

**WSDOT/ACEC-WA Executive Liaison Committee Meeting**  
**Friday, December 8, 2023 – 9:30 to 11:30 am**  
**Meeting Minutes**

**Hybrid:** WSP Tacoma Office, 1201 Pacific Ave Suite 550, Tacoma, WA 98402  
Microsoft Teams [Link](#) or Call-In: 1-206-531-0324, Conference ID: 247 898  
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**Budget/Staffing Update/Legislative Update**

**Workforce salary and long-term outlook**

Currently, there has been a lot of discussion with no answers. Van shared that the ACEC winter meeting is next week, and Governor Inslee plans to speak during the meeting.

There was an article in the “Seattle Times” about workforce shortages. The article mentioned this shortage is going to escalate costs and impact project delivery. Which is a growing concern for WSDOT and ACEC. There is a program where students work with mentors on projects and tackle real-world issues. At a national level, ACEC has established a new workforce development committee.

A major impact we are currently experiencing is that a generation of employees is slowly retiring, and we are losing knowledge and experience. Our national folks are looking at trying to get changes to the H1V Visa Program because there is talent abroad. Another alternative is to ship the work out but hopefully, this is something we don’t need to do. This problem needs collaboration for resolution, not competition.

We need to find ways to foster interest in younger people. We need to keep it in the conversation and encourage new ideas. One development we have is our HR proposed to state HR to raise/adjust salaries for engineering positions at the agency (Engineering series, Bridge engineering series, Technicians, and some WMS Classes) which will be considered in the 25-27 session.

WSDOT Updates: Our team had the opportunity to present project updates and presentations of cost escalations to the House and the Senate. We believe the governor’s budget will come out within the next few weeks. There is a mix of budget issues including the Fish Passage Program, and project costs, but also concerns around WSDOT's preservation program, maintenance, and ferries.

Additional WSDOT news: Amy Scarton has left her position and Marshall Elizer is filling in until the new incumbent is chosen.

Interesting statistic around workforce, WSDOT roughly has around 7,200 workers (including ferry workers). Over the last 2 years- there have been about 5,000 new hires. Of that 5,000,

roughly, 1500 people are brand new to WSDOT, and 3500 are WSDOT employees that were hired for new positions. Experience level isn't where it used to be because of all the new staff and training going on. We are headed in the right direction and need to be patient and do what we can to prevent burnout from our current employees.

With a shortage of engineers, the cost of acquiring engineering talent goes up because of market conditions. The private sector can pay more, and we will continue to articulate that to elected officials and others. We don't want people to leave because they are unhappy or for economic reasons. So, it would be a win/win paying engineers more.

#### AASHTO STEM Outreach Solutions Program

Evan Grimm provided a presentation regarding the AASHTO STEM Outreach Solutions program.

- What the program is: AASHTO STEM outreach is a program designed to engage students (pre-college) in solving real-world problems. Mentors, classrooms, and materials are provided. AASHTO trains teachers who want to be a part of the program, so they can teach their students. There will be outreach to other schools to engage interest. This program is free for teachers and students and currently focuses on grades 7-12, with the hope to expand to younger students in the future.
- WSDOT's role: WSDOT's role is to fund the program by sourcing out federal grants, other financial aid, and resources. WSDOT will also be doing most of the outreach to the schools and teachers to gauge interest and participation. Another role WSDOT will have to set up the annual local teacher training class. WSDOT will send engineers to the classrooms if contacted by a teacher who wants an engineer to come to their classroom, to make connections.
- The two main programs: RIDES Grade school and younger middle school and TRAC (Transportation Research Activity Center, grade 7-12).
- Why: To educate students interested in the engineering fields and provide students assistance when applying for college and internships.
- How will WSDOT participate: Each WSDOT region will have a group that would help their local teachers and school districts. The goal is to have 4-5 people from WSDOT and external engineers. There will be an assigned leader (could be from ACEC), and the cohort leader will engage with the teachers. The target is to start this upcoming school year. The first step is to identify the cohorts so that in the late spring or early summer teachers can be trained. Larry Larson sent out an announcement requesting groups identify a main cohort leader within the next month. This included asking ACEC for volunteers as well.

Kerri Whoeler suggested that we ensure stipends are available for underserved communities, and teachers. Evan said he would make a note and investigate what opportunities may be available regarding stipends.

A concern was brought up that there are more qualified applicants than positions in civil engineering positions at the universities. The issue may have to do with the funding

mechanisms. It is much less expensive to educate someone in art and sciences than in engineering. We need to do some exploration with the universities to make sure there are sponsors and availability to support this program.

### **Brief Subcommittee Updates**

#### **Business Administration**

Erik Johnson and Ron Paananen- During the last two meetings the group focused on onboarding, enforceable goals, and diversity mapping, touched on the disparity study, and safe harbor challenges, and have been productive.

Van would like ACEC to survey small minority firms in the future to help identify the barriers to entry and has decided to hold off for now due to the department's eminent disparity studies. A survey will be done in the future when the time is right to help identify why people aren't joining us at Safe Harbor.

#### **Design-Build**

Art McCluskey - Our group put out a survey "Industry Interest in WSDOT Design Build Projects". During their last two meetings, the group discussed some of the results from survey that will assist in generating meeting topics for 2024. One hot topic of discussion will be regarding stipend payments. Other topics are engineer's estimate, fuel cost adjustment (collaboration with roadway/administrative team), material supply, OCOI manual check-in, Design Build Performance Report, and WSDOT contract administration evaluation.

- Discuss and bring in concrete supplies and talk about the issues they are facing.
- Design-build challenges - to review the manual.
- Template review is an ongoing item, and we will be discussing it at every meeting in 2024. We are still finalizing the schedule for the year.

Regarding the Fish Passage Task Force - The warranty WSDOT requires on the stream design is a top priority. All fish passage design-build projects require this warranty; however the design builders have very little discretion in how the stream design is approached. Also, WSDOT concurs with the design prior to construction. It may be in the interest of WSDOT and the design-builders to eliminate the warranty. A meeting is coming up next week to discuss. It was suggested that the task force meet before we do.

#### **Project Delivery**

Steve Olling - We took a long summer break, and there have been a lot of changes in the team, due to promotions, and retirements. We've just started looking at what our focus areas will be for 2024. Some focus areas already identified are the plans for the approval process, check-in on the progressive design-build world, and how to improve that process, as well.

- The next meeting is in February, and we will come up with ideas to focus on.
- If there is anything out there that warrants project delivery investigation, we are open to ideas.
- Our group is interested and excited to be a part of the AASHTO STEM Outreach Program.

- Regarding the Team Charter we want to get some fresh people/ideas onto that team.
- One of our priorities is to rebuild the team. We will be working on this over the next couple of months.

### **Structures & Geotechnical**

Evan Grimm - We continue to have discussions with the Geotech engineers, about forthcoming modifications on earthquake hazard maps. We are looking forward to learning from a few key projects, such as the 520 program that will be presenting the structural lessons learned. We have an upcoming presentation about GIS and how our WSDOT bridge data group uses electronic mapping in our work.

### **Local Programs Update**

Jay Drye - At the last meeting Kyle talked about the federal fiscal year on the local side, and we have the biggest federal program that we have ever had in history. All indications show that we are going to stay high.

- We just obligated the largest program yet (\$540M for local agencies) this last fiscal year. This was a significant lift that meant a lot of processing and paperwork to meet federal obligations. So, this isn't a sustainable model. The ask is that if consulting firms are assisting local agencies in pursuing this funding, please try and spread the packages out through the year to level the workload for everyone.
- Pay attention to the local agreements from local agencies, if they are about to expire at the end of the year, then please proactively get those addressed if the work will continue.
- The business admin committee is having conversations about getting the rates approved earlier. The sooner those are processed, the better for everyone.
- The call for City Safety projects is \$35 million for the local cities throughout the state. We are expecting the typical \$100+ million in applications. There are plenty of safety needs out there. We spend a lot of time picking the projects that have the most safety benefits throughout the state. Once the funds are awarded to these projects, we need to ensure they move forward in a timely manner.
- The Fish Passage program on the local side is very small, but the need is large. We do have the PROTECT program that is federally funded. In the next few days or weeks, a call for PROTECT projects will go out on the local side.

### **Update ACEC/WSDOT Charter and web page**

We plan to update the ACEC/ WSDOT Charter annually. We will track the changes and updates for the year; however, we are set for 2024 and will revisit the Charter in the fall.

The web page is updated, and Van gets credit for that. If you see anything wrong with the webpage, let us know so we can correct any errors.

### **Small business survey update**

Van has covered most of this already. We met with the Office of Equity and Civil Rights, who

pointed out that the disparity study is being finalized and will be released very soon. This study may provide some of the information we were looking for in a survey and could also help form or shape the sorts of questions we would like to ask. We mutually agreed to wait and see what the results are and once the results from the study come out, this group can discuss the results and talk about what the survey will look like in the future.

**Fish passage update**

Kim and Molly provided the Fish Passage Updated presentation.

Injection requirements, WSDOTS program organization, and priorities. We have 2000 barriers statewide. We have to open 90% of blocked habitats by 2030.

- We have organized our plan- the 2030 delivery plan and the beyond 2030 delivery plan (to be developed).
- We use a variety of prioritization principles to plan and deliver our program.
- Progress to date is 114 injunction barriers corrected, restored access to 502 miles of habitat accesses were improved.
- The Ravensdale Creek- Partnership with King County.
- Kim requested that if anyone has any examples, they can add for future presentations to please share those with her.
- Kim showed Leland Creek which has Coho Salmon, that are returning to the site already.
- Remaining 2030 Delivery plan- the projects getting under construction contracts adding to the percent habitat opened.
- We currently have 143 construction contracts. Once those are complete, we will be at 60%.
- 2024 will have 298 barriers under contract and 80% habitat (by December). There is a lot of work going on and we appreciate everyone’s help and support.
- Fish passage delivery is accelerating quickly with a total program budget of \$ 3.8 billion.
- If the Seattle Times (or any media) contacts anyone with questions regarding fish passage, please work with Kim for responses to ensure we accurately answer questions.
- The revised total plan estimate is \$ 7.3B-\$7.7B, additional fund needs are \$3.5B-\$4B.
- Some challenges they are facing are maintenance of traffic, utilities, right of way, built constraints, staff shortages, etc.

**Upcoming Meetings and Action Items –**

- a. Upcoming Scheduled ELC Meetings Options:
- b. Hybrid or virtual?

Jan. 24 <sup>th</sup>	Jan. 30 <sup>th</sup>	March 22 <sup>nd</sup>	March 26 <sup>th</sup>
10-12 pm	8-10 am	8-10 am	8-10 am

2-4 pm		9-11 am	
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**Action Items:**

- 1) Mark Gaines will reach out to the universities in Washington State that have civil engineering programs. He will work to determine if they have extra capacity for new students and if there is interest in sponsorship or in assisting WSDOT with the AASHTO STEM Outreach Program.
- 2) Evan will look into stipends and what opportunities may be available for underserved communities, and teachers involved in the AASHTO STEM Outreach Program.
- 3) Mark Gaines follow up with the group with a date that the disparity study will be available and provide any outcomes. Once the study comes out, we will discuss the need for an ACEC-driven small business survey.
- 4) Kim Rydholm will share the Fish Passage presentation with everyone.

**Adjourn**

The meeting adjourned at 11:50 am.