

## **WSDOT/ACEC-WA Executive Liaison Committee**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** Wednesday, May 14, 2025

**Time:** 2:00 PM – 4:00 PM

#### **Present Attendees**

Mark Gaines  
Kerri Woehler  
Robin Mayhew  
Evan Grimm  
Jay Drye  
Erik Jonson  
Rafael Reyes  
Kim Rydholm

Steve Roark  
Art McCluskey  
Leann George  
Lisbeth Panush  
Jeff Carpenter  
Van Collins  
Richard Patterson

#### **Welcome and Agenda Review – Leann George**

Leann opened the meeting by reviewing the agenda and confirming that subcommittee report outs should include attendance, key issues, and other relevant updates. The agenda was approved with no additions.

#### **Fish Passage Update –Kim Rydholm**

Kim Rydholm presented a focused update on a proposed Fish Passage Symposium, an idea that emerged from the Fish Passage Industry Task Force. Rather than providing a general program update, Kim introduced this event concept as a strategic opportunity to improve delivery across WSDOT's Fish Passage Program.

The symposium would be a one-day, in-person event targeted for fall 2025 (October or November), likely held in the Tacoma area for accessibility. The purpose of the event is to bring together WSDOT, ACEC, and AGC partners to share lessons learned, explore continuous improvement opportunities, and identify strategies to reduce program costs and improve efficiency. The event would cover all delivery models (Design-Build, Progressive Design-Build, and Design-Bid-Build), and would foster collaboration across disciplines involved in the program.

The concept has received internal support through WSDOT's executive levels. Before moving forward, Kim asked for ACEC and AGC support. Don Oates (KPFF) has been a strong advocate for the idea, drawing from experience with similar events in other states.

Participation would be capped at approximately 100 attendees to ensure a meaningful and productive exchange. While the group size would be limited, all materials would be shared

afterward for broader benefit. Attendees would be expected to actively participate and share insights—this is not intended as a passive learning event or an opportunity for firm promotion.

Planning would be guided by a Steering Committee composed of five WSDOT representatives and 3 each from ACEC and AGC. An internal WSDOT Executive Committee would provide final oversight and decision-making. The goal is to identify committee members by June, begin outreach in July, and have draft presentations submitted in August.

Kim emphasized that presentations would be vetted in advance, with a strong focus on practical outcomes. A tentative planning schedule includes a June Steering Committee launch, July industry outreach, and a fall event. She also shared that this may become an annual event if successful.

Van Collins and Richard Patterson expressed support for the concept. Van offered AGC's event planning support and stressed that participation should be based on experience with Fish Passage projects. Richard raised questions about participant qualifications and suggested considering perspectives beyond WSDOT, including local agencies and out-of-state contributors. Mark Gaines recommended allocating slots between ACEC, AGC, and WSDOT to ensure balanced representation.

The group discussed whether a one-day event would be sufficient, noting the potential richness of the content. Kim acknowledged that this would be reviewed during planning. There was agreement that the event could be recorded to expand access.

Kim concluded by thanking the group and confirming she would follow up with the concept summary and coordination on Steering Committee appointments.

## **Subcommittee Report Out**

### **Business Administration Subcommittee – Erik Jonson**

Erik Jonson reported on behalf of the Business Administration Subcommittee, which he co-chairs with Ron Paananen. Erik shared that the subcommittee has held five meetings to date, all of which had full attendance, an improvement over past cycles and a sign of strong engagement from members.

The subcommittee includes two rotating seats representing regions and programs, which will be refreshed prior to the September meeting later this summer.

Two standing topics are discussed at every meeting:

- Consultant rates and the Safe Harbor process
- Consultant prequalification and contracting with the department

In addition to this, the subcommittee has focused its recent efforts on the following key topics:

- On-site reviews conducted by WSDOT's OECR Office, particularly related to minority business participation goals

- Updates to the Consultant Manual and LAG Manual, Chapter 31, incorporating feedback from FHWA
- Revisions to the Consultant Agreement Boilerplate, Exhibit C, to accommodate the transition from InRoads to OpenRoads Bentley products and related data exchange needs

Erik concluded by inviting questions and noted the group will reconvene at the upcoming meeting in a few weeks.

### **Project Delivery Subcommittee – Rafael Reyes**

Rafael Reyes provided the report on behalf of the Project Delivery Subcommittee, noting that co-chair Jen Sagan was unable to attend this meeting. He acknowledged that attendance at subcommittee meetings has been inconsistent but emphasized that a new engagement strategy is underway. The plan includes assigning members to participate actively in each meeting, with a mix of volunteers and appointed roles. The goal is to increase involvement and potentially reevaluate committee membership where needed.

A key focus of the subcommittee has been the effort to standardize the Plan for Approval process across all regions. The team has nearly completed identifying regional differences and is finalizing a uniform checklist that defines consistent requirements statewide. A draft will be sent out shortly to WSDOT regions and the ACEC project delivery team for feedback, with the goal of distributing the finalized checklist by the end of the month. The guidance will be shared via email and is intended to clarify, not change, existing policy. Full integration into the 2026 Design Manual is also planned.

Rafael confirmed that although the 2026 Design Manual won't be published until mid-2026, interim guidance will be issued to allow immediate use. Mark Gaines suggested considering a Project Delivery Memo to formalize the guidance, especially to ensure inclusion in Design-Build contracts. Richard Patterson supported this idea, noting the benefit of having consistent documentation across contract types. Rafael agreed to follow up with internal contacts to explore this option.

The subcommittee is also tracking the migration from InRoads to OpenRoads and has invited the CDA/CAE group to an upcoming meeting to discuss implications for project delivery. While the topic was introduced in a previous meeting, full participation is anticipated at the next one.

In closing, Rafael expressed optimism that the new engagement strategy will generate more ideas and greater participation, helping the subcommittee advance additional priorities soon.

### **Design-Build Subcommittee – Art McCluskey and Richard Patterson**

Art McCluskey provided the report for the Design-Build Subcommittee, noting that attendance remained strong. The subcommittee charter requires members to attend at least 75% of meetings annually, and all current members have met or exceeded that threshold. While some absences have occurred, members have been diligent in notifying the co-chairs in advance, ensuring those absences are excused. Additionally, the subcommittee regularly welcomes guest participants, which has increased overall participation.

Since January's meeting was canceled, the subcommittee has held two meetings so far this year, in February and March. In February, discussions focused on exploring more collaborative approaches to assessing geotechnical risk and preparing geotechnical baseline reports. They also reviewed the results of a survey on the costs associated with fish barrier warranties.

In March, the subcommittee reviewed agency policy on tariffs and dedicated significant time to defining its agenda and topic priorities for the rest of the year. Art shared the planning document outlining upcoming meeting topics, which include:

- Collaborative sessions on partnering, with input from the Partnering Committee
- Discussions on bill signing and sealing policy, lane restrictions, and fuel cost adjustments, the latter being a revived topic due to ongoing uncertainty in project pricing
- A review of project method selection guidance in October, anticipated to be well-developed by that time
- Renewed attention on basic configuration guidance, which has resurfaced due to staff turnover on both agency and consultant sides

Additionally, the subcommittee is following the process to amend rulemaking that would officially enable use of the Design-Builder Performance Report. A check-in with the OCI Manual industry work group is planned before the subcommittee revisits that topic later in the year.

Every meeting also reserves time to address feedback or concerns related to template documents, including recent changes or potential improvements. Art concluded by confirming the subcommittee's focus for the year is well defined, with structured topics at each meeting and flexibility to address emerging issues.

### **Structures and Geotechnical Subcommittee – Evan Grimm**

Evan Grimm reported that three new ACEC members have joined the subcommittee, with two already participating ahead of their official September start. Their early involvement has been positive, and the group is optimistic about the energy they'll bring. Evan also recognized longtime ACEC co-chair Joan, who will step down after the next meeting. He expressed appreciation for her steady leadership through years of transitions, including the pandemic.

Attendance has generally been strong, though the March meeting revealed challenges with the current three-hour format. After a mid-meeting break, most participants did not return, prompting discussion about shortening future meetings to two hours. WSDOT membership is also under review to support leadership rotation.

A key focus for this year has been a two-part discussion on lessons learned from design-build and progressive design-build projects, particularly from subject matter experts in structures and geotechnical disciplines. Led by Bryce Exley and joined by contributors like Julie Heilman (Hydraulics), the sessions addressed challenges such as alternative technical concepts and communication barriers. While not policy-driven, the insights were valuable and may be worth sharing more broadly. Evan was encouraged by Mark Gaines and Richard Patterson to present a summary to the Design-Build Subcommittee and committed to doing so.

The subcommittee's final meeting before the summer break is scheduled for Friday and will include a brainstorming session to shape next year's priorities. These will be discussed further at the June meeting in Tacoma.

Evan also provided an update on the upcoming Western Bridge Engineers' Seminar (WBES), which returns to Washington this year. While not formally coordinating with the event, the subcommittee offered input and is organizing two pre-conference tours—to the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and Concrete Tech. The seminar has surpassed sponsor goals, filled the exhibitor space, and will feature 75 presentations selected from 260 submissions.

Mark Gaines added that WBES, held every two years, rotates among western states and returns to Washington only about once every 12 years. Both he and Richard Patterson praised the seminar as a high-value event for bridge and structural engineers. Evan closed by thanking ACEC, WSDOT, and partners for their ongoing support.

### **Local Programs Update – Jay Drye**

Jay Drye provided an update from Local Programs, noting that the team is navigating ongoing challenges related to recent federal changes. He described the current environment as “stormy waters,” requiring continuous adjustment and coordination.

Reflecting on the broader legislative context, Jay emphasized the increasing difficulty faced by Local Programs due to a mismatch between funding and capacity. While the operating budget was only modestly adjusted for inflation and cost-of-living factors, the capital program has grown substantially—by as much as 50%, depending on how it's viewed. The local program budget now ranges between \$1.8 to \$2 billion, representing a massive workload that far exceeds current staffing and resources. He likened the situation to a Mount Rainier-like peak, referencing a familiar WSDOT chart. He noted that Local Programs are currently at or near the summit in terms of program size, and while the trajectory still appears to be rising, the long-term sustainability of that level remains uncertain.

Jay also reiterated a recurring issue with consultant agreement end dates, stressing the importance of closely monitoring those timelines. Reimbursement requests submitted after funding or consultant agreement expirations continue to be a common—and costly—error. While there may be some flexibility on the state side, such oversights are largely unforgivable on the federal side, resulting in significant financial consequences.

Jay closed by noting that while the update may not be especially uplifting, it reflects the ongoing realities and pressures his team continues to manage.

### **Legislative Updates – Van Collins and Kerri Woehler**

Van Collins opened the legislative update by noting the conclusion of the session and highlighting that a transportation budget was passed. While the funding levels remain modest, there is new money available to sustain ongoing efforts. He expressed optimism about the bipartisan collaboration observed, particularly among leadership in both chambers—citing strong cooperation between Senators King and Liias, as well as Representatives Barkis and Fey.

Van also mentioned that although the Fish Passage bill did not pass, it remains active for potential consideration in the next session. Its continued relevance, with Senator Saldana as a co-sponsor, should not be underestimated.

Kerri Woehler added that, from the agency's perspective, the session was expected to be extremely difficult. However, there is a sense of relief: anticipated furloughs and severe budget shortfalls did not materialize. While the budget maintains the status quo, it also preserves funding for core agency functions.

The agency will continue to face ongoing challenges related to increasing operational costs, especially in preservation and maintenance. Woehler emphasized that while there is some financial relief, the overall picture is a continuation of prior trends, and further clarity is expected as budget details are finalized.

Both Van and Kerri noted the constructive tone of this year's session, with relatively little grandstanding or political friction, and described the overall process as encouragingly bipartisan.

### **Annual Meeting Agenda Topics – Mark Gaines and Van Collins**

Mark Gaines opened the discussion by reviewing the draft agenda and identifying areas needing updates. Van Collins reported on speaker outreach for the legislative segment. As a backup, Representative Janice Zahn was suggested due to her engineering background and legislative alignment with ACEC-WSDOT priorities.

For the technical presentation, Van shared that a panel titled "*A Consultant's Perspective on Technology: The Good, the Bad, and the Future*" is being assembled. It will cover topics such as AI and the OpenRoads-to-InRoads transition, featuring nationally experienced consultants.

Leann George confirmed additional speakers:

- Julie Meredith will present under her new title, *Delivery for Washington*.
- Todd Trepanier is confirmed; title pending.
- Bart Treece will present *Challenge 2050: The Future in Motion*.

Mark reminded presenters to focus more on future goals than past accomplishments, based on last year's attendee feedback. The group agreed the agenda is coming together well, with a balanced mix of updates and forward-looking content.

### **FHWA Update – Mark Gaines**

Mark Gaines reported a significant reduction in FHWA staffing, noting that Washington is currently down from six to a single area engineer, due to federal buyouts and workforce cuts. This abrupt change has left WSDOT without clear guidance for managing federally required processes like permitting and NEPA reviews.

While negative impacts on project delivery haven't been fully realized yet, Mark cautioned they are likely. Many responsibilities still require direct FHWA involvement and cannot be delegated to WSDOT.

Jeff Carpenter asked if FHWA authority has been scaled back, referencing other states where approvals are increasingly routed through Washington, D.C. Jay Drye confirmed this trend is occurring in Washington as well, more so than in past transitions.

Jeff suggested ensuring ACEC members have access to the FHWA Stewardship Agreement, which outlines approval timelines.

Mark noted FHWA has offered WSDOT additional delegated authority, with growing uncertainty and the risk of future delays this will be considered.

Kerri also flagged new complexities in the federal funding process, including executive orders introducing unclear language, pending lawsuits, and broader uncertainty, all of which continue to complicate how federal funds are managed.

### **Upcoming Meetings – Jeff Carpenter and Mark Gaines**

Jeff Carpenter suggested scheduling meetings well in advance to improve calendar availability. Mark Gaines supported continuing the current cadence and asked Leann George to use the previous year's schedule as a guide and send out polls to finalize dates for the full year.

Leann confirmed she would proceed and asked about continuing the in-person kickoff meeting format. The group supported this approach, with Tacoma suggested as the preferred location.

Van Collins offered the Tacoma Country Club as a potential no-cost venue. The group agreed to explore that option further as part of the in-person meeting planning.

### **Action Items**

Leann George summarized the following action items from the meeting:

- Van Collins will coordinate with Kim Rydholm regarding the Fish Passage Symposium (meeting already scheduled).
- Evan Grimm will reach out to Art McCluskey to share insights from the Structures and Geotechnical Subcommittee's design-build lessons learned.
- Van Collins will continue efforts to confirm a legislative speaker for the upcoming annual meeting.
- Leann George will send out Doodle polls to schedule meetings for the remainder of the year.

**Meeting adjourned.**