

Point Defiance Bypass Project Executive Advisory Team – Meeting Notes

Date: August 5, 2010
Time: 10-11 a.m.
Location: Lakewood City Council Chambers
Attendees: Dave Bugher, City of Lakewood
Kevin Dayton, WSDOT
Bruce Gardner, Clover Park School District
Dawn Masko, City of DuPont
Andrew Neiditz, City of Lakewood
Brian Zeigler, Pierce County
WSDOT Project Team: Ron Pate, Larry Mattson, Melanie Coon, Dianna Lahmann

Welcome

Cascades High Speed Rail Program Director Ron Pate kicked off the meeting with introductions.

Program Overview

Pate gave a brief overview of the Cascades High Speed Rail Program, and the challenges WSDOT, like other states, face in reaching agreements with the Federal Rail Administration and host railroads. Good progress is being made to define the process of establishing performance and outcomes which will directly define future service expectations. That will be a benefit to this team as we work to review information and work through the environmental assessment process.

Currently:

- The corridor-level Draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is available for public comment.
- The comment period ends August 9.
- Three projects on the corridor that are ready for construction are Corridor Reliability Upgrades South, Advanced Signal System, and the Everett Storage Track.

Discussion followed on funding. ARRA funding for these projects is being committed. FRA selected projects that are eligible for grant funds. Money for the projects is obligated when stakeholder agreements are signed.

Public Outreach Overview

Melanie Coon provided an update on recent outreach and briefings. WSDOT plans to approach various city councils, chambers of commerce, neighborhood councils and community groups to schedule briefings on the status of this project. Lakewood City Manager Andrew Neiditz urged WSDOT to approach the Lakewood City Council for a date in September.

EA Schedule Status

WSDOT Environmental Manager Larry Mattson kicked off the EA process discussion by making the distinction between formal and informal outreach. Formal outreach is that outreach required by

NEPA/SEPA. Informal outreach is all the other opportunities to engage the public and community groups in existing venues and community-hosted events.

There are four formal opportunities in this EA process: scoping, mitigation/design weighting, DR reviews and the EA comment period.

Technical Advisory Committee Update

Mattson shared that the technical team gave initial endorsement of the project's team charge. Jeff Gonzalez (City of Lakewood) asked to include alternative alignments, specifically "route alternatives."

Mattson announced that the technical team will be conducting a weighting exercise on August 12. The exercise will help WSDOT and stakeholders identify values and priorities for the design option and mitigation measures.

Members of the technical committee have been sharing information about other planned projects in the area, like the Lakewood Pedestrian Bridge and Camp Murray Gate Location projects. WSDOT is interested in partnering with local jurisdictions on mitigation opportunities. Mitigation work doesn't have to be directly adjacent the project, and can be done in tandem with or in addition to local mitigation projects.

Upcoming Milestones

Mattson was asked to clarify the difference between design options and mitigation measures. He responded saying design options are typically within the project right-of-way and are integral to the functionality of the project, and mitigation options can be outside the project right-of-way, and will reduce or eliminate adverse effects of the project.

WSDOT Traffic Study – September 2010

Questions were asked about mitigation for traffic on local roads. Mattson told the team that a thorough traffic study is scoped (including I-5 interchanges), and data will be collected in September when school is back in session. The transportation report will be out for review by February 2011.

Assistant City Manager Dave Bugher highlighted some work currently planned for Union Street and suggested pieces of the project can be a mitigation option for the Point Defiance Project. The city is trying to get a bike trail next to the rail line and is waiting for a response from Sound Transit.

Neiditz asked about future growth potential for Tacoma Rail. Are there future options for Tacoma Rail that could increase freight traffic? Pate explained that we intend to account for Tacoma Rail when we model traffic.

Neiditz asked at what point mitigation agreements will be signed. Mattson and Pate responded that commitments will be made when the whole EA process is vetted, including the public component.

The Camp Murray gate relocation was discussed and Lakewood cited concerns with traffic issues.

Risk Management Process to Better Define Project Costs

Bugher brought up an example of potential cost risk for the cities – utility relocation. He was concerned that rail work may require moving utilities at significant cost to the cities, based on previous experience in other projects.

WSDOT has developed design visualization drawings for some grade separations. They are currently working to associate costs with the drawings. Pate told the team that we have heard from technical team members that the current route should be evaluated more. He explained that the past EA work done is being compiled and there will be a determination if anything has changed from that time, and what may need to be added to that work. This will more clearly present what work, and the associated cost, would be required to upgrade the existing route. The information will be put into a technical memo for the teams and the project record. The technical memo should be complete in about 60 days. All of the previous environmental/technical reports are being reviewed and if something has changed, or more detail is needed, steps will be taken to get the appropriate level of detail for the environmental assessment process. WSDOT will “show its work.”

Next Steps

The next meeting of the Executive Advisory team is Thursday, September 9 at 10 a.m., at the Pierce Transit Rainier conference room. In the interim, the Technical Advisory Team will hold a weighting options workshop at 9 a.m., August 12, at the same location.