

WSDOT/ACEC-WA Executive Liaison Committee Meeting

Monday, September 12, 2022 – 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Meeting Minutes

- 1.) Kevin Dayton spoke briefly about the Governor's September 8th [press statement](#) regarding the upcoming rescission of all remaining COVID-19 emergency proclamations and state of emergency by October 31st. WSDOT will be monitoring the guidance from DOH, L&I and others to align our protocols and will make and communicate changes to those protocols as appropriate. The vaccine requirement also stays in effect for state agency employees even after the Oct. 31st date, as it's now a condition for employment. We're seeing a pivot away from having boosters be a requirement which the Governor was looking to do through WAC rules, now there's discussions about providing an incentive for staff to get a COVID booster. This is a good thing from a workforce standpoint for WSDOT and has eased a lot of people's minds. We haven't heard any update regarding vaccination requirements for Contractors or Consultants working on WSDOT projects. But the Governor did make a change for Craft workers, which has been eased a bit there.

Marshall Elizer commented that WSDOT is in a transitional mode trying to settle into the new COVID normal and setting guidance for holding our meetings and conferences hybrid vs. in-person only. More discussion to happen around those areas.

- 2.) Kevin Dayton, Marshall Elizer, and Van Collins provided a budget and staffing update. WSDOT is in good standing with the budget and has more funding available than can be spent. While WSDOT is expending considerable effort recruiting, they still are not keeping pace with departures and ongoing retirements. Recruiting is difficult because of the market conditions, it's hard to attract new engineers. WSDOT will be putting a huge demand on consultants to help with delivery. WSDOT is seeing successful recruitments, but they are not at the level of staffing they would like to reach. Employees are being put in new positions with less experience. WSDOT has very talented staff, just lacking experience, especially at the PE, Asst PE, and the Technical Engineer 3 level. One to two years is the average experience level for these employees.

WSDOT is embracing new hiring and recruiting practices. They are using statewide hiring efforts and lots of advertising with a goal of not leaving talent on the table. They are being flexible with place-based hiring with less expectations regarding in office work to attract talent. Meetings will likely remain hybrid as many WSDOT employees will remain remote workers with the agency's 30-40% telework goal. As some WSDOT employees have to report in person, i.e., maintenance, field, and ferry workers, other employees will telecommute at much higher rates.

Van mentioned the Business Planning Advisory Committee represented by members of WSDOT, Union leadership, ACEC and AGC. A new report will be provided to the Legislature this year. All committee membership agrees that WSDOT staff are underpaid. The committee's goal is to support WSDOT in being a strong Owner by retaining quality staff. The Department needs younger employees to step up and training is key. ACEC will also be talking with legislators in support of training for the engineering series employees. Most consultant firms are using a form of hybrid meetings and remote work as well. There is a concern regarding mentoring and development of younger employees without exposure to other employees in a broader in-office work environment.

Mark Gaines noted that their new hiring practice allows WSDOT to address Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion goals better than they have in the past. They are shifting their focus at job fairs to improve their percentages of diverse hiring. He asked ACEC representatives whether they made offers on the spot at job fairs, as that is not WSDOT's current practice. ACEC members at the meeting said they are not aware of their firms making on the spot offers at job fairs, but that they do often provide contact information to college students to get interviews scheduled with a quick timeline. Additionally, firms will provide interns that are doing good work for the firms with aggressive job offers. Van noted that his daughter (3rd year engineering student) has been an intern for both ACEC and AGC over the past several years. AGC is much more aggressive at putting hiring offers on the table and it's likely that his daughter will have a job offer before she starts her 4th year of college.

3.) The following Subcommittee updates were provided:

- Design-Build: Chris Tams (WSDOT) provided the group with an agenda for WSDOT's Design-Build training that will be provided virtually October 11th through the 27th. The training is free to those that are interested. The next Design-Build Subcommittee meeting will be in November and will be held at the new Olympic Region Building in Lacey. The meeting will be hybrid for those who cannot attend in person.
- Structures & Geotechnical: Bijan Khaleghi (WSDOT) noted that they will be holding their first meeting this fall on Friday, September 16th. They are looking at new membership in their committee due to changes in both consultant and WSDOT membership. A few of their focus areas will include permit changes, seismic and BDM training and feedback. Their plan is to hold virtual meetings every two months.
- Project Delivery: Kevin Miller (WSDOT) and Steve Olling (Parametrix) noted that a key issue for them is the use of Bluebeam for plan review, etc. WSDOT introduced it at a July PDE meeting and there was broad support. Kevin sent out an internal solicitation regarding the number of licenses needed so that he can get a better idea of costs. So far, costs are looking reasonable. When he gets the final cost numbers he will have a discussion with Mike Fleming and Mark Gaines for approval to proceed with negotiations.

They held a meeting in July and the following topics/presentations were provided and discussed: 1) Complete Streets – Celest Gilmore; 2) Highway Runoff Manual Training – Julie Heilman; and 3) Bid Period and availability of digital files – Jim Mahugh.

The Subcommittee will hold their next meeting on Friday, September 23rd and they will be discussing new changes to Buy America provisions, enhancements to the design parameters worksheet, the use of BIM and where the future is going.

- Business Administration: Erik Jonson (WSDOT) and Santosh Kuruvilla (Exeltech) noted that they had previously met and discussed continuing to hold their meetings virtually. Their next meeting will be Monday, September 19th. Their topics of interest remain the same as those that were provided during the annual meeting presentation which includes input from other members and subcommittees:
 - Consultant Look-Ahead tool process improvements
 - Impact of remote business practices
 - PPP loan forgiveness monitoring and reporting
 - Prequalification updates

- Fish passage program updates
- Local programs announcements and updates
- Safe harbor program updates
- OEO mentoring program and periodic updates
- Supporting new entrants to the market in wake of infrastructure bill
- Audit/invoice review updates
- Coordination with other subcommittees – Design-Build & Project Delivery
- Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCOI) Impacts

WSDOT will need new subcommittee representations from the Local Programs and Audit Office as both John Ho and Schatzie Harvey have moved to new positions within WSDOT.

Mark Gaines noted that they are considering new pre-qualification changes for small firms. WSDOT has defined small firms as those firms that earn a gross revenue of \$5 million or less. There is a large pool of potential candidates for current work. If consultant firms meet the threshold and apply, they will be put into a list of pre-qualified firms for smaller bid efforts. The next step WSDOT is working on is how to provide work opportunities to this pool. An example they are considering, that if there is an RFAI for work that falls in the \$200,000 to \$500,000 range, only the smaller pre-qualified firms would be eligible for this work. Mark and Erik recognize that this could be an issue for both WSDOT PEs and larger firms that currently compete for these type of work efforts. WSDOT PEs are uncomfortable when they can't select the larger good firms that they know can do the work.

Mark would like to receive feedback on this proposal. ACEC representatives responded that feedback depends on the specifics. More specificity to a broader audience is needed to provide good feedback. Several examples discussed was that this proposal may not apply to fish passage or structures type work that has very specific prequalification needs. Erik said that they would provide more information about what they are planning. Van noted that ACEC would likely need to get together and do some brainstorming on this issue.

- 4.) Mark provided an Organizational Conflict of Interest (OCOI) Manual update. WSDOT has undertaken a major re-write of the manual. The content has not changed from latest discussions, but the goal was to make it more easily understood by PEs and consultants. The manual has been vetted internally and the feedback is that the manual is now very easy to use. Mark expects Jon Deffenbacher to get a draft copy out this week or next, and they will then review it with ACEC. Expect a meeting to be set up in late September with workgroup, then roll-out to broader membership in the October/November timeframe.
- 5.) Jay Drye provided a Local Programs update. Local Programs continues to take advantage of the Move Ahead WA and BIL funding programs with the project awards. The Local Bridge Program call has closed, and the awards have been sent out. This program provided 49 awards for \$179 million worth of bridge projects statewide. They will likely put out another call for bridge projects next year to get more projects into the pipeline. There are currently long lead times due to NMFS stormwater challenges. They are currently awarding City Safety Projects. They had 51 applicants for 198 projects and \$160 million of work with only \$36 million to award. This is an oversubscribed program, with 11 new cities also applying for these dollars. Local Programs continues the process of working through railroad projects. There are 27 Jurisdictions with \$30 million worth of requests in. Unfortunately, this program has lots of active and legal challenges to solve with the railroads.

- 6.) Mark reviewed minor updates to the ELC Charter based on membership changes and titles. He requested feedback on any additional changes. No additional comments or suggestions were provided. Janelle will route the charter for signatures soon.
- 7.) Mark provided a quick review of updates to WSDOT's Strategic Plan Goals. Workforce Development is similar to past language. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion title includes a broader focus and incorporates expectations from the HEAL Act. Practical Solutions is replaced with a broader focus on Resilience that includes a 2-part focus, resilient transportation systems, and transportation systems that combat climate change and support a healthy community for all. This new executive direction is being shared with AGC and ACEC. Mark would like all the subcommittee co-chairs to share back with their membership. Van also suggested an opportunity to discuss at a broader level is to combine with the OCOI Manual scheduled discussion with the ACEC community. Mark agreed with that approach.
- 8.) Mark and Van discussed feedback they had each received from the Annual Meeting survey. Feedback included 1) The meeting was well attended and it's nice to be back in person, 2) The venue was good, 3) We should provide more opportunities for presenters to engage with the audience, not just presentations, 4) Get smaller groups together, 5) Right size the presentations, some were too long, there was redundancy, and they could be more appropriate for audience. Mark suggested that the core planning team (Van, Linea, Mark) review presentations in advance for time and content and provide more direction to the presenters, 6) An out of state attendee provided compliments regarding the work that is being accomplished by ACEC and WSDOT. WSDOT is doing great work and the relationship with ACEC is good.
- 9.) Upcoming Meetings are planned to be a mix of virtual and hybrid if there enough people that will attend in person. Likely in person meeting will be at the Kent Maintenance Facility for ease of attendance from Seattle and Olympia. No one wants to be the only person in the room when the rest are virtual, so we will send a poll in advance to find out whether the team members will attend in person or not. If less than 50% are not available to meet in person, the hybrid meeting will be changed to virtual only. Upcoming scheduled meetings:
 - Monday, December 5, 2022, from 1-2 pm (MS Teams)
 - Tuesday, January 3, 2023, from 1-3 pm (Hybrid)
 - Wednesday, March 1, 2023, from 9-11 am (Hybrid)
 - Monday, May 1, 2023, from 9-11 am (Hybrid)

The following action items were noted:

- Mark/Janelle – Confirm whether upcoming meetings will be virtual or hybrid and confirm location if hybrid.
 - Mark – Work on content and logistics of Strategic Plan Update and OCOI Manual presentations to broader ACEC group.
 - Erik Jonson – Further define small consultant framework for awarding work.
 - Janelle – Finalize the charter after 9/16 and route it to all members for electronic signatures.
- 10.) The meeting adjourned early at 2:30 pm.