

MT. BAKER FOOTHILLS ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION
WASHINGTON COMMERCE CORRIDOR
SYMPOSIUM REPORT

June 24, 2004

Prepared by
The Commerce Corridor Symposium Committee
Mt Baker Foothills Economic Development Association
PO Box 866
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Submitted to
WCC Steering Committee
Wilbur Smith Associates
Washington State Department of Transportation

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INTRODUCTION

During the afternoon and evening of Thursday, June 24th, the Mount Baker Foothills Economic Development Association (EDA) sponsored a Washington Commerce Corridor Symposium in Van Zandt, Washington. The intent of the Symposium was to provide a venue for members of the communities in eastern Whatcom County to share their questions, comments and concerns regarding the Washington Commerce Corridor (WCC) Feasibility Study currently being conducted in Western Washington.

The Symposium was moderated by Jeff Margolis of the EDA and included a panel of elected officials, project consultants, EDA members and community leaders. Panelists included elected officials at the local, state and federal levels, including Whatcom County Council member Seth Fleetwood, State Representative Doug Erickson, State Senator Harriet Spanel, and Jasper MacSarrow, Whatcom County Representative for Congressman Rick Larsen. The panel also included Arno Hart of Wilbur Smith Associates and Gordon Rogers from Whatcom Council of Governments.

The Symposium was attended by more than 160 people throughout the afternoon and evening, and included thirteen formal presentations that were punctuated by many questions and comments from participants in the audience. Presenters, panelists, and audience participants posed a number of eloquent, thoughtful and well-researched questions, persuasive comments and critical concerns. Elected officials made several commitments to action during the Symposium. Residents unable to attend the symposium submitted documents, bringing the number of written submissions to 23.

Below, we summarize the thematic and poignant concerns, comments and questions that arose during the Symposium.

MAJOR THEMES

Six major themes were enunciated:

1. Quality of Life
2. Public Resources/Private Profit
3. Growth Inducing Impacts
4. Environmental Costs
5. Collaborative Planning
6. Natural Resource Based Economies

Each theme embodies a subset of critical remarks that bear upon the feasibility of the Washington Commerce Corridor (WCC). The intent herein is to present a synopsis of the discussion content rather than a full itemization of subheadings. The focus, breadth and nuances of these themes are located in the documents submitted by presenters and interested others.

1. Quality of Life

The most repeated concern was regarding the loss and destruction of communities. Generations of families have invested their lives and livelihood in establishing a sense of place. People see this as such a monumental threat to all that they hold dear, that they will do whatever they can to make sure that it does not happen. The proposal is not seen as abstract and potential, but as personal and immediate. Loss of place in a social network is part of a formula for human depression and despair, leading to untold social, economic, environmental, personal and collective health consequences.

2. Public Resources/Private Profit

A rather alarming concept wherein the government acquires private property that is then transferred to investors with exclusive development rights. Critics suggest that the private sector will not take on risk without the guarantee of public support. Accountability and control have proven to be difficult when the private sector is paying the bills. Residents believe that they are sacrificing their land and placing their tax dollars at risk to protect private investment. This problem is particularly acute with a project that impacts the hopes and dreams of so many people. Costs and benefits must be in balance.

3. Growth Inducing Impacts

Build it and they will come! The WCC flies in the face of a myriad of planning commitments that have been hammered-out throughout decades of continuous effort to create a sublime and harmonious relationship between human needs and the ecosystem. The WCC tears this asunder. It creates the antecedents for industrial/commercial proliferation and urban sprawl.

4. Environmental Costs

This, the most indignant list of particulars, litters the WCC landscape with loss of fish and wildlife habitat, damming of waterways and wetlands, inevitable pollution of air and water, degradation of the natural order and failure to recognize the manner in which the changing world environment bears upon the future of transportation equations. There is no apparent respect for environmental justice whatsoever. Of particular concern is the South Fork of the Nooksack River which hosts two species of salmon listed under the Federal Endangered Species Act. Any attempt to undo the millions of dollars invested in trying to protect this natural resource will undoubtedly be hard fought with many allies including national environmental organizations, governmental agencies and Native American tribes.

5. Collaborative Planning

A project of this magnitude, which attempts to realign not only the contours of the landscape but involves the relocation of thousands of families, businesses and institutions, necessitates a mile wide blank geographic tablet. Without public participation and collaborative planning attentive to detail, the potential for latent if not manifest social upheaval must be considered. Even with serious public participation and collaborative planning, which are unlikely with private financing, social upheaval seems unavoidable.

6. Natural Resource Based Economies

Agriculture, forestry, sport and commercial fishing, tourism and recreation are the stellar components of the economic base of the Cascade Foothills. This region is a refuge for urbanites from the huge metropolitan sectors north and south. The realignment of this region has as much import for the well being of a Seattleite looking for a getaway and a fresh piece of fruit right off the tree, as it does to the farmer growing that product. The cost of the hundreds of thousands of acres of lost agrarian productivity in perpetuity is beyond computation and would be contrary to Whatcom County policies and programs, including substantial financial investments in protecting farmland.

CONCLUSION

The Mt. Baker Foothills Economic Development Association submits this report and the associated addenda to the consulting firm Wilbur Smith Associates and the Washington State Department of Transportation as a Collaborator, and as a civic organization with common and mutual interest in discussing the feasibility of a WCC in Northwestern Washington. If one takes time to peruse the submissions in the addenda the wisdom of revisiting the I-5 corridor instead is oft proposed.

In the end, we of the EDA have learned that the prioritization of values is at issue. We are concerned with the bottom line, the totality of cost -- if it can ever be quantified. We must assume that a true theory of value extends beyond a simple formula of capital investment that asks who will use it, who will build it, and who will pay for it. Economic theory has matured. In this day and age "social capital" recognizes the effervescent elements inherent in long-term economic growth and the management of natural and human resources. The rural lifestyle that Cascade Foothills residents enjoy emanates from the major themes voiced by our Symposium participants, the very qualities the construction of anything like the WCC would place at grave risk.

We formally request a response from WSA, WSDOT, and the WCC Steering Committee, by U.S. Mail by Sept. 16th 2004, letting us know (1) that our report was received, (2) that it has been read, and (3) any comments or questions regarding our report.

Sincerely,

Carole McDonald, EDA Chairperson- Glacier, WA

Jeff Margolis, EDA Recreation and Trails Committee Chair - Van Zandt, WA

Alan Seid, EDA Sustainability Committee Chair - Kendall, WA

Lou Piotrowski, EDA Vision and Mission Committee Chair - Glacier, WA

Phil Cloward, EDA Infrastructure Committee Chair-Kendall, WA

Anthony Kelley, EDA Infrastructure Committee Co-chair - Everson WA

Nan Laney, WCC Symposium Panelist - Sedro-Woolley, WA

Holly O'Neil, WCC Symposium Panelist - Van Zandt, WA

LIST OF SYMPOSIUM PANELISTS

Doug Ericksen, Washington State House of Representative
Seth Fleetwood, Whatcom County Council
Arno Hart, Wilbur Smith Associates
Mike Kaufman, EDA
Nan Laney, Educational consultant
Jeff Margolis, EDA
Jasper McSlarrow, Congressman Rick Larsen's Office
Holly O'Neil, Crossroads Consulting
Lou Piotrowski, Mt. Baker Foothills Chamber of Commerce
Gordon Rogers, Whatcom Council of Governments
Alan Seid, EDA
Harriet Spanel, Washington State Senate

ADDENDA

List and Location of Symposium Exhibits

The following people offered presentations during the Symposium in Van Zandt. Due to the extensive material offered by the presenters, it was impossible to include all of it in this summary report. The exhibits currently reside in the Whatcom County Public Library in Deming, WA and are available to the public.

<u>Exhibit No.</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Residence</u>
1.	Nan Laney	Sedro Woolley
2.	Dr, Richard Haard	Bellingham
3.	Daniel M. Warner, Esq.	Bellingham
4.	Dr. Richard Gantman	Deming
5.	R. Peter Silva	Sedro Woolley
6.	W. & P. Hartman	Sedro Woolley
7.	Amy Poe	Acme
8.	Dr. Joseph Garcia	Deming
9.	Robin Bailey	Ferndale
10.	Andrea Xaver	Mt. Vernon
11.	R. & R. Heft	Mt. Vernon
12.	Doug Dobyys	Deming
13.	Elea Plotkin	Littleton, CO
14.	Michael Davenport	Deming
15.	Alan Seid	Kendall
16.	Jackie Rossing	Acme
17.	Michael Taylor	Everson
18.	Dr. Sara Singleton	Everson
19.	Tina Bixby	Acme
20.	Lloyd H. Flem	Seattle
21.	Charles Mott	Seattle
22.	Patricia L. Laughlin	Mount Vernon
23.	Amy Margolis	Van Zandt