

MEETING MINUTES

Spokane Regional Transportation Council
Board of Directors Meeting – Thursday May 14, 2020
Zoom Video Conference Meeting

1. **Call to Order** – Chair Ben Wick brought the meeting to order at 1:00 pm.

2. **Roll Call/Record of Attendance/Excused Absences**

Board Members Present:

Mayor Ben Wick, <i>Chair</i>	City of Spokane Valley
Council Member Paul Schmidt, <i>Vice Chair</i>	City of Cheney
Council Member Sonny Weathers	City of Airway Heights
Mayor Shane Brickner	City of Liberty Lake
Council Member Kate Burke	City of Spokane
Council Member Lori Kinnear	City of Spokane
Larry Stone	Major Employer Rep.
Larry Krauter	Spokane Airports
Commissioner Al French	Spokane County
Commissioner Mary Kunej	Spokane County
E. Susan Meyer	Spokane Transit Authority
Kennet Bertelsen	TAC Chair
Karl Otterstrom	TTC Chair
Council Member Micki Harnois	Town of Rockford, Small Cities/Towns Rep.

Board Members Not Present:

Matt Ewers Rail/Freight Rep.

Board Alternates Present

Larry Larson WSDOT-East. Region

Guests Present

Alex Pacanotacos	Census Complete Count
Andrea Frye	Hill Intl.
Chad Coles	Spokane County
Adam Jackson	City of Spokane Valley
Chris Barnes	TAC
Melanie Rose	TAC
Dave Richardson	TAC
Todd Coleman	TAC
Rhonda Young	TAC
Brandon Blankenagel	KPFF Engineers
Katie Herzog	Gonzaga University
Char Kay	WSDOT-East. Region
Katherine Miller	City of Spokane
Paul Kropp	Citizen
LeAnn Yamamoto	CommuteSmart NW

SRTC Staff Present:

Sabrina Minshall	Executive Director
Eve Nelson	Principal Transportation Planner
Jason Lien	Principal Transportation Planner
Mike Ulrich	Principal Transportation Planner
David Fletcher	Assoc. Transportation Planner III
Michael Redlinger	Assoc. Transportation Planner II
Kylee Jones	Assoc. Transportation Planner II
Julie Meyers-Lehman	Administrative-Executive Coordinator
Stanley Schwartz	Legal Counsel

Chair Wick stated that Matt Ewers had requested an excused absence from the meeting.

Mr. Schmidt made a motion to excuse the absence. Mr. Weathers seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

3. **Public Comments** – There were no public comments.

4. **Executive Director’s Report** – Ms. Minshall reported on:

- Update on SRTC operations; staff is still 100% working remotely and all committee meetings are being held on video conference platforms.
- The annual SRTC audit by the WA State Auditor’s office is currently in progress.
- The first Transportation Advisory Committee meeting was held on April 27; more details later in the meeting.
- The Electrification Grant application will be submitted by July 1. She provided a re-cap of this SRTC-Avista Corp.-member agency initiative.
- WA Dept of Commerce will hold a panel tomorrow about electrification and alternative fuels. Ms. Minshall was asked to present at this event on the topic of “green infrastructure” and what that means.

- EWU and UW, in collaboration with SRTC, are distributing a survey throughout the community to track how COVID-19 and the stay-at-home order has impacted travel and mobility in Spokane County. Links to the survey have been sent to Board members and all member agencies. She noted this information will not replace traditional traffic counts; the data will be used to compare with survey results from Western Washington and also to track the impacts to local congestion and air quality
- By WA Legislative direction, WSDOT is creating a Freight Stakeholders group, of which she and the Executive Director from Puget Sound Regional Council will be members. The group will meet 3 – 5 times in the next 18 months and information from this group will be relayed to the Board.
- Early notification of the Joint Transportation Commission’s needs assessment. She said there is nothing to react to at this point as it is still very high level, but she will continue to keep the Board informed.

5. Special Report: 2020 Spokane Census Complete Count – Ms. Paganotacos reported that the response rate for Spokane County is currently 68.3%, the Washington State average is 62.7% and the national rate is 59.1%. Spokane County is only 2% away from achieving the 2010 response rate and in light of the obstacles being faced, this is a great result. She provided information about the extended 2020 Census timeline and noted the committee will continue to focus outreach on rural areas. She spoke about a grant opportunity for additional funding and the plan created by Innovia to fill in the gap between the extended timeline and static funding.

ACTION ITEMS

6. Consent Agenda (a) April 2020 Meeting Minutes (b) April 2020 Vouchers (c) 2020-2023 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) May Amendment

Mr. Weathers made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as presented; Ms. Kuney seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Vouchers Recap for April 2020	Vouchers: V121238-V121263	134,105.82
	Salaries/Benefits Pay Period Ending: 4/4/20 and 4/18/20	74,937.39
	Spokane County Treasury Monthly SCIP fee – APRIL 2020	27.26
		209,070.47

7. Support Letters for BUILD Grant – Ms. Minshall described the BUILD federal grant program and noted the submittal deadline for this round is May 18, 2020. She said three member agencies have requested SRTC letters of support for their applications; the decision before the Board today is whether to support all three or only one. There is no staff recommendation. She outlined the three projects:

- City of Spokane Valley: Pines Rd/BNSF Railway Grade Separation Project
- City of Deer Park: Reconstruction of North Colville St from Third St to North City Limits Project
- Spokane County: Bigelow Gulch

The group discussed project readiness since the BUILD grant has a fairly quick turnaround. Ms. Minshall noted that SRTC does not have complete information from the agencies about project readiness; that is not something this agency monitors. She said if the Board would like the agency to start project readiness tracking, it must provide SRTC with clear direction.

The group discussed the pros and cons of supporting one or all three projects. Comments included:

- Chair Wick stated that applications are stronger if this ground would band together to support one project, however, there is no process in place to make an analytical selection.
- Ms. Harnois advocated for the Deer Park project; she said they are requesting a much smaller dollar amount than the others.
- Mr. French said that regional prioritization and project ranking has been discussed by this group on many occasions, but it has never come to fruition. It would be difficult to select just one project when there is no established selection criteria; it would end up being an emotional or political decision.

Mr. French made a motion to approve that SRTC write letters of support for all three BUILD grant applications. Ms. Harnois seconded the motion.

Discussion continued:

- Mr. French said that in the past the region has received more than one BUILD grant. These three projects are all very different from each other, so there could be no basis to say that one is better than another. He said the federal reviewers will realize how completely different these projects are and unlikely to judge them against each other.
- Mr. Schmidt agreed with Mr. French. He said the Board had this same conversation one year ago and questioned whether anything has been learned. He does not want to differentiate between the three projects. He asked if the Board is going to have to hold this conversation every time multiple agencies apply for the same grant and requests letters of support.
- Chair Wick commented that it is likely that funding is going to get tighter and there will be increased competition for project dollars in the future.
- Mr. Larson stated that one agency's chances at receiving BUILD grant funding will not be hurt by SRTC supporting all three projects. Chair Wick agreed that chances are not hurt, but it is not ideal.
- Mr. Krauter said it is better to have multiple projects from the region in the competition for funding; it is better to advance as many appropriate projects as possible. He is in favor of forwarding support letters for all three.

A vote was taken on the motion and it passed unanimously.

8. Board Approval to Act as Fiscal Agent for Census 2020 Supplemental Grant – Ms. Minshall provided a brief history of the collaboration of SRTC and Innovia Foundation for the Census 2020 Complete Count Committee Coordinator position; in 2019 the Board approved SRTC to act as fiscal agent for the position. She explained that a new Census 2020 supplemental grant has become available from the Washington State Office of Financial Management for additional census outreach activities; the amount is up to \$80,000 for such activities in Spokane County. Innovia is not eligible to handle the funds.

Mr. Schmidt made a motion to approve SRTC to act as fiscal agent for the Census 2020 Supplemental Grant up to \$80,000; Ms. Burke seconded. All votes were in favor.

INFORMATION & DISCUSSION ITEMS

9. Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) Update – Mr. Bertelsen stated the Board approved TAC membership in early April, the first TAC meeting was April 27, and all members were in attendance. He said the overriding theme of their meeting was setting the foundation for the TAC and establishing a community contract. He further detailed additional topics of discussion and expressed the group's desire for increased dialogue between the Board and the TAC. He said the TAC will be developing a work plan with the Board with the goal of producing the most value for the Board. He explained that TAC members want to build a committee that will maximize their time and effectiveness and also that of the Board. He spoke about the proposed community contract.

Ms. Young described the membership as very well thought out and diverse. She said this membership, as well as the rules of engagement, will be a win for putting regional interests above of individual purposes. Mr. Bertelsen said this committee will operate in a different way that the way the TAC operated in the past; they are striving for more connection to the Board and would like input from the Board as to their needs and wants from this committee.

Mr. Brickner said he appreciates the value and thought process that went into the committee restructuring; it is important to hear what this group has to say and what they bring to the table. He noted hearing a different mindset is helpful to the Board.

There were no questions or additional discussion.

10. Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) Freight Element Introduction – Mr. Fletcher explained that the MTP incorporates all different modes and components of the region’s transportation system; he will be speaking about the freight element of the MTP update. He discussed previous agency freight planning efforts (Bridging the Valley-2006, Inland Pacific Hub-2012, and JTC Road-Rail Conflict Study-2017) and said the MTP’s freight element will build upon that work. Mr. Fletcher noted that staff began with a review of best practices from other MPO freight planning efforts. Staff also reviewed WSDOT’s statewide freight plans and studies.

The MTP freight element will include two main components; a Regional Freight Study and a Freight Investment Strategy. He explained that both the study and the strategy will be informed by a subject matter expert (SME) team comprising of both public and private sector representatives and presented a list of groups participating; he noted that Board member Matt Ewers is on the SME team. Mr. Fletcher said the SME team will provide their recommendations to the TTC, who will in turn make recommendations to the Board. This team met for the first time last month.

He outlined the tasks for the freight study, what topics it will address, and where the data is coming from. He then spoke about how the study results will feed into the creation of a regional freight investment strategy and then into the MTP. The goal of this efforts is to understand freight’s role and impact in the region, to identify data-supported criteria to prioritize freight needs in the MTP and to increase the competitiveness of local freight projects for grant funding. He presented a project timeline and called for questions or discussion; there was none.

11. Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2020 Project Delivery Update – Ms. Nelson defined the term “project obligation” and explained that SRTC, along with all other MPO’s in the state, is required to meet a WSDOT-set obligation target each year. For federal fiscal year 2020 that amount is \$11.37 million; currently at 41% of the target has been reached. She described how project de-obligations negatively affect reaching the target.

She said if MPOs meet their targets by July 1st, they are in a position to possibly receive additional federal dollars that become available. If MPO’s fail to meet their targets by September 30, they are in jeopardy of losing their unspent funds. Ms. Nelson reported that for FFY 2019, SRTC missed the July 1 deadline, but was able to meet the September 30 deadline. For FFY 2020, it is anticipated that we will be short of the target by the July 1 deadline. She presented a list of projects that have been delayed and/or struggling to deliver and provided some details of why they may not obligate in time.

Ms. Nelson said the TIP Working Group keeps close tabs on the obligation target and discuss it at each monthly meeting; Spokane County and City of Spokane may have projects they can advance to help meet the target. She said SRTC is hosting a workshop for member agency staff on May 28 to discuss possible strategies to help the region meet this annual target going forward. She will be presenting to the Board about this again on July and possibly to discuss policy changes.

Chair Wick asked if we are able to backfill for the projects that have been delayed or have de-obligated funds. Ms. Minshall replied that all projects that could be advanced have been already.

Ms. Kuney asked there is a contingency list. Ms. Nelson replied there is, and the City of Spokane may be able to advance a project but is it difficult this late in the year for agencies to get a project going. M. Kuney asked if preservation projects could be used. Ms. Nelson replied they could, but the projects must already be incorporated into the TIP. Chair Wick suggested that at the next meeting the Board be provided a list of next year’s scheduled projects.

12. Regional Funding Strategy – Chair Wick explained that having a regional strategy is a way to increase project delivery and gain extra dollars; he questioned how a strategy could be created. He said it is obvious that COVID will have a big economic impact and the region must strategize to hang onto the funding it has. He said economic development is linked to transportation, so how can we improve the process and set a strategy.

Mr. Schmidt appreciates the creation of the freight SME Team. He suggested the TTC and TAC might have discussions of this topic as well. He said it is difficult for agencies to have shovel ready projects standing by; we need to be more proactive to come together as a region to identify high priority projects.

Chair Wick said similar discussions have been held at local chambers and asked how this group could help set a prioritization. He suggested perhaps breaking it down into phases. He spoke about the Regional Transportation Coalition and asked how this group might collaborate with them.

Mr. French noted that legislators are currently in a mode to attempt to salvage what funding they have instead of creating a new transportation funding package. For several reasons, transportation funding in Washington is in flux right now. Being a presidential election year, much attention at the federal level will be tied up with that. He said it is not likely the next session will be about new projects; it may just be a year of survival. He agreed that the group must discuss prioritization and determine what the Board will support; economic development or freight or safety, etc.

Mr. Schmidt said all agencies could use additional preservation dollars and those types of projects are much more simple and straightforward since there are no right of way issues.

Mr. Larson reported that WSDOT is losing up to \$100 million per month in lost revenues. The legislature has just proposed eliminating all chip/seal projects in all of eastern Washington. He said it's hard to talk about new projects when funding is in crisis and currently WSDOT is emphasizing preservation projects. Chair Wick said he understands preservation projects are very important, but they don't usually get the votes in the legislature. He commented that sometimes agencies intentionally do not federalize preservation projects.

13. Board Member Comments

- Mr. Bertelsen thanked the TAC members who attended the meeting today and to all TAC members for a productive first meeting.
- Mr. Stone thanked all elected officials for their efforts to lift the business closure order.
- Mr. Brickner reported that all local Mayors and Commissioners are continuing to reach out to the Governor's office until a more acceptable response is received.
- Ms. Meyer spoke about capital projects in process at STA. The Central City Line broke ground on May 1.
- Chair Wick said the Spokane Valley is re-paving Indiana Ave in from of the Valley Mall.
- Mr. French said regional leadership is frustrated with the Governor's office for its overly quick rejection of the request to re-open businesses in Spokane County

14. Adjournment - There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:32 pm.

Julie Meyers-Lehman, Clerk of the Board