

## **MINUTES Highway 2 Safety Coalition Meeting September 26, 2005**

319 Main Street, Sultan, Washington 98294

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The meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM.

### **Attendees:**

- Fred Walser, Highway 2 Safety Coalition Chairman
- Donnetta Walser, Mayor, City of Monroe
- John Seehuus, Councilman, City of Sultan and Highway 2 Safety Coalition Charter Member
- Dave Somers, Candidate (Democrat) for Snohomish County Council
- Greg Stephens, Candidate (Independent) for Snohomish County Council
- Loreena Eng, P.E., Regional Administrator, Northwest Region, WSDOT
- Rene Zimmerman, WSDOT's Urban Planning
- Rick Mitchell, WSDOT
- Richard Warren, WSDOT
- Tina Rogers, Snohomish County Public Works Department (no title available for these minutes)
- John Light, Public Works Director, City of Gold Bar
- Loretta Storm, Temporary H2SC Secretary
- Josie Fallgatter, Sultan Planning Commissioner
- Greg Erwen, Washington State Patrol
- Chester Marler, Stevens Pass Ski Area
- Mark Fallgatter, Citizen and Sultan resident
- Ray Kistenmacher, G.R.I.T. co-founder
- Carole Nichols, Citizen and Sultan resident

### **Self-Introductions all around**

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Rene Zimmerman gave a summary of the status of the Highway 2 corridor's Rural Development Plan (RDP). Kamuron Gurol, having taken a position with the City of Sammamish, will no longer be guiding this effort. She will be coming to the Coalition meetings to offer monthly updates, but the new Corridor Studies contact is Richard Warren, Corridor Planning Manager. His background with King County, with expertise in urban planning and transportation.

Next she explained that no contract has yet been issued to the consultant for the RDP effort, but she's expecting a Notice to Proceed Agreement so they can begin work. Her hope is that by mid-October, the consultant can begin work.

Re funding, she's only received about 50% of the federal funding. The reauthorization of the National Federal Bill has held this up. She has only been authorized to spend about \$333,000 from a grant fund, with the remaining amounts from the feds coming in January/February 2006. They also have another \$100,000 grant for public involvement from the Puget Sound Regional Council grant submitted in June. So the total right now for the study is \$600,000, which covers a large territory of the City of Snohomish to Skykomish. The scope of the plan will include assessing existing conditions in the corridor, review safety areas and problems, and traffic capacity will also be of great concern, as WSDOT attempts to determine what can be done in tandem with the corridor cities to try and solve the issues.

Rene announced there will be a planning charette (an interactive workshop with approx. 30 people from each city) to define problem areas and help with solutions. In answer to question from Greg Stephens, Zimmerman stated she anticipated the timing for the charette to be Feb./March, 2006.

**Chairman Walser** asked for clarification on the funding issues, as he was under the impression that the \$500,000 federal funds was a done deal and would already have been received, to which **Zimmerman** explained funds were only able to release the \$333,000 due to the reauthorization of federal funds. She confirmed that although the full \$500,000 will be delayed, it should not affect the RDP project momentum or substance.

**Greg Stephens** asked how long the RDP process would take. **Zimmerman** indicated the standard RDP was about 18 months, but feels the Highway 2 project would run about 10-14 months, the timeline beginning once the consultant gets started.

**Tina Rogers** asked which consultant was selected; Zimmerman stated it was Lochner, who will have two sub-consultants: Enviro-Issues who will handle the public involvement process, and Pertee Engineering, who will be doing some modeling and will handle the environmental documentation.

**Chairman Walser raised the issue of traffic counts**, indicating the City of Sultan has been taking these for some time. **Zimmerman** requested that the City provide those figures to her, if possible. **Walser** stated the sensors were in place over Labor Day weekend and it was the first time in nine years that traffic was down for that weekend: Both Friday night eastbound and Monday westbound, the two traditionally heavies days, there was significantly less traffic. They cannot account for the drop in volume. He said he would share these figures with WSDOT.

**Chairman Walser then mentioned one of the reasons for this count was due to anticipated growth** in Sultan over the next two or three years, and traffic on U. S. 2, obviously, is a concern.

**Mayor Donnetta Walser then gave a summary of the TEA-21 funding.** They are anticipating a letter of approval for TEA funding in October to make improvements at the U.S. 2/Kelsey intersection, and the U.S. 2/Old Owen-Main Street intersection. Their desire is to totally reconfigure the Old Owen/Main St. intersection.

**Mayor Walser** briefly discussed the current major ongoing construction over the summer on U.S. 2, the purpose of which is primarily safety improvements, which will remove most of the left turn lanes from the SR 522 intersection to the one eastward at Old Owen/Main Street. The configuration will ultimately be moving the traffic signals, widening the intersections to allow U-turns, and removing the left-hand turns, then repaving it all. She wistfully expressed a regret that it would have been nice if this project could have been coordinated with the TEA-21 funding. They are also trying to coordinate the Railroad crossing signals; drivers have been taking Main Street to avoid U. S. 2, which then backs up against the RR tracks. The traffic volume is such that when the signal changes at Lewis Street, cars are still sitting there when the train comes by, and Monroe has been fortunate that no accidents have occurred.

**Carole Nichols** asked whether the right turn (to go east) onto U. S. 2 from Main Street, due to the traffic pile-up from folks who wish to make free right turns eastward. **Mayor Walser** said she has not yet seen the details, but it's her understanding that there will ultimately be three lanes there: One right towards Sultan, one to go straight onto Old Owen Road, and another to turn left, to go westward onto U. S. 2. She said they've been working with the Chevron station, which is currently undergoing renovation, to provide a right-turn lane so that their business can avoid people who've been using their parking lot to avoid the light.

**Chairman Fred Walser** then corrected everyone's terminology in order to try to change the public's mindset: He feels there's no such thing as an accident. That is an Act of God. These are crashes, which are *caused* events.

**Walser then gave an update on U. S. 2 Sultan improvements:** A new signal at 5<sup>th</sup> Street will "mess up traffic." And the TEA-21 funding will provide funding for improvements to the Sultan Basin Road/U. S. 2 intersection; the current access/turn will be moved eastward slightly and installing a dedicated turn lane, which should greatly decrease accidents there.

**John Light** said **Gold Bar** was **gearing up** for when the RDP is released, so it can be properly communicated to residents

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Chairman Walser** then summarized recent **Safety Coalition** organizational efforts. The Coalition needs to file with the State Secretary of State as a non-profit corporation, and research has been done by Loretta Storm on the possibility or efficacy of setting up the Coalition as a 501(c)(3), but has not had time yet to research it properly. Ultimately, the Board needs to be selected first. She has organized the previous Coalition documentation passed along to her by her predecessor(s), however. **Walser** stated that the Coalition will need to work closer with the Legislature in the future in order to encourage that more funding flows for improvements to U. S. 2, so he felt that tax-deductible donations, if possible, could be of benefit in that effort. Certainly, donations to facilitate continuing public outreach and educational efforts on the need for improvements to U.S. 2 is essential. Toward that result, Walser then encouraged all participants to “spread the word” among their friends and within the community so others can learn of the great work the Coalition is doing on behalf of, and for, all valley residents and

**Walser** called for officers/board members to serve on the Coalition, and this will be addressed at the October meeting, hopefully. Contact any Coalition member for information on how to contact Chairman Walser.

## **Walser opened the meeting up to questions....**

**Mark Fallgatter** asked what the “weakest link” was, related to funding. **Mayor Walser** then made the following statement:

*Anytime I pick up the newspaper and I see that state funding gas tax money is slated for Highway 9 and Camano Island and Stanwood, it seems disproportionate to me, when we were promised by the legislators in those two areas that they definitely have Highway 2 in their radar screen and they're very concerned. I was going to suggest – but maybe it's not a good idea, though, so don't – sometimes I get a little radical... [Chairman Walser looks surprised, then says, “I'm going to write that one down!”] ...many times that we ask for a written response from both Senator Mary Margaret Haugen and some of the other legislators as to why Highway 2 was totally left out of the picture. With the effort to repeal the gas tax, the people in east Snohomish County are really getting a double shot here, negative publicity when we say, “Why should we support this, when we have to waste gas to get in to fight this, and we were made promises that weren't kept.” And I would just like a written response so I can tell citizens in Monroe why.”*

**Chairman Walser** stated when he spoke with **Sen. Mary Margaret Haugen** (Chair, Transportation Committee), she said, “Fred, I know what's going on on Highway 2.” Walser then stated he's certain Highway 2 funding was the victim of political in-fighting during the last session, and a concerted and concentrated effort needs to be made by citizens to contact their legislators and ask that improvements to U. S. 2 be made. The Coalition's sign “*Stuck in Traffic? Call your legislator*” was quite effective before it was wiped out by a car crashing into it.

**Tina Rogers** stated the worst thing the Coalition/Sky Valley could do was to lobby hard for funding without first knowing how that funding should be applied, and that's the purpose of the RDP. So she is optimistic that the process is unfolding as it should. **Chairman Walser** agreed with her thoughts, but also expressed disappointment that state-promised funding for U. S. 2 was reallocated to address Highway 9 improvements, due to the “heavier” political climate in that area.

**Carole Nichols** stated she was quite grateful for the light at Old Owen Road/Fern bluff expressed hope for additional improvement funding for this area, and **Mark Fallgatter** who must travel to downtown Seattle to his job, must change buses three times and asked if there were any future transit/bus

improvements that could help long-distance travel. **Walser agreed** and echoed that the solution is not just building more roads, but indicated Community Transit should also be a part of it.

**Josie Fallgatter** summarized the concerns by those present, the drivers of this section of U. S. 2, of the recent "improvement" done by WSDOT to the Sultan-to-Monroe section. WSDOT just laid tar, then place pea gravel on top. The result is a six-mile stretch of extremely bumpy roadway which is like driving over an old washboard. Most residents have dubbed the so-called improvements "traffic calming devices."

**Significant discussion ensued** about this "fix" to U. S. 2, and Rick Mitchell promised he would check into the reasons why it was so poorly done.

**The Meeting Schedule** for the remainder of the year was discussed. The dates of 10/24, 11/28 and 12/19 were selected.

## **GENERAL CLOSING COMMENTS....**

**Loretta Storm suggested** that communication of the Coalition's efforts be improved on a city-by-city basis. Although the cities of Monroe and Sultan are adequately covered (via Mayor Walser's and Chairman Fred Walser's communication and participation), there does not seem to be any regularly-attending representatives from the other cities. Perhaps regular visits to update the councils of other Corridor cities might be helpful in getting the word out on the Coalition's achievements.

**Greg Stephens** stated he would share the Coalition's efforts with Snohomish County Tomorrow, as he is a member of that quasi-judicial body, but someone would have to provide him with a briefing paper he could present.

**Chairman Walser** summarized Snohomish County Cities and Towns meetings that both he and Mayor Walser attend. Everyone there was aware of the U.S. 2 problems, including a Mukilteo representative seeking "anti-Paine Field expansion" support from others. He suggested that his group and the Coalition could join forces to mutually provide strength to each other's issues.

**Mayor Walser** stated that Senator Maria Cantwell has been extremely supportive of the U. S. 2 issues, and in a recent call asked what she could do to help. Walser then explained to the Senator Monroe's concept of a city-built "bypass" running west-to-east from Kelsey (at approximately the Galaxy Theater/Red Robin) to Woods Creek which would remove approximately 10,000 vehicle trips per day from U. S. 2, according to the traffic studies they have done. She had 45 minutes to put a proposal together for Senator Cantwell, which she included in the Senate Bill for Re-appropriation. Walser is under the impression that it's funding they are trying to keep within Washington State, but she will keep us apprised. Chairman Walser and Mayor Walser both agreed that the funding and assistance from the federal level has exceeded what's been received from the state.

**Loretta Storm** suggested a Coalition name change, to more accurately reflect the "national" condition of the highway. She has had a conversation with **Chairman Walser** on this subject, and he distributed an email from PSRC's King Cushman wherein he stated that is a more proper designation than "Highway 2." After brief discussion, the name, "U. S. 2 Safety Coalition" seemed to be preferred. Charter member Seehuus suggested, for continuity purposes, inclusion of the word, "Traffic" to reflect the original Coalition name, which was "U. S. 2 Traffic Safety Coalition."

**Greg Stephens** reinforced Chairman Walser's opinion that a coordinated lobbying effort would be required by which to obtain funding.

Meeting adjourned at 8:04 PM. *[Minutes submitted by H2SC Temporary Secretary L. Storm.]*