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WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
**Special Committee Of The Whole**

March 18, 2008

Council Vice-Chair Seth Fleetwood called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. in the Council Conference Room, 311 Grand Avenue, Bellingham, Washington.

Present:

Barbara Brenner  
Sam Crawford  
Carl Weimer  
Laurie Caskey-Schreiber  
L. Ward Nelson

Absent:

Bob Kelly

**1. PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS OF AN IN-DEPTH MOBILITY SURVEY (AB2008-017)**

Susan Horst, Whatcom Council of Governments Community Transportation Program Manager, stated she runs the Smart Trips and Commute Trip Reduction programs for the Council of Governments. The Council of Governments contracted with Socialdata America last year to do an in-depth mobility survey that looks into how people travel around in the region, which includes Bellingham and its surrounding area.

Socialdata America has done transportation research in cities around the world. The Council of Governments worked with Socialdata America in 2004 on an individualized marketing pilot project, which included a before-and-after survey of travel behaviors. That's how the Council of Governments learned about the Socialdata America in-depth mobility survey. She introduced Socialdata America's Managing Director, Werner Brög, who will present a small subset of the data. They are very fortunate to have this comprehensive data, which is unusual for any city in the United States to have.

They are learning how to use the data properly this week and during a future visit. Transportation engineers, planners, and educators from the County and City of Bellingham are invited to attend events regarding this information.

Werner Brög, Socialdata America, submitted a handout (on file). He will present information on project design, mobility in this area, how people locally use their cars, personal attitudes about car use, and the possibilities for reducing car travel and changing individual behaviors.

He read from the handout on the Bellingham Showcase and explained the project design. The project design included three parts: mobility behavior, attitudes and perceptions, and potentials to reduce car driver trips. He described the techniques used to gather information, including a survey, telephone interviews, and face-to-face household interviews.

1 He read the handout. He surveyed people across all social and economic  
2 demographics about their travel seven days per week. Car use is extremely high. A trip is  
3 defined as going from one point to another point. For instance, going to work and then  
4 home is considered two trips. Stopping at the grocery on the way home would be three  
5 trips. The results were drawn from a random survey of 7,500 people throughout the region  
6 of Bellingham and Bellingham's surrounding area. On short trips, very little time is gained  
7 by using a car instead of other modes of transportation, including walking, bicycling, and  
8 public transportation. In terms of policies and planning, a clear majority of people want to  
9 give preferential treatment to developing environmentally-friendly modes of transportation.  
10 There are six categories that include 40 variables on the reasons people choose to make car  
11 trips. The categories are: constraints; objective choice of alternative modes; information  
12 about alternative modes; evaluation and perception of time, costs, and comfort; subjective  
13 disposition of individuals, and; the use of alternative modes objectively and subjectively.  
14 Subjective perceptions are never correct. For instance, people overestimate the public  
15 transport travel time by about 60 percent. Travel time by car is underestimated by 25  
16 percent.

17  
18 *(Clerk's Note: End of tape one, side A.)*  
19

20 Brög continued to read from the handout on mode choice, consistencies on three  
21 continents, car trips per year, and potentials for change. Changes in mode choice from  
22 2004 to 2007 are clearly sustained. People in cities round the world have made mode  
23 changes to reduce car mileage, up to 16 percent fewer trips. To reduce Bellingham car trips  
24 per year by 16 percent, residents would have to make only two fewer trips per week. That  
25 is one roundtrip per week using an alternate mode of transportation. The first priority is to  
26 not lose any more alternative modes and uses than they have now. There is potential for  
27 change. It's a question of finding the right measures.  
28

29 Fleetwood asked how they use this information in policy-making and land use  
30 decisions. They are beginning to have traffic jams in certain parts of Bellingham that have  
31 never experienced that before. He asked how a 16 percent reduction would affect traffic  
32 jams. Brög stated that 15 percent is a reduction big enough that people will see it and feel  
33 it. Even eight or 11 percent reduction is a lot. Transportation planners often aim for a two  
34 or three percent reduction. A modest beginning will develop momentum. People will realize  
35 they can do other things.  
36

37 Fleetwood asked the best way to begin. Brög stated start with soft policies to  
38 change peoples' minds about transportation. Improving infrastructure would be a hard  
39 policy. Begin with a combination of the two. Help people to change their choices, and also  
40 improve the system where needed.  
41

42 Caskey-Schreiber stated she recently visited Paris, France, which allows motorcycles  
43 to travel between car lanes, which seems crazy, but works fine. It would motivate people to  
44 use that mode of transportation.  
45

46 Crawford stated he agrees that getting people to make changes is mostly a mental  
47 thing. Given education and more options, it would be great. He would have to have his  
48 mind changed about the inconvenience of riding the bus. He would like to hear how riding  
49 the bus would make sense for him based on where he lives and where he goes. There is  
50 not a bus stop within a mile or two of where he lives. Of all the local problems, traffic is low  
51 on his priority list. Other things are more important. However, the Smart Trips program  
52 has been a success by raising user awareness. Brög stated people living outside the city

1 could drive a car to the city, and then use public transportation to get around once inside  
2 the city. Another option is to bicycle or walk to the bus stop to get exercise.  
3

4 Weimer stated it seems that face-to-face education produces a big return. He asked  
5 if data on the cost of face-to-face education and whether it offsets the cost of infrastructure.  
6 Brög stated there was a project in Portland, which introduced a new light rail line that  
7 included an individualized marketing project. They generated 20 public transportation trips  
8 per person, per year. Within one year, the revenue from public ridership paid for the public  
9 outreach. They can also take into account cost benefits to the environment and other  
10 factors. The standard cost-benefit ratio of public outreach is from 1-30 and 1-60 or more.  
11 That is enormous. Locally, the benefits of a big project would pay for the public outreach  
12 costs in three or four years. The public outreach project doubled the demand for the  
13 Portland light rail project.  
14

15 Caskey-Schreiber stated there may be an alternative to buying a new ferry for  
16 Lummi Island. They may be able to do education and change behaviors, and save a lot of  
17 money. She appreciates the presentation. Brög stated that if the County develops  
18 infrastructure, it should also do public outreach to change behaviors.  
19

20 Weimer asked if rising fuel prices changes the types of trips or just the type of cars  
21 people drive. Brög stated the changes are the same. Many people say that they hope  
22 higher gas prices will significantly reduce car traffic, but that's not his experience in the  
23 United States.  
24

25 Fleetwood asked what the Council of Governments plans to do with this information.  
26 Horst stated that as an educator, she will find people who are uninformed and not  
27 motivated, and will focus her energy on those people. The Whatcom Transportation  
28 Authority wants to know about those areas of the city with excellent service and people who  
29 aren't aware of that service or aren't motivated to use it. That is something they can work  
30 on right away with the Smart Trips program. There are also areas in the city that aren't  
31 served well, and the Whatcom Transportation Authority should prioritize their investments  
32 based on those areas. That is data they are eager to get.  
33

34 The Council of Governments' Smart Trips program is an ongoing program to provide  
35 education, assistance, and motivation to people. However, she has to wait until people find  
36 out about the Smart Trips program. The program is less than two years old, and more than  
37 6,000 people are members. A large, individualized marketing project will go directly to the  
38 people, find out who is interested, and provide assistance to those people who are  
39 interested but not yet using the system. Using this technique, she can find those people  
40 and go to them, rather than wait for them to find her. This individualized marketing survey  
41 is a permanent, durable technique. The Smart Trips program and this technique are an  
42 excellent combination. This program is a one-time investment for a large area. They don't  
43 have that funding yet, but are looking for it from wherever they can find it. The cost is \$20  
44 per survey person. She would like to survey all of Bellingham, but they can target areas of  
45 the city where it would be most effective. Her original request was \$1.5 million. She scaled  
46 that back so as not to frighten people off. The request now is \$750,000.  
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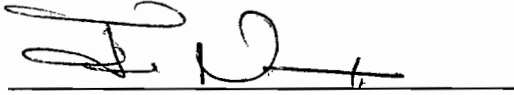
#### 48 **OTHER BUSINESS**

49 There was no other business.  
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**ADJOURN**

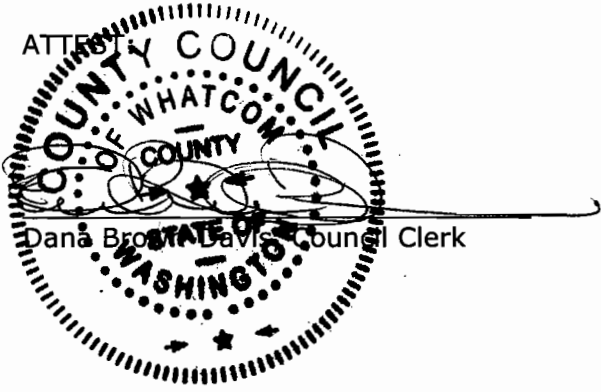
The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:55 p.m.



Jill Nixon, Minutes Transcription

The Council approved these minutes on June 17, 2008.

ATTEST



Dana Brown Davis, Council Clerk

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON



Carl Weimer, Council Chair