

Washington State Road Usage Charge Steering Committee

Meeting #4 (by web meeting)

Meeting Notes | January 11, 2013

Attendees

Steering Committee Members

Tom Cowan, Chair, WSTC Commissioner
Curt Augustine, Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers
Senator Andy Billig
Scott Creek, Crown Moving Company
Don Gerend, City of Sammamish Councilmember
Representative Mark Hargrove
Tom Hingson, Everett Transit
Sharon Nelson, Board of Records
Janet Ray, AAA Washington
Senator Ann Rivers
Neil Strege, Washington Roundtable

Washington State Transportation Commission Staff

Reema Griffith
Paul Parker

Washington State Department of Transportation Staff

Jeff Doyle

Consultants

Jeff Buxbaum, Cambridge Systematics
Jocelyn Hoffman, Cambridge Systematics
Matthew Dorfman, D'Artagnan Consulting
Travis Dunn, D'Artagnan Consulting
Steve Morello, D'Artagnan Consulting
Jack Opiola, D'Artagnan Consulting
Allegra Calder, BERK
Gary Simonson, BERK

Other Attendees

Amanda Cecil, Senate Transportation Committee
Jeff Finn, Volt
Mary Fleckenstein, Joint Transportation Committee
Clare Gallagher, Port of Seattle
Alison Hellberg, House Transportation Committee
Mark Matteson, House Transportation Committee
Carl See, Department of Licensing
Mark Stout, Mark L. Stout Consulting

NOTE: As presentation materials are available on the Washington State Road Usage Charge website (<https://waroadusagecharge.wordpress.com/meetings/>), this meeting summary focuses on the discussion and not the presentation content.

Agenda Overview and Introductions

Tom Cowan, Steering Committee Chair, opened the web meeting and welcomed everyone. Jeff Buxbaum of Cambridge Systematics conducted a roll call from the participants list on the web meeting and those present on-site, and reviewed the agenda and meeting objectives.

Washington State Transportation Commission Feedback on Feasibility Assessment, Work Plan, and Budget

Jeff Buxbaum summarized the suggestions provided by the Washington State Transportation Commission (WSTC) at the December 12, 2012 meeting (see presentation material). Tom Cowan provided additional comments on the December WSTC meeting:

- The Commission is appreciative to the Steering Committee for their time and effort;
- The Commission expressed concern about their ability to vet the budget without more detailed information.

Final Feasibility Assessment, Work Plan, and Budget

Jeff Buxbaum described the most significant changes made to the Feasibility Assessment, Work Plan, and Budget report (see presentation materials).

Jeff Buxbaum recommended that a Steering Committee Sub-Committee review the additional report revisions before it is sent to the Commission. Tom Cowan asked if any members would be willing to participate. Tom Cowan, Don Gerend, and Senator Billig volunteered.

Discussion

- The report states there will be a projected decline of \$5.3 billion in motor fuel tax revenue between 2007 and 2023. The reality is that it's a decrease from a very optimistic projection made in 2007. We may need to rephrase this to clarify the difference.
 - This is correct. We often discuss revenue declines, but, this is really a decline in the revenue growth anticipated based on earlier projections.
- Our plan was to tell the Legislature that road usage charging is feasible, and then we would explore desirability. Can you provide context on why the word desirability was taken out of the report?
 - When we talked about "desirable" with the Steering Committee, we were asking whether the concept was a desirable approach in terms of public policy. However, from the perspective of the public, taxes are never desirable. We decided to clarify that Phase 1 would focus on policy choices and operational concepts to provide information to enable the Legislature to decide whether to advance additional system design research and development in Phase 2, culminating in an acceptable policy that is ready to implement. Acceptable policy as opposed to a desirable policy is a term that better reflects the way the public thinks about tax policy.
- Will there be a PowerPoint presentation that the Steering Committee can use to make presentations?
 - Yes, please let us know what your needs are for that.

Tom Cowan asked if the Steering Committee could approve the report pending an additional review by the Steering Committee Sub-Committee. The Steering Committee concurred.



Report Rollout and Communicating Findings

Jeff Buxbaum described the next steps in terms of finalizing the report. The WSTC will decide whether to approve the report on January 23rd and 24th. Following that, there will be briefings to individual legislators and legislative committees (the House and the Senate transportation committees, not the Joint Transportation Committee).

Work Plan Highlights: January 2013 – June 2013

Jeff Buxbaum discussed the current work plan between January 2013 and June 2013, including finalizing the report, reporting to the Legislature, and continuing public relations. He reviewed the potential work plan elements during this time period:

- Preliminary Policy Research;
- Preliminary Cost and Benefit Evaluation;
- Begin Task 3 of Work Plan – Define Policy Objectives; and
- Voice of Washington Survey.

Discussion

- Did you mention that a PowerPoint presentation will be available for Steering Committee members to use in presentations to our member organizations?
 - Yes. We have a presentation we've been using with media briefings that we can make available. We've also developed a preliminary frequently asked questions document which we will refine and send out to the group.
- The Steering Committee should be kept abreast of what is occurring in the international arena, in terms of infrastructure development. Continuing to share current information about road usage charging with the Steering Committee will be valuable.
 - WSDOT is collecting news clippings that it will send out to the group related to road usage charging and related topics.
- One of the media's biggest concerns is the urban-rural equity issue. In Oregon, for example, there is the concern that urban dwellers will actually pay less than they did with the gas tax, which means others (rural districts) will have to carry more of the burden. We need to be aware of those concerns and address them at every opportunity.
 - We have to be careful about this issue because we haven't defined a system or rates, so it is premature to come to conclusions about this issue.
 - D'Artagnan has been working in Oregon and created a special report regarding rural and urban attitudes towards the road usage charge. While it has not been released officially, we can comment on a few interesting findings: 1) people who live in rural areas in Oregon report that they drive less because, although they drive further each trip, they take far fewer trips than urban drivers; 2) people who live in rural areas generally own vehicles with lower efficiency per mile so they actually pay more with the gas tax. A December 2012 presentation made to the Oregon Road User Fee Task Force covers this topic, which can be found on the [Oregon Department of Transportation website](#).

- The media is having a hard time grasping the nuance of the urban-rural debate because this is a difficult concept, so premature conclusions can be easily drawn. It will come with the territory and we must become adept at addressing and responding to these concerns. We should not allow isolated anecdotes to define the issue.
- Tom Cowan: It was clear during an interview with a Wenatchee radio station that urban-rural equity issues are a major concern. One way to address that question is to make clear that there will be many choices and it is not a “one size fits all” approach. Someone who lives in a rural area may choose a different way of applying the charge than someone in an urban area.

Tom Cowan recommended that a Steering Committee Sub-Committee review the updated work plan for January 2013 – June 2013. The Steering Committee concurred.

Adjournment

Tom Cowan then provided an opportunity for public comment. No comments were provided. He thanked the group for participating and adjourned the meeting.