

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION OF WYOMING

The Transportation Commission of Wyoming met virtually via Zoom on May 27, 2020. Chairman Newton convened the special business meeting at 9:45 a.m. The following members were present constituting a quorum:

Rick Newton, Chairman, Buffalo
Phil Schmidt, Vice Chairman, Casper
Mike Larson, Commissioner, Lusk
Jim Espy, Commissioner, Savery
Jon Dolezal, Commissioner, Evanston
K. Luke Reiner, Director
Sandra J. Scott, Commission Secretary

Others present and participating in the meeting: Dennis Byrne, Chief Financial Officer; Shelby Carlson, Chief Engineer; Keith Fulton, Assistant Chief Engineer for Engineering and Planning; Mark Gillett, Assistant Chief Engineer for Operations; Taylor Rossetti, Support Services Administrator; Brian Olsen, Aeronautics Administrator; Troy Babbitt, Chief Technology Officer; Colonel Kebin Haller, Wyoming Highway Patrol (WHP) Administrator; Mike Kahler, Senior Assistant Attorney General; Ryan Thompson, Assistant Attorney General; Rodney Freier, Budget Program Manager; and Bryan Cawley, Division Administrator, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

Other meeting attendees: Senator Michael Von Flatern (S24), Co-Chairman, Joint Transportation, Highways & Military Affairs Committee; Erica Legerski, Senior Policy Advisor to Governor Gordon; Doug McGee, Public Affairs Program Manager; John Davis, Management Services Program Manager; and Katie Legerski, Executive Director, Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Wyoming.

Commissioner Lee Filer was absent.

1. Proposed WYDOT Budget Modifications: Director Reiner advised that amidst the long-time pressure of the ongoing funding shortage, WYDOT has concluded that budget cuts are necessary. For the last few years, the Department has been short approximately \$135 million annually to keep Wyoming roads in their current condition. A transportation needs study is currently underway to ensure that amount is enough to cover those costs.

A road user charge is under investigation as a potential means of raising revenue for Wyoming's surface transportation needs. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has exacerbated the funding shortage for roads because individuals are not traveling, greatly reducing WYDOT's fuel tax revenues over the last two months.

WYDOT executive staff has been combing through the budget to reduce its FY 2020 operating costs.

Director Reiner met with Governor Gordon last week to discuss the potential closure of numerous rest areas as a cost-saving measure. Governor Gordon concurred with the need to save, and he concurs with the idea.

Director Reiner presented the following list of proposed rest areas closures.

Wyoming Rest Area Closures (In Priority Order)						
Rest Area Location	Route	Nearest Town	Nearest Town	Cost Savings through 9/30/2020	Cumulative Savings through 9/30/2020	Cumulative Annual Operating Costs
Lusk	US 18	Lusk	1 mile	\$24,605.63	\$24,605.63	\$98,422.52
Guernsey	US 26	Guernsey	2 miles	\$18,945.93	\$43,551.57	\$174,206.27
Greybull	US 16	Greybull	2 miles	\$17,809.65	\$61,361.22	\$245,444.86
Moorcroft	I-90	Moorcroft	0 miles	\$17,569.77	\$78,930.99	\$315,723.93
Star Valley	US 89	Thayne	3 miles	\$4,346.43	\$83,277.42	\$333,109.62
Ft. Steele	I-80	Sinclair	7 miles	\$33,497.85	\$116,775.27	\$467,101.05
Sundance	I-25	Sundance	0 miles	\$11,772.18	\$128,547.45	\$514,189.81
Upton	US 16	Upton	0 miles	\$8,316.30	\$136,863.75	\$547,455.05
Orin Junction	I-25	Douglas	0 miles	\$30,970.62	\$167,834.37	\$671,337.51
Chugwater	I-25	Chugwater	0 miles	\$29,618.67	\$197,453.03	\$789,812.16

The Fort Steele Rest Area has a large truck parking area scheduled for expansion under the I-80 Winter Freight project. The proposed plan is to close the rest area for now, construct additional parking at that location, and reopen the rest area and its enlarged parking area when the project is complete. The project will be complete in the fall of 2021.

Janitorial services are contracted for each of these rest area facilities. Each contract contains a provision allowing WYDOT to give a 30-day notice and discontinue janitorial services. If the Commission approves the rest area closures, WYDOT will notify the janitorial contractors that their contracts will be terminated on June 30, 2020. Rest areas will close June 15, 2020, and the janitorial contractors will be asked to provide a thorough cleaning of the facilities during the remaining 15-day period. WYDOT will then winterize the facilities.

Commissioner Espy asked if WYDOT had contacted local communities that will be impacted by the closures. Director Reiner advised that he wanted to be sure the Governor and the Commission concurred with the concept before reaching out to local governments and businesses. If the Commission approves the plan, WYDOT will certainly communicate further with the communities.

Mr. Cawley asked if only the facilities at rest areas would close or if parking areas would also be closed. Director Reiner advised that there would be no access to rest area buildings or parking areas.

All of these rest areas, except Upton, Orin Junction, and Chugwater, have some form of commercial facilities less than 3 miles away. The convenience store near Upton closes at 9 p.m.

This rest area has very little use and it is 20 miles from Moorcroft, which has 24-hour service available. Newcastle is also 29 miles away where 24-hour service is also available.

The truck stop within a half mile from the Orin Junction Rest area closes at 10:00 p.m. This is a busy rest area, but Douglas is only 10 miles away where 24-hour service is available.

The Chug-Chug Gas-and-Go Convenience Store is available across the road from the Chugwater Rest Area. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic, their hours of operation are unknown. The Chugwater Rest Area is relatively busy, and it is 25 miles to Wheatland or 40 miles to Cheyenne. Service is available 24 hours a day in Wheatland and Cheyenne.

Vice Chairman Schmidt asked if the Department is considering other cost savings measures. Director Reiner advised that, because of the 30-day notice required to cancel janitorial contracts, he did not want to delay presenting the proposed rest area closure concept, as it would only delay the Department's potential savings. Additional potential budget reductions will be presented to the Commission for consideration at its June 18, 2020 regular business meeting.

Commissioner Larson asked if WYDOT has a certain level of budget reductions in mind. Director Reiner advised that WYDOT anticipates losing approximately \$10 million to \$15 million in fuel tax revenue before September 30, 2020 because of the COVID-19 emergency. Governor Gordon has also instructed all state agencies to begin looking for significant cuts within their budgets.

It was recommended by Director Reiner, moved by Commissioner Espy, seconded by Vice Chairman Schmidt, and carried to approve closing the 10 Wyoming rest areas presented by Director Reiner.

Commissioner Espy encouraged the Department to communicate with the local communities affected by these rest area closures, since they will have to manage the traffic that comes into their cities and towns.

2. It was moved by Commissioner Larson, seconded by Commissioner Espy, and carried to adjourn the meeting. Chairman Newton adjourned the special meeting at 10:13 a.m., on Wednesday, May 27, 2020.