

## 2008 Transportation Summit – Executive Summary

On September 17, 2008 the Transportation Summit, held at the San Juan County Fairgrounds, marked the first time citizens, policy makers and transportation providers have gathered to explore economically and environmentally sustainable multimodal transportation solutions for San Juan County. The recent designation of the San Juan Islands as a Washington State Scenic Byway spurred the need to assess regional opportunities and accelerated local interest in furthering transportation options for residents and visitors. Thus two principles guided the creation of the conference:

1. Transportation is the number one issue impacting the economic sustainability of San Juan County's communities and business as well as the everyday quality of life for San Juan County citizens.
2. The role of intermodal transportation in reducing pollution and congestion will be largely determined by public policy at several levels of government and by partnerships among various public agencies, private providers, and citizens.

Participants included interested citizens from ferry-served islands and neighboring Counties, local transportation providers, the San Juan County Ferry Advisory Committee, the Governor's aide for transportation, Washington State Ferries staff, the San Juan County Council, various San Juan County port commissioners, members of the Friday Harbor Town Council, and members of the Washington State Transportation Commission. Organizations that advocate for some aspect of transportation services and businesses that demonstrate unique transportation solutions and/or technologies were also in attendance.

Led by the San Juan County Economic Development Council, financial sponsors included the Port of Friday Harbor, the San Juan Islands Scenic Byways Partnership and the Seattle-based Cascadia Center for Regional Development. Over 50 volunteers acted as hosts, facilitated sessions, wrote session summaries, videotaped, and performed set-up and clean-up. Twenty-two speakers provided overview information that fed small group discussions. The topics they addressed included transit, car-free travel, bicycling and hiking, passenger ferries, freight mobility and tourist-related transportation planning.

The Transportation Summit was convened with the expectation that attendees would leave the event better equipped to make the personal decisions that could ultimately contribute to improving the quality of life and the economic vitality of the San Juan Islands. To this end, the day was designed around a "World Café" model, a meeting approach in which conversations among participants is the primary vehicle to accomplishing the goals. Two local artists produced a graphic Wall of Action conveying the group's perceived challenges and possible solutions.

Five themes emerged from these conversations:

- **To gain a better understanding of the transportation needs of San Juan County.**  
Understanding the needs of the served community will lead to plans for logistics that

are based on reality. There was interest in implementing several small pilot projects at once so the interlocking parts of the transportation system could be stimulated concurrently. This might include passenger-only ferries, walking school buses, or coordinating car-free travel on and off island. There was concern for the accommodation of special needs and the identification of accessibility issues for families, children, pets and the baggage that car-free travel entails.

- **To create a new vision of island travel.** In keeping with the principles of the Summit participants seemed committed to personally continue the conversation by promoting a new vision of island travel, norms and expectations. They spoke to the need to create a new mindset: that car-free travel is not inconvenient and indeed, can be designed to address issues of “stress, schedule, safety, and stuff.”
- **To raise public awareness of the transportation issue.** Participants sought ways to communicate, promote and market an increasing awareness of existing options and connections. They recommended various strategies to get the word out: for example, developing electronic bulletin board information hubs for both local and regional travel. The need to consolidate freight, and business and personal travel needs was a reoccurring idea. Maximizing the use of existing resources such as shuttles and school buses was affirmed, as well as exploring multi-modal alternatives and reducing the use of standard automobiles.
- **To explore private and public funding for new solutions** Funding was raised as an important goal and participants were willing to talk about how to charge or tax ourselves for either infrastructure improvements or alternative services. Pursuing public funding for car-free travel options might also lead to the need to implement financial incentives for desired transportation improvements.
- **To further local and regional long-range planning.** Creating a local planning organization that interfaces regionally would improve government agency coordination. Summit attendees welcomed efforts both formally and informally to join regional planning groups to ensure connectivity. Action steps called for both inclusion in a larger regional transportation organization, and the inception of a local “Farmhouse Gang” to create a county transportation collaboration forum. Specific tactics for such a group included:
  - a) The design, implementation and maintenance of a local transportation connectivity map
  - b) Coordinating and connecting individual groups, agencies, and businesses to use, improve and develop systems and resources
  - c) Reviewing successful models in other small or island communities

- d) Supporting low impact infrastructure development
- e) Identifying which local transportation issues have solutions that are not merely local

As a means of follow-up after the Summit several efforts are in place.

- San Juan County will soon announce the appointment of the first designated Transportation Planner for the county. One of their immediate responsibilities will be to complete the application to form a local Transportation Planning Organization which would then petition to become part of a larger Regional Transportation Planning Organization. Notes from the Summit regarding challenges and solutions will be presented to this person for future use.
- Another pending development is anticipated funding to create a Corridor Management Plan for the new San Juan Islands Scenic Byway, a document which could guide transportation-related improvement along the ferry route and on the two islands which have chosen to participate in the Scenic Byway.
- This summary and the content of each session will be posted to the SJC-EDC website at [islandway.org/transummit](http://islandway.org/transummit) and in hard copy at each of the public libraries in the County, along with a DVD recording of each session by the end of October.
- The San Juan Islands Transportation Forum is dedicated to continuing the transportation related conversations begun at the September 17, 2008, Transportation Summit, among citizens, elected officials, and transportation providers. Interested persons should email: [SJITransportation-subscribe@yahogroups.com](mailto:SJITransportation-subscribe@yahogroups.com) to request to become a member.

The Planning Committee dissolved with the confidence the objectives for the Summit were met. Attendees were exposed to present and future transportation needs and challenges. The generated actionable ideas for improved transportation in the islands are available via the internet and local libraries for further research. The collaboration that will be required to implement transportation solutions was indeed begun.

### **The Transportation Summit Planning Committee**

Liz Illg, Bill Watson, Jim Hooper, Laura Tretter, Deborah Hopkins, Anne Sheridan, Curt VanHying, Shannon Wilbur, Anji Ringzin, Scott Webster