

Road-Rail Advisory Committee – Meeting Minutes

FMSIB Conference Room - Oct. 25, 2017

Meeting was called to order at 10:00. Brian Ziegler thanked everyone for volunteering again on this project. He then provided a Safety Briefing. Gena Saelid provided a Comfort Briefing. Introductions commenced and the following were in attendance:

Committee Members Present

Lisa Janicki, Skagit County, WSAC
Al French, Spokane County, WSAC
Kevin Murphy, Skagit Council of Governments
Chris Herman, WPPA
Ron Pate, WSDOT
Sean Guard, City of Washougal, AWC

Committee Members on the Phone

Mike Wallin, City of Longview, AWC
Johan Hellman, BNSF
Sheri Call, Washington Trucking Association

Committee Members Absent

Paul Roberts, City of Everett, AWC
Dave Danner, UTC

Others Present

Jason Lewis, Alternate for Dave Danner, UTC
Dave Catterson, AWC
Pat Hulcey, City of Fife, FMSIB
Jon Pascal, TranspoGroup
Allegra Calder, BERK

Others on the Phone

Dan Gatchet, Chair, FMSIB
Matt Ewers, FMSIB

Brian outlined the agenda for the day ([Link to presentation here](#)) and reminded members of the direction provided by the legislative proviso in FMSIB's budget (Slide 3). He also summarized the three Project Objectives (Slide 4) and the Scope and Schedule for the project (Slide 5).

Chris Herman reminded the Committee that the legislature requested inclusion of the Marine Cargo Forecast data and that study is now complete. Kevin clarified that the crossing rankings provided in Phase 1 of this study were conflict rankings and not projects. Ron said that this study should also coordinate with ongoing state planning efforts, like the recently updated Freight Mobility Plan. The Committee discussed some about the "corridor-based prioritization" requested in the proviso, but detailed conversation was deferred to later slides.

Allegra described the composition and role of the Advisory Committee (Slide 6). Jon asked if the group thought there was a need for written role and expectations for the Committee. Brian encouraged it since FMSIB will need a recommendation from this Committee. The final Committee recommendation should be a consensus one, but if there is disagreement, documenting and following a decision-making process will help FMSIB, and ultimately the Legislature, understand where the various interests are positioned.

Jason said it is good idea to have a game plan for decision-making, but we're also talking about collecting new data in this process so it's hard to get behind something now without knowing where that will lead.

Brian suggested that the Committee adopt a vocabulary that describes the Phase 1 List as “Needs” and the expected outcome of the Phase 2 List to be “Actions.” Kevin asked whether FMSIB would recommend funding a list of projects or a program of actions. Brian said that is yet to be determined, maybe both. Al added that not every conflict in the study requires a grade separation. The challenge is identifying creative ways to deal with conflicts.

Brian said he assumed that a key prioritizing criterion would be Benefit-Cost ratio or Net Benefit for the list of actions. Ron added this should be viewed on a corridor-based approach, from the road authority and the rail authority. We still need to define roles and the MPO’s and RTPO’s can help us figure it out. The prioritization tool outcomes can inform regions and seek their confirmation of alignment with regional priorities. Allegra added that Phase 1 is a planning-level database. The current list may be an important input to Phase 2; it may not, depending on many factors.

Jon provided an overview of the JTC Study - Phase 1 (Slides 7-15). Al asked whether it was clear about the weighting of criteria. Ron said Safety is key for WSDOT and UTC. He referenced the Section 130 funding administered by WSDOT Local Programs. Jason said the first thing you read in the criteria is Safety. The current database uses publicly available statewide data from a variety of sources, but did not collect data about specific crossing conditions. UTC thinks it's a great planning tool, but concerned about some data integrity.

Sheri Call asked if the list would prioritize differently with different weighting of the criteria. Jon said yes. They are currently weighted as shown on Slide 10. Phase 1 did not have comprehensive safety data for all crossings, and the feedback received from the advisory group was to weight safety less because there was already an established process through the UTC to evaluate and fund safety improvements. Jon added that several weighting scenarios were considered in Phase 1. However, the Top 100 crossings were relatively consistent regardless of how the criteria is weighted. Some small data elements were missed, but the Top 300 are probably a good representative list of crossings with the potential for road-rail conflicts.

Sean pointed out that some local governments have identified projects at locations; some have not. He believes those who have should rank higher. When all is said and done and all crossings are on the list, and if we had all the money in the world, what are we trying to ultimately accomplish? Quiet zones are cheap (\$150,000 per each) but then they drop off the list.

Lisa asked if we really need to rate Safety higher or not. She recalls when Kathleen Davis came to the Committee and talked about Target Zero. Lisa believes that significant safety filters already exist for railroad crossings. The Phase 1 Advisory Committee looked more toward a Mobility focus because that is where the need existed, i.e., there is already a system in place to capture and fund safety issues.

Ron asked when do we do hazard analysis for crossings. Dave responded by asking if there is a way to flag certain crossings. We do not want to ignore safety, it is just hard to analyze on a statewide basis. He went on to remind the Committee why this topic became such an issue for AWC membership. Cities are experiencing more long slow trains, otherwise referred to as unit trains. The impacts to communities are clear. Safety is important, but Public Safety (i.e., Police, Fire, EMS) are critical to communities. Moreover, this safety is rooted in Mobility first.

Sean confirmed this study did not start from a rail safety perspective. He said the increase in oil and coal trains shifted focus to rail safety. Moreover, grade separations do not help with train derailment safety. Jason added that while more long slow trains are an issue for communities, public safety should also address issues like proximity to schools and children who take short cuts across the tracks, issues like that. Al added the Committee agreed on the weighting shown in the study (i.e., Mobility – 50%, Safety - 25%, and Community – 25%). Allegra added that when JTC members weighed in on this, they focused on community impacts, particularly emergency vehicles, and freight mobility, and less on safety at crossings.

Dave said that while this was not flushed out well in Phase 1, he expected Phase 2 would result in groupings of problematic crossings. Al agreed, citing Spokane Valley as an example where there are five road-rail intersections, but grade separation is viable on only one.

Sheri asked if incremental improvements could be considered and whether that might end the discussion about weighting of criteria. Jason said he looks at the tool a little differently. He wants to know how we update the tool; we need a recommendation on that. If the railroad companies do not analyze problematic crossings, nothing will happen. Recently, the UTC conducted a Risk Analysis and inspected every single crossing in the state.

Kevin asked the group whether the deliverable for this effort is the database tool or the prioritized list. Allegra pointed out that the Legislature did not fund a place to host the tool or staff to update it. Dave noted that this study was directed to FMSIB to perform, but FMSIB has a very clear definition of what constitutes a “project.” He is not sure that is what we want to use in this study. Brian agreed.

Kevin stated that using "average" data for crossing delays does not work. He said the public experiences the “worst condition,” and that is a shortfall of the database. Jon said that in order to be consistent statewide, data averages were employed. That is what the database does. He questioned whether we want to account for local differences in the analysis.

Allegra pointed out that 54% of the Top 50 crossings DID NOT have projects planned. Kevin added that "projects" may have been identified in Phase 1 but not all of them really solved a particular crossing issue. Al said we have a Catch-22 here, i.e., if a project is not in the plan, it will not get funding and there is no funding to do the engineering/planning to get the project in the plan. Kevin reminded everyone that regional plans have to be fiscally constrained, so that controls the local discussion about needs.

On Slide 13, Jon highlighted Recommendation 2c, which states *“Further analyze Top ranked crossings to identify potential solutions individually and at the corridor level.”* Chris commented that meeting this would be a heavy resource request. Jon replied that he wasn’t expecting that the Committee perform such an analysis, they just need to be aware that if additional analysis is needed, then it likely falls on the MPO/RTPO and/or the local agency to complete it.

Jon also highlighted Recommendation 4 (Slide 14): *“In some cases, projects prioritized locally did not rank high when evaluated on a statewide basis.”* He wondered how we might account for this or whether the Committee should be concerned.

Sean suggested the Committee create a different list for those crossings where no project is identified. He also suggested we look at grade separations separately from all other actions. If it is just about safety issues, \$75 million might address the Top 300 crossings, but it will not build a single grade crossing. Ron asked if the study identified the costs for crossings. He also asked if the study identified the total cost of all crossing improvements. Jon said yes, it was about \$800 million and was based on the cost estimates identified in the local and regional plans. Brian added that because of time and effort limitations, we have to consider that number very suspect. Al noted that crossing improvement costs could be less if a different solution is implemented. Jon added that project scoping is always constrained by the availability of funding sources and one is not yet identified.

Kevin stated that the original FAST Corridor effort started out as a program to deliver "x" projects (as a package) with the goal to speed up trains to add volume and remove road conflicts. It was a "package" to deliver the expected outcomes. Planning for something like this is a "chicken or egg" dilemma since MPO plans have to be fiscally constrained and there is no funding source identified for these crossings.

Kevin stated that MPO's have historically been reluctant to spend limited resources to scope projects unless there is some identified source of funding to advance the projects. Sean agreed saying that on one crossing in Washougal, the city has spent \$100,000 to date to identify needs with another \$850,000 planned in 2018 to finish. Moreover, there is no source of money for the \$25-30 million construction price tag.

Al said the traditional approach to using grade separations prices those projects out of the plan. He wondered whether the database tool gives guidance to MPO's to help them do the needed planning to help them know how to qualify projects to be on a funding list. If not, where do they get that guidance? A list is one thing, but knowing how to get on the list is more important.

Kevin said the database is a good tool and it can help regions plan their system of rail crossings. However, the expected outcome of this Phase 2 effort is to create program criteria and apply that to the needs in order to generate a list of needed projects. Getting on a list may require large amounts of engineering. In his region, most solutions are ITS, while grade crossings are proposed on only three out of 26 grade crossing in the region's 30-year plan. Al noted that some MPO's might not have gone that far in their planning processes.

Jon said the study outcome might be a comparison of a list of needs and an identification of areas where no solution exists. We could also see a long list of grade crossing improvement projects; that sends a message too. Sean added that sometimes local jurisdictions need to do some engineering work too. Solutions may vary according to local priorities.

Jason noted we need an early assessment of what is out there and what people are doing. Are the problems being addressed? Is it universal? Dave responded that the current gap is that there is no program addressing the mobility/community issue. It is not just safety and not just freight. Sean added that with all the noise coming from Washington DC, there seems to be increasing attention on freight projects. Our Congressional delegation is interested in seeing a statewide plan like this and it could present an opportunity for the state.

Jon discussed Database Improvement opportunities (Slides 16-19). He highlighted issues of data integrity, accuracy, and availability. New data elements could also be added to the database. He said some of those elements could be whether regions have a crossing on a project list or not. Is that list prioritized regionally? Has there been any local work accomplished? Sean suggested we weed out those crossings that do not have a project identified.

Jason wanted to be sure the trucking industry has an opportunity to be in the list development process. He does not want to leave out an important freight mobility stakeholder. He asked who the database audience is. Does the tool exist to help people identify solutions they have not even talked about yet? Sean agreed that the trucking industry should be part of the conversation.

Brian said it was his belief that the legislators wanted to hear more about projects than about data. Dave agreed saying that "how much" was commonly the first question asked by legislators.

Kevin reminded everyone that the Regional Plan is composed of projects of regional significance. There are many projects of local significance that will not show up in regional plans. Jon added that after today's meeting, we can reach out to the RTPO's and the RTPO's can reach out to locals. Ron asked how this was accomplished in Phase 1. Jon said JTC staff handled it and they just asked what regions have in plans right now.

Allegra said that one approach we can use is to send the list to the regions for "ground-truthing." Dave said that would be one way we could recognize some of the crossings proposed to be eliminated by locals.

Dave suggested an approach using a tiered prioritization. He thought maybe a Tier for crossings that have some local work in process vs. another Tier where nothing has started. This would allow us to build a case for the need. Brian added that maybe a third Tier could be added for those almost ready to construct. Dave pointed out that it took another state agency awhile to realize that the reason it did not receive many grant applications for construction was that the local governments did not have the funds to conduct the initial planning and engineering. Therefore, the state agency started offering grants for planning and engineering. Chris added that planning grants could really help locals get started.

Brian pointed out the numerous state agencies that provide grants to local government. Some of them do construction only (like FMSIB) some do offer both construction and engineering grants (like TIB and CRAB). Others provide planning funds only. Therefore, the real question is what gap does the state want to fill.

Al pointed out that Spokane Valley's TIGER grant applications for Barker Rd. used the Phase 1 study results to justify the need. Kevin said his region took a systematic ITS approach with the goal to inform EMS drivers about crossing blockages. The net result is that fewer grade separations were identified. Sean said his community is doing the same thing working with WSDOT to provide early warning on the freeway of local crossing blockages. Al pointed out that frontage roads are a potential solution and generally a lot cheaper than grade separations.

Jon asked the Committee what information we need for next time we get together. Do we need regions to help us classify conflicts by Tiers? Kevin said for his region it would not take him long, but his region is atypical. He estimated maybe two to three weeks. He agreed maybe we want to go to the next quarterly meeting (Nov. 14) and show them a proposal and ask them what we might be missing. Ron added we need to be clear with them about what is "need." Chris added that we do not want to forgo allowing the regions to identify innovative solutions. Maybe we should provide a "solution basket" for regions to consider. Allegra commented that we could help the MPO's and RTPO's think about this at their next regional meeting, and then follow up with some more ideas at the second meeting of the Committee. Jon added that previous comparisons of the conflict list to the regional plan list showed some areas are underrepresented (e.g., Lewis County, the Tri-Cities, etc.)

During the lunch, Brian reminded the Committee that the meeting is being recorded. There were no objections.

Jon reviewed the "Prioritization Discussion" slides (Slide 20 to 25). He added that the traditional railroad corridors (six of them shown on Slide 24) could be used in a discussion of urban/rural equity.

Dave asked whether FMSIB had any regional equity allocations. Brian responded that those allocations are statutorily determined for the Central Puget Sound, Other Western Washington, and Eastern Washington regions of the state.

Jon noted that Slide 25 is one example way of drilling down to project level in order to group by smaller corridors. What are the Committee's thoughts on this approach of a corridor-based strategy? Sean asked about the City of Edmonds example. Jon said that particular crossing operates somewhat independent of adjacent crossings. The example slide includes only the Top 50 crossings.

Jason asked if this depiction reflects the higher weighting for Mobility. Jon said yes. Allegra said this map was an attempt to create a proposal for smaller corridors (a grouping of interdependent crossings rather than the I-5 corridor).

Al said there is some logic to letting MPO's and RTPO's determine "corridors." These planning organizations tend to have a broader view of the region than locals do. Dave said any approach should include the total number of crossings within a corridor.

Allegra said that the legislature did not necessarily want just a "one-off" list of projects; they wanted guiding principles. Jason added that any needs list could easily be swamped by one big Seattle project. For the Mobility criterion, the area of influence is larger. For the Safety criterion, the impact is much more specific to a location. Brian added Benefit-Cost must be an important criterion since we want to avoid high cost / low benefit projects. Sean added that we should rely on local knowledge in this prioritization.

Allegra asked if we have confirmed that the corridor is the rail corridor or the road corridor. Kevin said that the role of MPO's is to certify local transportation plans. The issue for locals is mobility across the tracks. The proximity of crossings has an effect, as does the ADT across those crossings. He cited examples in Marysville and Edmonds. He noted that "one-offs" are still important, particularly if it is the

ONLY crossing in town. Jon asked how proximate is relevant. Kevin replied it is more about the railroad functions being performed at the crossing, since there is a big impact differential between moving trains and building trains.

Jason said the UTC determines whether crossings can be closed, not locals, or regions, or WSDOT. This is a proximity question for them since a closure at one location may negatively affect traffic flow at another crossing. For upgraded crossing protection and grade separations, the UTC has does not have the same concerns.

The group listed the essential elements of a "corridor:"

- The railroad is the spine of the corridor, roadway crossings are the focus
- Train length and frequency a factor
- Proximity of crossings are important
- The mobility concern is cross-railway travel

Jon asked about the role of land use. Ron stated that the problem is not just the crossing; it is that local land use decisions are not being communicated to the state, which affects freeway capacity, ramp capacity, and travel growth. Chris added that roadway intersections in close proximity are a problem. Jason suggested we also look at infrastructure to see if capacity can be improved. We have vehicle counts by type across the crossing for a reason.

The group discussed the type of information that would be discussed with the MPO/RTPO's at their next Coordinating Committee meeting. Three topics arose:

1. Based on the Phase 1 list of conflict priorities, can you sort them into three tiers in your region:
 - a. Tier 1 – Projects that are in design and awaiting full construction funding.
 - b. Tier 2 – Projects that are planned and/or scoped but have not proceeded to engineering of any kind.
 - c. Tier 3 – No project has been studied, scoped, or identified in the regional plan.
2. Do you have any comments on the criteria the Committee is considering for defining a "corridor:"
 - a. The railroad is the spine of the corridor, roadway crossings are the focus
 - b. Train length and frequency a factor
 - c. Proximity of crossings are important
 - d. The mobility concern is cross-railway travel
3. Can you review the data used to prioritize crossings in your region and verify it contains no obvious errors or omissions? Are there any crossings that should come off?

Al liked this approach and wanted to ensure we did not have another WAFAC debacle where the data request of the regions was not clear and the criteria changed later in the process.

Kevin added that in requesting this information from the regions we need to ask them to identify expected outcomes from any grade crossing improvements they recommend. Submitted projects may have multiple outcomes for each grade separation or crossing improvement. We need to ask the regions to identify those. Chris suggested we ask those questions in free form and not multiple choice. Jon added that also including a drop down menu would help in post-processing the submitted data.

Dave concluded that the bad news is that there is no funding program. And the good news is there is no funding program. We are building it.

Jon concluded by saying we made good progress today on Objectives 1 and 2 and that we need more data on projects to advance Objective 3.

Allegra facilitated a Plus-Delta exercise with the Committee in order to assess what worked in this meeting and what needs to be improved next time.

Next Steps

1. Brian to prepare draft meeting notes and share with the Consultant team. Send to Committee afterward.
2. Brian will prepare a draft request letter to the MPO's and share with Kevin for feedback. Then the draft will be shared with the Committee.
3. Kevin will schedule time on the Nov. 14 MPO/RTPO meeting for this topic.
4. Brian and Kevin will share the request letter with the Coordinating Committee Nov. 14. The request of the MPO's and RTPO's is to use staff to provide the data and not necessarily schedule it for Board action (unless they feel compelled to).
5. Schedule another meeting to share with the Advisory Committee the response from the MPO's (Late Dec. / Early Jan.).
6. Jon to begin draft a Scope for Phase 2 to present to the next Advisory Committee meeting
7. FMSIB staff to set-up a website for posting meeting agendas, presentations, and minutes.