legislative directive. All analyses use the same score range (+4 to -1). All are documented, summarized, and sent to the legislature for project ranking. This process is different from the highway process. Since development two years ago, it has been successfully used to evaluate a number of passenger and freight rail projects (slide 46). This methodology will be updated to meet current federal requirements.

Question: Have there been many capacity changes? Is there excess short-term and long-term capacity?

Answer: It depends on which segment. The plan will identify and evaluate chokepoints. The WPPA/WSDOT Marine Cargo Forecast report has good capacity analysis.

Question: Looking at the Evaluation Process chart (slide 35), what percentage of proposals fail at the "Conduct CBA" stage?

Answer: WSDOT will provide an answer.

Question: Are the benefits quantified?

Answer: Yes, quantified then qualified.

Question: How will the benefits be weighted for a level playing field?

Answer: They are monetized (weighted by dollar value).

Question: How does our analysis compare with other states?

Answer: There are standards, some are based on loading. For now, we're using the national standard.

Comment: Looking at the TIGER grant process, there is a direct relationship between the partners, benefits, and awards. That's why partnerships and management information systems (MIS) is important.

Question: Looking at the CBA list (slide 38), which items will show on the report?

Answer: The list is expandable, the items addressed will be listed.

Comment: Tie goals to the analysis process.

Question: In the application, are other alternatives analyzed?

Answer: The requirement comes from the legislature. WSDOT provides limited risk analysis. Mode alternatives are considered when there is enough data/information for a fair evaluation. WSDOT is working toward a more multimodal, integrated planning process (i.e. Trends Report to be completed by the end of the year).

Question: Can't the legislature override WSDOT recommendations?

Answer: WSDOT provides decision support tools for the legislature. The public process can influence the legislature to make changes in any process. Society lends help to benefit the public interest.

Next Steps

George presented the planning project schedule of important dates through project end-of-year completion and he encouraged stakeholders to help with plan development and review. Dates include: October 6 for the Eastern Washington Advisory Committee meeting (same agenda), October 22 for the public open house (WSDOT Headquarters), November 2 for the draft plan to be sent to the Advisory Committee for review, November 13 for Advisory Committee comments due on the draft plan, December 10 for the final draft due to WSDOT Executives, and December 31 for the plan to be completed.

Question: What about the Marine Cargo Forecast projects, will they be included in the project list?

Answer: Yes, we're still working on the project list.

Question: What about freight rail bridge projects?

Answer: Yes, they should be included in the statewide project list.

Question: Is there an electronic copy of the old freight rail plan?

Answer: We'll look into this and respond.

Suggestion: Look at the *TRPC 2003 Regional Transportation Plan*. MPO/RTPOs may have freight rail projects, policy maker questions, and rail-focused action items in their plans, studies, and Unified Project Work Plans.

Answer: Thanks, we'll look into this and respond.

Attachments:
* Meeting agenda
* Meeting minutes
* Meeting participant list
* Meeting presentation slides
* Draft vision statement
* Draft vision statement examples
* Draft goals matrix
* Project list summary