Washington State Freight Rail Plan
Advisory Committee Meeting
Commission Board Room, WSDOT Headquarters
310 Maple Park Lane, Olympia, WA 98504
9:30 AM to Noon, October 6, 2009

Minutes

Welcome

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

National Rail Plan Update

George provided a summary of the September 9, 2009 National Rail Plan (NRP) meeting. New statutory requirements require a national rail plan. Work is underway to define the contents and development process, the relationship between state and national plans, and the goals. WSDOT will email the slide presentation to interested meeting attendees.

Project Survey Summaries

Lynn Scroggins (Senior Rail Planner) provided a 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.

Comment: Regarding the trend of short-range project submittals, "thirty years out" seems to be not clearly understood in terms of longer-range projects.

Answer: We will encourage stakeholders to submit long-range projects as well as short-range projects.

Question: Who received the survey?

Answer: A large list of people from many categories was invited to participate in this planning effort. The Advisory Committee included meeting participants and people who requested involvement.

Question: Does the stakeholder list include Public Works Departments? They are included through their regional planning involvement in MPO/RTPO and through other affiliations. They should submit projects with rail issues.

Answer: This is our first attempt at developing a statewide project list. We will encourage stakeholders to submit projects through the online survey link or the PDF file link on the project's Web page.

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.

Suggestion: In slide 12, distinguish between owner/operator. Include WSDOT on the list.

Comment: In slide 16, use the term "at-risk abandonment" instead of "likely abandonment." There is reluctance to be the first to publically state that a line is to be abandoned in the plan. Things are going on, but people may be too reluctant to project abandonment. A critical mass is needed to keep a line open. Those at the "bitter edge" may be reluctant to respond.

Comment: In slide 18, the port map appears to list individual ports vs. port districts. And some facilities/airports are missing (i.e. Moses Lake).

Answer: The maps are a start, a work in progress. We will continue to work with stakeholders, the WSDOT aviation planner, and others to update the data and maps, identifying major freight generators.

Question: Is WSDOT coordinating with Oregon State? The Oregon gorge [mainline] is at capacity.

Answer: We are working with Oregon. They have also have limited resources.

Vision and Goals

Lynn reported on vision and goals development, based on the handouts. Work continues to revise the documents based on stakeholder input and assistance.

Suggestion: State that rail is an *essential public utility*.

Question: How do you analyze and integrate passenger rail and freight rail development to resolve conflicts and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes?

Answer: The integration of passenger rail and freight rail will be addressed in more detail in the next update. We will reference the Marine Cargo Forecast report and include a conceptual discussion in this update.

Suggestion: Make goal #4 a positive statement. The WPPA Green Gateway report is a good environmental reference.

Discussion: Under state functions (slide 27), the private sector dominates freight rail development, so the state role is different than other state roles. Freight rail is essential, but may not be very profitable, so the state needs to find the best way to strengthen those sectors, to serve the underserved markets.

Suggestion: Under state functions (slide 27), clarify funding capacity, financial capacity, strategic investment, strategic planning.

Review Cost/Benefit Methodology

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

Question: Is rail compared with barge?

Answer: No, highway transportation is the base.

Suggestion: Revise the statement (slide 32) to "Preservation of *rail* transportation corridors." Slide 33 should state Department of Commerce instead of CTED.

Question: Who quantifies the projects?

Answer: WSDOT, as analysts, conducts the CBA in a consistent and objective manner.

Question: Is there a way to quantify "unit value"?

Answer: Though not as accurate for big projects, unit value is updated on a regular basis. The CBA is a quick-turnover. WSDOT works with the project leads to achieve consistent and objective results.

Question: Is this CBA the same as the Andrew Wood spreadsheet and training workshop?

Answer: Yes, see slide 38. It is fact-based vs. subjective. The qualitative assessment is collective, based on subjective judgment.

Question: How many projects receive a CBA? The process is data demanding.

Answer: Generally 10-20 projects receive a CBA. Since the CBA assumes universal benefit, the User Benefit analysis addresses the distributional impact on users (i.e. jobs in local communities). A CBA summary will be about a 10-page paper.

Question: Can the CBA be used to help with funding availability?

Answer: Yes, it can be used to show the need.

Question: Will the project list be in the plan?

Answer: Yes, along with a variety of summaries.

Question: How can the east side compete with the west side?

Answer: The purpose of the CBA strategy is to level the playing field.

Discussion: There are models such as the Transportation Improvement Board funding program that allocates and distributes funding between east side and west side… since decision-making is at the legislative level. There are other models such as the Grain Train program (self-sustaining, dedicated funding) and the Produce Rail Car program (dedicated funding). It comes down to goals and policy discussions. It's more a mainline vs. shortline issue, rather than an east vs. west issue. More information is needed to make good decisions, such as a statewide short-line rail condition assessment to understand our assets. It was proposed, but didn't make the supplementary budget. This proposal will be included as a future action in the plan.

Next Steps

George presented the planning project schedule of important dates through project end-of-year completion. He noted that dates have recently changed. They will be provided along with the meeting summary information. He encouraged stakeholders to help with plan development and review.

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