

MINUTES
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, January 28, 2020

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Brackett, Vice Chairman Crabtree, Senators Winder, Den Hartog, Lodge, Rice, Burtenshaw, and Nelson

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Buckner-Webb

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: With a quorum present, **Chairman Brackett** convened the meeting of the Senate Transportation Committee (Committee) at 1:31 p.m. He welcomed Brian Ness of the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and the representatives from the Pacific NorthWest Economic Region (PNWER) to the Committee.

PRESENTATION: **Brian Ness**, Director of ITD, shared that this marked the eleventh year he had presented the department's annual report before the Committee, and that there were four focuses to his remarks: 1.) an overview of the Governor's 2021 budget recommendation; 2.) efficiency and innovation within ITD; 3.) transportation needs throughout the state; and 4.) employee hiring and retention.

Director Ness said the base amount in the Governor's budget was \$775 million, with 1,651 full-time positions statewide. Including adjustments and 13 line items, the total appropriation would be \$785.4 million, which would enable ITD to meet their mission of "Your Safety. Your Mobility. Your Economic Opportunity."

With regard to efficiency and innovation, ITD accomplishes their mission by outcome-based measuring, that includes: 1.) keeping the roads clear during storms; 2.) delivering projects on time and ahead of schedule; and 3.) saving money by using employee-driven innovation to help achieve performance goals. Over the past 5 years, ITD employees have implemented more than 1,000 innovations that have saved nearly \$11 million and over 200,000 work hours.

Director Ness described some employee driven innovations around the state.

Director Ness continued that even with the many innovations, the state's transportation needs are increasing. Those needs include: 1.) more than half of the state's 1,800 bridges have aged beyond their design life of 50 to 60 years and need to be improved or replaced; 2.) the safety and congestion-mitigation improvements identified in the Governor's Task Force; 3.) with more drivers on the roads, it's more difficult to get through an intersection in one traffic signal cycle; and 4.) growing traffic volumes, especially in Idaho's critical corridors. Idaho's rapid growth and unmet transportation needs affect safety, mobility, and the movement of goods and services for Idaho's commerce and industry sectors.

Finally, **Director Ness** addressed the internal needs of ITD with regard to employee hiring and retention given Idaho's growth and robust economy. They solved some of their pay issues by cutting 9 layers of management down to 5, which cut their workforce by more than 10 percent. It has become difficult to fill positions like mechanics, electricians, and computer experts, and they are experiencing increasing workloads in the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV). While ITD has about a 5 percent vacancy rate, it is still much lower than most state transportation departments around the country.

DISCUSSION:

Senator Nelson commented that in his transportation discussions, the one topic that continues to come up is ITD's flexibility with local jurisdictions. He listed a few examples, but wanted to focus on pedestrian safety. In Moscow, 58 percent of the bicycle and pedestrian safety crashes occur on Moscow's two state highways, and 40 percent of the pedestrian fatalities in Idaho are on state regulated highways. Given that, **Senator Nelson** asked what ITD could do to work better with local jurisdictions. For example, there were two safety projects in Moscow that were stalled. **Director Ness** said this is an ongoing discussion at ITD in deciding how to balance limited funds with so many needs. He believes ITD's districts work well with local agencies. To enhance that, when the Idaho Transportation Board (ITB) meets in each district they invite all the district's local community leaders to meet with them to discuss how they can utilize the benefits of economies of scale so that planned local projects can work in conjunction with ITD planned projects in order to save time and money. **Senator Nelson** asked if Director Ness had any specific thoughts on bike/pedestrian safety statistics. **Director Ness** said ITD knows fatalities are going up cross the board, which he attributed to growth in the volume of vehicles on the roadways. The pedestrian injury rate is also going up which is not unique to Idaho. He attributed that to distractions with cell phones and pedestrians walking in front of vehicles. Other state's attribute it to opioid use because a disproportion of pedestrian fatalities test positive for the drug. He was not as familiar with bicycle fatalities. **Senator Nelson** asked if there was hard data available supporting opioid and texting as significant impediments to pedestrian safety. **Director Ness** said that the Commonwealth of Maryland was looking at that correlation and he had asked ITD to see if that could be a contributing factor in Idaho as well.

Vice Chairman Crabtree, Senator Den Hartog, and Chairman Brackett asked Director Ness about the flexibility of ITD regarding: 1.) how needed funding for transportation will be generated as fuel enhancements are increasing efficiencies which reduces the amount of fuels tax being collected; 2.) whether the miles traveled tax is currently in place or if it's just being considered; and, 3.) how Idaho fits into the regional pilot study with Oregon and Washington on the miles traveled tax. **Director Ness** responded with his thoughts on: 1.) balancing limited fund pools so all benefit from economies of scale while becoming more efficient; 2.) looking to other states for new funding opportunities like vehicle miles traveled and fast lane taxes; and 3.) analyzing data collected from an Oregon pilot study on their miles traveled fuels tax.

Chairman Brackett thanked Director Ness and recognized Julie DeLorenzo, an Idaho Transportation Board member in the audience.

PRESENTATION:

Chairman Brackett welcomed Bruce Agnew, Director of the Cascadia Center and PNWER's transportation co-chair with Senator Winder, and Brandon Hardenbrook, PNWER's Chief Operating Officer. They were in Idaho to deliver annual PNWER updates on many issues including transportation and infrastructure.

Following opening remarks by Mr. Agnew, **Mr. Hardenbrook** went through PNWER's 2020 update PowerPoint presentation on transportation and infrastructure throughout the PNWER region. (See Attachment 1 — PNWER Transportation & Infrastructure Briefing.)

DISCUSSION:

Senator Lodge raised concerns about the cost of crossing guards at railroad crossings and expressed how important they were to rural Idaho. **Mr. Agnew** said that the federal transportation legislation of 2018, Section 130, required consolidating crossings and provided federal match funds for the program. He said this impacts many congressional districts across the country, and added that the next federal transportation funding bill will deal with the need for more funding in this area. He encouraged communicating her concerns with Idaho's Congressional Delegation, as they had with delegations across PNWER's region. He added that the rail corridor from North Dakota to Washington would be a topic of discussion at PNWER's summer conference in Big Sky, Montana. He encouraged Committee members to attend.

Chairman Brackett commented that transportation, including short line railroads, was also a priority of Idaho's Governor. Co-chairman of PNWER's Transportation Committee, **Senator Winder**, thanked PNWER for their informative presentation.

ADJOURNED:

With no further business before the Committee, **Chairman Brackett** adjourned the meeting at 2:46 p.m.

Senator Brackett
Chair

Gaye Bennett
Secretary