ERODING STATE BUDGET THREATENS COUNTY FUNDING

About this time each session the cost forecasts for Medicaid, K-12, and other entitlement programs to reflect the latest information are released. This year, growing Medicaid costs for low-income elders and disabled persons have left state budget writers reeling. In addition, the growing signs of slower economic growth mean that the cycle of ever increasing state revenues may have come to an end. The final extent of the damage won’t be known until the official state revenue forecast update on March 17. In the mean time, fiscal leaders are telling WSAC and WACO that the situation may be $400 million to $1 billion worse than it was when the Governor’s budget was written. To put this in perspective, the entire State General Fund is about $22 billion. The Governor’s budget proposed a total reserve of about $650 million, most of it in the restricted 601 emergency reserve fund.

All of this means trouble for county budgets and services. Legislative leaders are sending a strong message that they expect to reduce I-695 backfill funds. Some leaders have said that they might provide funding for only the first year of the biennium. They will need to make additional cuts in state programs. Since 60% of the state budget is spent on K-12 and higher education, legislators will concentrate the cuts in the remaining 40% of the budget. This includes human services, natural resources, courts and corrections – all of them areas where state and local programs are highly interdependent.

WSAC and WACO are reminding Legislators that the backfill funding was only partial mitigation of the MVET loss. The MVET funds for criminal justice had been intended to meet the state’s legal obligation to fund the criminal justice mandates it imposed in the late eighties and early nineties. In spite of that, after the legislature reduced the car tab fees to $30 in the aftermath of the court ruling I-695 unconstitutional, they only replaced 53% of the loss. When they did that they made a promise in the form of a legislative intent section in the supplemental budget that those funds would be on-going. They are now considering breaking that promise.

No state agency had a 47% cut in funding last year nor are such cuts proposed this year. However, counties now need to struggle to keep what was promised to them. The WSAC position is that this Legislature needs to fund the on-going I-695 replacement funds plus the I-601 growth factor. This position has not changed and the members need to let their legislators that they must support continued funding. Please call your legislators today.

RETIREE OPPOSE LEOFF 1 MEDICAL REIMBURSEMENT BILL (HB 1072)

Retired law enforcement officers and firefighters showed up in large numbers to oppose the bill that would provide a small portion of the over one billion dollar surplus in the LEOFF 1 retirement system to pay city and county medical costs for the retirees. They raised many concerns, but what they didn’t say is that they want to increase their benefits if the employer groups get to use any of the surplus.

Douglas County Sheriff, Dan LaRoche, and Pend Oreille County Commissioner, Joel Jacobsen, gave excellent testimony to the Appropriations Committee by explaining how they had paid out large amounts for nursing home and extraordinary medical costs.

It is estimated that if the counties and cities were to receive an annual appropriation from the Legislature for the full liability of long-term care and other medical costs, it would not decrease the one billion dollar surplus. In other words, the growth of this surplus exceeds the amount cities and counties would need to pay all costs. There would still be a one billion dollar surplus after every LEOFF 1 retiree has died.

It is important that your legislators hear from members of WSAC and WACO. Tell them this bill will result in substantial savings to local governments in future years and will not impact the state general fund.

Next Wednesday, February 21 the companion bill in the Senate, SB 5191, will be heard in Ways & Means at 3:30 p.m. Please contact members of the committee.
TRI-ASSOCIATION LEGISLATIVE RECEPTION GOES OFF WITHOUT A HITCH

Over 400 county and city officials, legislators and state officials attended the Tri-Association Legislative Reception Wednesday night, at St. Martin’s Pavilion, in Lacey. After a long day of meetings, legislative contacts, and legislative hearings, the reception was a perfect time for relaxing and socializing prior to Valentine’s dinner appointments.

This was the first joint reception sponsored by the Washington State Association of Counties, the Washington Association of County Officials, and the Association of Washington Cities, for their members and legislators. Food and drink was plentiful and the various officials were able to meet at designated areas marked by legislative district signs.

LAW & JUSTICE

NEW WIRELESS 911 TAX BILL INTRODUCED

SB 6034, introduced this week, would establish a new statewide 45-cent per month tax on wireless phones to pay for wireless E-911 services. This would allow E-911 agencies to identify the call-back number and location of emergency calls that originate from cell phones.

The bill was drafted by wireless carriers, with input from several state and local 911 personnel. The issue likely will be on the agenda for discussion at the next Legislative Steering Committee meeting.

Of the proposed 45-cent state tax, 25 cents would be distributed back to the counties. But the bill requires that the first priority for use of the funds shall be full reimbursement to the carriers for “nonrecurring and recurring costs incurred in providing wireless enhanced 911 service.” Commissioners are encouraged to review the bill to determine if it meets county 911 needs and sufficiently preserves local flexibility for expenditures of the new revenue.

Currently enhanced 911 service for wireline phones is available throughout Washington State. But 911 calls from wireless phones are a different story. On these calls, the 911 centers currently do not get any location information, and only in some cases get a phone number. As a result, it is difficult to provide emergency assistance to these 911 callers.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has recognized the importance of this issue, and has required that wireless carriers be capable of providing E-911 service for their subscribers in two phases. Phase I will provide 911 centers with the call-back telephone number of the subscriber and the location of the cell sector which transmitted the call. The technology to deliver this service exists today. Phase II provides the actual location of the caller. The technologies to accomplish this are being developed.

UP NEXT WEEK

HB 2017, Traffic stop racial profiling, and HB 2018, Racial profiling, will be heard on Monday, February 19, at 10:00 a.m. in House Criminal Justice and Correction Committee. The companion Senate versions, SB 5852 and SB 5853, will be heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, February 20, at 8:00 a.m.

HB 2000, Warrantless Arrests, will be heard in House Judiciary on Thursday, February 22, at 6:00 p.m. At the same hearing, the committee will hear HB 1995, Civil Forfeitures, which prohibits civil forfeitures unless there is a conviction. SB 5935, the senate civil forfeiture bill, will be heard on Monday, February 19, at 10:00 a.m. in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

SB 5896, DNA testing, will be heard in Senate Judiciary Committee on Thursday, February 22, at 10:00 a.m. SB 5896 established a statutory process for convicted felons who are currently in prison to request a court order requiring DNA testing of evidence used to convict him/her. The House Bill, HB 1889 will be heard in House Criminal Justice and Corrections on Friday, February 23, at 8:00 a.m.

COURTS

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

HB 1925 and HB 1926, both bills dealing with the State Archives are being heard on Monday, February 19, in House Appropriations at 3:30 p.m. There has been much discussion about HB 1926, which doubles the local government records surcharge collected by the County Auditors. The County Clerks report that they have suggested to Secretary of State Sam Reed that compromise language be developed that will limit the uses for any increase. The County Auditors met with Secretary Reed as well and expressed their concern regarding allowing the surcharge use language to include state records. SB 5892 and SB 5893, the companion bills, have not been scheduled.

SB 6034, E-911 funding, was introduced this week and recommends adequate ongoing funding for the E-911 system.

Senate Joint Memorial 8002, sponsored by Senators McCaslin and Morton, is addressed to U. S. President George W. Bush and
Congress and requests the formation of a new state which would encompass all the Washington State from the crest of the Cascade Mountain Range to Idaho.

**HEARINGS NEXT WEEK**

**HB 1864.** Family Law Information, will be heard in House Judiciary on Thursday, February 22, at 8:00 a.m. **HB 1864** is last year’s County Clerks’ proposal to remove financial and personal information from family law files.

**SSB 5115.** Tax warrants, is another County Clerks’ priority bill and is still in Senate Rules. Please contact your senators on the Rules Committee and request a “pull.” **HB 1793,** the companion bill, is up for hearing tomorrow, Friday the 16th, in House Judiciary.

**HB 1825.** Election of Judicial Officers, is scheduled for Tuesday, February 20, in House Judiciary at 1:30 p.m. along with **HB 1591.** Service requirements in harassment orders.

**HB 2063.** funding for county law libraries other than from the filing fee, and **HB 2064,** providing on-line legal research to county law libraries, will be heard in House Judiciary on Friday, February 23, at 10:00 a.m.

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**ENVIRONMENT, LAND USE & RESOURCES**

**ADVANCE NOTICE: CONFERENCE ON INNOVATIVE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES**

Low Impact Development 2001, a conference on innovative stormwater management practices, is being hosted by the Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team on June 5-6, 2001 at the Hilton Seattle Airport & Conference Center.

Nationally recognized experts, elected officials, and members of the development and regulatory communities will explore the innovative stormwater management techniques known as “low impact development practices.” These innovative management strategies emphasize protection and use of natural features on development sites to manage stormwater and improve protection of streams, fish habitat, and the hydrologic functions of watersheds.

Reserve June 5th and 6th, 2001 on your calendar and watch for further information on the Action Team’s web site at: http://www.wa.gov/puget_sound. If you have any questions about preparations for Low Impact Development 2001, please contact Bruce Wulkan at the Action Team at (360) 407-7332 or bwulkan@psat.wa.gov. If you would like to have your name added to a mailing list for conference information, call 360-407-7300 or send e-mail to gwilliams@psat.wa.gov.

**WATER BILL HEARINGS PORTEND CONTINUED DISAGREEMENT**

A lobbyist, who has been around a long time, appeared second-to-last at a hearing this week on Governor Locke’s proposed water bill and reflected on the critical testimony he had heard for the previous two hours something like the following:

It’s as if the Governor’s staff was watching an old western in which a 15-year long bar fight was underway. Jim Waldo, the Governor’s new water advisor said, wait, I’ve got a script change here. All the pugilists agreed to take a look at the new scene, thought it over, and decided they’d prefer to keep fighting.

A few elements of the script change were generally praised:

- more money and flexibility for WRIA planning processes;
- changes in statute to promote use of trust water rights;
- tax incentives to promote water conservation;
- two lines for water rights processing.

There was substantial, but not unanimous sympathy, for changes to family farm water rights.

Vehemently strong feelings divided the hearing on whether to clarify the authority of conservancy boards to address water right transfers, to expand the boards’ membership and to allow intervenors in and appeals of conservancy board decisions. There was near universal skepticism of the proposal to authorize certification of water rights examiners.

Municipal water rights concerns are not a part of the Governor’s proposal, but will get full consideration by the House Agriculture and Ecology Committee.

**LITTLE SUPPORT FOR MIDDLE GROUND ON SHORELINES RULES**

After six hours of public hearings in the House and Senate this week on legislation to implement, reject or revise the newly adopted shorelines rules, almost all interested parties continue to stand firmly for either full implementation and funding for the rules statewide on the one hand or a repeal or moratorium with no funding on the other.
WSAC staff testified at both House and Senate hearings this week in stating our preferred position for repeal of the rules, but indicating that a middle ground helping some counties move forward while letting others continue under the old rules is also acceptable. To that end, Grays Harbor County Commissioner Dan Wood and WSAC staff both testified to the Senate Natural Resources, Parks and Shorelines Committee in support of **SB 5458**, which exempts counties and the cities within them from the new shorelines rules if 75 percent or more of the county land base is in resource production, preservation, or open space and if there is an adopted comprehensive plan and shoreline master program in place. Tim Ceis, Chief of Staff to King County Executive Ron Sims, expressed his county’s disagreement with that approach, indicating that shorelines improvements are needed across the state and that inaction by some counties will weaken the environmental gains achieved by others.

Similar testimony in the House in support of Governor Locke’s proposal that all counties and cities with shorelines move forward with updates over a stretched-out five-year period was offered by Dave Somers, Chair of the Snohomish County Council. Joining with WSAC staff in seeking a full or partial rollback of the update requirement was Pacific County Commissioner Pat Hamilton. Island County Commissioner Bill Thorn indicated that his county’s estimated cost of update was potentially as high as $1 million.

The Association of Washington Cities also supported Governor Locke’s proposal and indicated it did not – at this time – support **SB 5458** reflecting the WSAC alternative to repeal of the rules.

**HEALTH, PUBLIC HEALTH & SOLID WASTE**

**Elimination of SWAC Removed from Senate Bill.**

**SB 5401**, which deals with the elimination of Boards and Commissions, has been amended. Included in the amendment is the deletion of the Solid Waste Advisory Committee from consideration for elimination. The amended bill has passed out of Committee and is now in Senate Ways and Means. The Companion House Bill (**HB 1355**) is still in House State Government. It is scheduled for executive session next week. We have asked Co-Chair McMorris to request an amendment to the house bill to also remove the SWAC from the bill.

**Other Bills of Interest to Public Health and Solid Waste:**

**HB 1876** – Regarding Public Water Systems

Provides that each year, the department of health shall determine the volume of water annually withdrawn by each public water system with one thousand or more service connections and shall determine the annual average amount of water withdrawn per service connection in the system. Directs the department to group the systems by geographic areas with similar climatological characteristics and, using these averages and adjusted averages as appropriate, shall determine the annual average amount of water withdrawn per service connection in each such group. This average for the public water systems in each geographic group constitutes the water withdrawal target rate for the group. Requires the department to publish these target rates annually.

**HB 1999** – Investigating the placement of automated external defibrillators in state and local government buildings. Provides that in order to assist in improving the survival rate of individuals who experience sudden cardiac arrest in buildings operated by state and local governments, the department of health shall consult with the American Heart Association, the Washington State Association of Counties, the Association of Washington Cities, and other interested parties, in order to gather analyze, and present findings on the best means to place automated external defibrillators in state and local government buildings. This bill will likely not pass this session, but the House Health Committee may call for an interim study.

**SB 5981** – Authorizing Local Governments to Restrict or Prohibit Smoking in Public Places – (Companion HB 1448). This bill would remove preemption. Realistically, it is not likely to pass this Session.

**SB 5993** – Revising Limitations on Smoking in Public Places.

Removes the discretion of owners or managers of restaurants, card rooms, and bowling alleys to choose to allow smoking areas other than in a lounge, bar or other area where persons under eighteen years of age are not permitted to enter or remain. This bill is the result of compromise work between the restaurant association and anti-smoking advocates. It does not remove preemption, but it would designate that public places where children are allowed would be smoke-free statewide. If agreement can be reached in committee on language around barriers, this bill has the possibility of being supported by both the restaurant association and the anti-smoking advocates.

**Hearings Scheduled for the Week of February 19, 2001**

**House Agriculture & Ecology**

2/23/01 3:30 pm  HHR A (Also on TVW)

**HB 1907** - Encouraging Recycling and Waste Reduction

**House Appropriations**

2/21/01 3:30 pm HHR A

**HB 1180** - Obtaining and Expending Funds for the Public Health System. Allows DOH to solicit funds from private foundations and non-profit organizations.
House Health Care
2/20/01  1:30 pm  HHR C
2/22/01  6:00 pm  HHR C
HCR 4406 - Establishing a blue ribbon commission on medical care costs and access. Hearing 2/20/01 and possible Executive Session 2/22/01.

2/22/01  8:00 am  HHR C
HB 1759  - Allowing for the sale of hypodermic syringes and needles to reduce the transmission of bloodborne diseases.

Local Government & Housing
2/19/01  1:30 pm  HHR B
HB 1710 - Regulating Franchise Fees Imposed Upon Solid Waste Business and Services.

2/22/01  1:30 pm  HHR B
HB 1794 - Requiring local governments to ratify rules and regulations enacted by local boards of health.

House State Government
2/19/01  10:00 am  HHR C (Also on TVW)
2/19/01  8:00 pm  HHR C (Also on TVW)

Possible Executive Session: HB 1355 - Elimination of Boards and Commissions

Senate Agriculture & International Trade
2/23/01  1:30 pm  SHR 3 (Also on TVW)
SB 5851 - Authorizing the director of agriculture to consult with public entities on human health risks associated with any proposed pesticide use by the department.

Senate Health & Long Term Care
2/21/01  1:30 pm  SHR 4
SB 5679  - Creating the HIV/AIDS prevention study committee.

2/22/01  3:30 pm  SHR 4
SB 5939 - Revising limitations on smoking in public places
SB 5981 - Authorizing local governments to restrict or prohibit smoking in public places.
SB 5820 - Providing Assistance to Treat breast and cervical cancer.

HUMAN SERVICES, JUVENILE JUSTICE & HOUSING

Hearings Scheduled for the Week of February 19, 2001

Monday, February 19, 10:00 AM
Senate Judiciary
SB 5419, providing chemical dependency treatment for certain offenders (striker is “Maleng” bill)

House Criminal Justice & Corrections
HB 2003, providing additional treatment for drug offenders (“Maleng” bill)
HB 1863, revising penalties for drug offenses

Monday, February 19, 1:30 PM
House Capital Budget
Housing Trust Fund programs for the homeless

Senate Health & Long-Term Care
SB 5796, revising prescriptive authority for ARNPs

Monday, February 19, 3:30 PM
House Appropriations
Low-Income Energy Assistance Program

Tuesday, February 20, 8:00 AM
House Juvenile Justice
HB 1939, mental health evaluations of minors committing specified crimes on school grounds

Senate Labor, Commerce, and Financial Insitutions
SB 5848, tax incentives for low-income housing

Tuesday, February 20, 1:30 PM
House Health Care
HB 2011, licensing of Puget Sound Hospital, Pierce RSN

HB 1994, revising availability of community support for persons with DD (Pierce Co. pilot)

Senate Human Services & Corrections
SB 5953, parenting education for juvenile offenders who are parents.
Revising provisions for supervision of offenders

HEARING SCHEDULE CONT.
Tuesday, February 20, 1:30 PM
House Juvenile Justice – 2 bills on information sharing among juvenile justice and care agencies

Wednesday, February 21, 8:00 AM
House Children & Family Services
HB 1994, revising availability of community support for persons with DD (Pierce Co. pilot)

Senate Human Services & Corrections
SB 5953, parenting education for juvenile offenders who are parents.
Revising provisions for supervision of offenders

HEARING SCHEDULE CONT.
Wednesday, February 21, 1:30 PM
House Health Care
HB 1994, revising availability of community support for persons with DD (Pierce Co. pilot)

House Criminal Justice & Corrections
Four bills on siting sex offender least restrictive alternative housing
Wednesday, February 21, 6:00 PM
House Children & Family Services
Executive Session including b, the CD-ITA bill

House Local Government & Housing
Executive Session

Thursday, February 22, 8:00 AM
Senate Human Services & Corrections
SB 5995, providing for information sharing between courts, providers, divisions, and agencies serving dependent children and their families.
Providing for coordination of services for dependent children.

House Health Care
HB 1629, Mental Health Ombuds

Thursday, February 22, 1:30 PM
House Children & Family Services
Executive Session

Thursday, February 22, 3:30 PM
Two bills on restricting smoking in public places

Thursday, February 22, 6:00 PM
House Health Care
Executive Session

Senate Human Services & Corrections
Executive Session

Friday, February 23, 8:00 AM
Senate Human Services & Corrections
Executive Session

Friday, February 23, 1:30 PM
House Juvenile Justice
Executive Session

TAXATION, BUDGET & FINANCE

COUNTY TREASURERS MEET
The county treasurers’ discussed legislation of interest this week as they met in Olympia, and took the message to their legislators on the hill that the I-695 backfill is the number one priority for county and city officials this year. The treasurers/WACO recommendation, SB 5638, making technical corrections to treasurers’ statutes, should be up for executive session in the Senate State and Local Government Committee next week.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TAX INCREMENT FINANCING
The concept of tax increment financing has been brought to the Legislature as a method to finance infrastructure and community revitalization. Tax increment financing redistributes tax collections within designated areas to finance infrastructure improvements within those areas. Counties, cities or tribes could pledge and use diverted regular property tax collections to pay principal and interest on general obligation bonds issued to finance infrastructure and revitalization programs. Bills have been introduced to the Legislature that would allow local governments to, for the first time, utilize different types of tax increment financing (including property tax and sales and use tax). HB 1115, HB 1418 and SB 5720 vary by which entities would be authorized to use tax increment financing, vary by what percent of the increase in assessed valuation would be diverted, and vary by what percent of the taxing districts must approve of the tax increment financing program before it can commence.

The Governor’s office is also proposing a bill to benefit community revitalization and infrastructure. HB 1518 would give local governments a tool to create public/private partnerships to simulate investment. Local governments could apply for proceeds from the state portion of the sales and use tax collected in that jurisdiction. Projects could receive no more than $500,000 a year for 20 years, and the state share of the public-sector component could be no more than 30% of the public sector component. The governor’s staff contact for this bill is Sheila Martin, Governor’s Executive Policy Office, (360) 902-0675. Contact Paul Parker or Stacy Connole, WSAC staff, with questions or comments at (360) 753-1886.

DEPARTMENT OF REVENUE/PROPERTY TAX BILLS
On Tuesday afternoon, the House Finance Committee gave a do pass recommendation to HB 1202 and HB 1467, which are the Department of Revenue’s request bills dealing with property taxes. HB 1202 requires three years worth of data for personal property ratios, the ability to make corrections when there is an error in the levy process, and other miscellaneous revisions. HB 1467 repeals all the obsolete language left over from the Referendum 47 lawsuit declaring it unconstitutional and makes other administrative changes. The only controversy around these bills was an amendment which would reconcile these bills with Governor Locke's value-averaging measure, if the constitutional amendment passes the legislature and ultimately a vote of the people. Unfortunately, the inclusion of those amendments raised some questions by legislators that supported or did not support the Governor’s constitutional amendment. It is unclear what will happen at this point as a result of that controversy; hopefully these bills can continue to move forward and reach the Governor’s desk.

TIMBER TAX
Wednesday afternoon, the Senate Ways and Means Committee heard testimony on the assessors’ timber recommendation, SB 5702. WACO staff testified in favor of the measure and was assisted by Kim Qually from the Department of Revenue who has been of great
assistance in drafting the original bill and all of the various revisions. Testimony was also presented in favor of the bill from the Washington Forest Products Association and the Washington Farm Foresters’ Association. There was support expressed for the bill from individual landowners, as well. The only thing working against this bill is the fact that it has so many pages and legislators get worried about any lengthy bill dealing with taxation unless there is enough assurance that there isn’t anything negative in the measure. We think the testimony was enough to assure them that the changes were either agreed to or not policy issues.

The House version of the Timber Tax, HB 2027 was not sent to the Finance Committee as expected, but was sent to the Natural Resources Committee instead. We should have a good hearing in that committee, as well. Over the next week, assessors should contact their Representatives on the Natural Resources Committee asking them for favorable consideration on HB 2027. Please tell them this bill has been worked out between the assessors, DOR, industry, and small landowners and is a good bill to benefit us all. Members of the Committee are as follows: Representative Sump, Republican Chair; Representative Pearson, Vice-Chair; and Representatives Buck, Chandler, Ericksen, and Pennington. The Democratic side includes Representative Doumit, Chair; Representative Rockefeller, Vice-Chair; and Representatives Edwards, Eickmeyer, Jackley, and Murray.

FARM AND AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT EXEMPTIONS

Last Friday, the Senate Agriculture & International Trade Committee held a hearing on SB 5668, which exempts all farm equipment and machinery from the State property tax levy. The fiscal note was not made available at the hearing although someone indicated it would be about $1-2 million. My understanding is that the fiscal note came in around $10 million, which more than likely means that the measure will not clear the Senate Ways & Means Committee if it is passed out of the Agriculture Committee.

COLLEGE FOUNDATIONS/TAX EXEMPTION

On Tuesday, the Senate Higher Education Committee considered a property tax exemption bill that would grant a property tax exemption to college foundations that own property used in conjunction with educational institutions. Most of these properties have been granted exemptions in the past by the Department of Revenue, but in reconsideration DOR removed those exemptions. However, there is another section in the act that exempts any lands purchased by these organizations from compensating taxes if the lands were previously classified under open space. It is our understanding that the one foundation that is most interested in this provision is located in Clark County and is in the process of considering an exchange of some commercial property for 35 acres of farmland and the landowner would have to pay the $80,000+ compensating tax. Even though these properties previously were not subject to property taxes, the fiscal note may still cause the measure to be set aside.

10-YEAR PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION ON TELECOMMUNICATIONS EQUIPMENT

The Senate Economic Development & Telecommunications Committee held a hearing Monday on SB 5620, which provides a property tax exemption for certain equipment installed to bring advanced telecommunication services to rural areas. The way the bill is drafted, when the exemption expires on January 1, 2009, the value would be placed back on the rolls, but there would be no gain to the taxing districts because this value would never be considered as new construction for budgetary purposes. WACO staff suggested the committee consider an amendment to the bill that would allow that value to be considered as new construction when the exemptions expired.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING

On Tuesday, the House Trade & Economic Development Committee took testimony on two measures that deal with tax increment financing, HB 1115 and HB 1418. A number of economic development folks testified for these measures emphasizing that this type of program is needed to bring vitality back to some of the cities and urban areas in the states which have suffered in the past. Some of the discussion was over the fact that one of the bills included counties and the other did not; one bill required all taxing districts to agree and the other only required that the parties which represented 60% of the tax collections to agree and then it would be binding upon all the additional entities. These bills are far from agreed to and it is not clear whether the committee will move ahead with either or with some sort of a combined measure.

A question was raised about the constitutionality of these proposals and the proponents are hoping that they will meet constitutional muster because they had taken the state levy out of the formula. When the court declared TIF unconstitutional some years ago, the decision centered on the state levy. However, it appears to many that it still is a uniformity issue under the State constitution, but since the Court did not go into any other reasons, the proponents are hopeful that the court will uphold this provision. An interesting side note, there were no representatives there from the various bond councils who have traditionally promoted this bill in the past. This may be an indication that the bond councils are not comfortable with the bill passing the constitutional muster. This would make it highly unlikely that any bond council would be willing to put their name on the line for a bond issue under this statute until there is a favorable court ruling.

The proponents have agreed to include the language in whichever bill moves ahead to see if it that the costs incurred by the county assessor beyond the normal revaluation effort are inclusive costs under the provisions of the act. In other words, the district that would be formed to create this type of program would be responsible for paying the costs to the counties that would be incurred to implement the measure.
TRANSPORTATION

BLUE RIBBON PROCESS CONTINUES

As noted in last week’s Legislative Bulletin, the Senate Transportation Committee spent this week hearing all 27 of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation (BRCT) bills. As more counties are actively reviewing the bills, the level of concern among WSAC members is growing. Several county commissions have scheduled work sessions with their staff to review the policy and operational implications of the bills. We would urge each county to do so as quickly as possible. The Governor and business community continue to push Legislators to pass these bills by the end of the month.

To look at the list of bills, go to the CRAB web site at www.crab.wa.gov where they maintain a tracking list for the BRCT bills as well as a comprehensive tracking list of significant transportation legislation. The WSAC members in Olympia this week focused their transportation discussion on several key policy issues including:

Regional Funding
- Should regional taxes and funding be directed at state highways?
- What is the role of cities and counties in regional governance?
- How should multi-county regions operate?
- Is “regional funding” really a shift of traditional state responsibilities to local government or a chance for local self-determination?
- Are the likely regional funding sources sufficient to buy the needed projects?

Accountability
- Since most county and all transit funding is raised locally, what role should accountability to the state play?
- If the state requires benchmarks, how should they be established? What are the roles of CRAB, DOT, the Transportation Commission and the Legislature in this process?

Revenues
- The current process of leaving revenue to the final step of the Legislative process may yield a mismatch between funding and changes to the policy and administrative processes.
- Business leaders and some legislators make it clear that all new revenues will be directed at state highway projects. Given that most counties are reducing road levy growth as a result of Ref. 47 and I-722, will this result in a real decrease in county road funding?

Legislative Transportation Chairs continue to invite county input and take it seriously. Please take the time in your county to understand these very important proposals.

OF GENERAL INTEREST

Status of bills of interest to county officials may be found at http://www.wacounties.org/waco/leg.pdf.

ELECTIONS

Twenty-three County Auditors came to town on February 14 and 15 to testify on proposed legislation, meet with their legislators and listen to Doug Lewis, the Executive Director of the Election Center to speak about national election reform. Doug spoke to the auditors on Thursday morning and then addressed the Senate State and Local Government Committee in the afternoon.

SB 5275, the absentee/mail ballot bill and SB 5273, relating to election filing dates were both heard in the Senate State Government Committee on February 14. The Senate State Government Committee members were very friendly to the visiting auditors and the legislation appeared to be well received. Both of these bills are WACO priority bills. County auditors testifying in front of the committee were Greg Kimsey, Clark County; Suzanne Sinclair, Island County; Shirley Forslof, Whatcom County; Kim Wyman, Thurston County and King County Records and Elections Manager Bob Bruce. In the House State Government Committee, Kitsap County Auditor Karen Flynn testified on the ballot rotation bill, HB 1715.

The House Select Elections Committee will be meeting on 2/21 to discuss bills that have been previously heard in the committee regarding the blanket primary. On 2/19 the House Local Government & Housing Committee will hear HB 1630, a bill dealing with the relocation of mobile homes. The bill requires a fee to be collected by DOL or the auditors when processing the application for transfer of title. In the House State Government Committee on 2/19 at 8:00 am, four election bills will be heard: HB 1230, changing the date of the primary; HB 1331, requiring absentee ballots to be signed by election day; HB 1539, changing
the primary date; **HB 1554**, revising absentee and mail ballot provisions. This was the auditor’s bill from last year. Numerous election bills will also be heard in this committee in executive session both at 8:00 am and 10:00 am.

In the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee on 2/20, **SB 5936**, a bill that will raise the recording fee by $10.00 to fund low income housing projects is scheduled for a public hearing. In the Senate State and Local Government Committee on 2/21 at 1:30 the following bills will be heard: **SB 5704**, clarifying recount procedures; **SB 5834**, strengthening the Secretary of State’s certification and training program; **SB 5783**, clarifying standards for candidates using party designations. In the same committee on 2/22 at 3:30 pm, **SB 5849**, changing the primary date and **SB 5338**, establishing instant runoff voting will both be heard. On 2/19 in the Senate, at 3:30 pm, **SB 5274**, a county auditor request bill will be heard in the Transportation committee. Also being heard in the committee are two sub-agent bills, **SB 5431** and **SB 5432**.

**BOARDS & COMMISSIONS**

**GOVERNOR NAMES COMMISSIONERS TO STATE PUBLIC WORKS BOARD**
Governor Gary Locke has named two county commissioners to represent counties on the state Public Works Board. Lewis County Commissioner Eric Johnson and Yakima County Commissioner Jesse Palacios join the board beginning in March.

In addition, Governor Locke has named Glenn Olson to chair the Board. Glenn serves on the Board as a citizen member but also is the Clark County Budget Director.

Johnson and Palacios replace former commissioners Charlotte Garrido (Kitsap) and Nora Mae Keifer (Whitman).

The Board manages the $100 million Public Works Trust Fund and awards low-interest loans to local governments and special purpose districts for infrastructure projects.

**NEWS from MSRC**

**ENERGY CONSERVATION INFO ON THE WEB**
To assist local governments in responding to Governor Locke's order requiring state and local governments to cut electricity and natural gas use by 10 percent for at least 90 days, the Municipal Research and Services Center has posted a Web site with Energy Conservation information for local government officials at http://www.mrsc.org/environment/energyconservation.htm. If your county has information to share with other local governments on compliance, please send to MRSC at 1200 5th Avenue, Ste. 1300, Seattle, WA 98101-1159 or contact ldemerritt@mrsc.org.

**COURTHOUSE RAMBLINGS**

**OKANOGAN COUNTY SHERIFF TAKES NEW POSITION**
Okanogan County Sheriff Jim Weed has been hired for the newly created position of Director of Administrative Services for the county. Weed, who has been the sheriff since 1988 will first focus on working with the commissioners in two challenging areas: finance and human resources. Congratulations to Jim on his new position!

**COMING EVENTS**

**February 22-23**
Washington State Association of County Auditors’ Recording Conference, Enzian Inn, Leavenworth.

**March 2-6**
National Association of Counties’ (NACo) Annual Legislative Conference, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C.

**March 13-15**
Washington State Association of Sheriffs’ and Oregon State Association of Sheriffs’ Annual Joint Meeting, Seaside, Oregon.

**April 4-6**
Western District Meeting, Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC). Oak Harbor, Island County.

**April 18-20**
April 22-28
National County Government Week.

April 25-27
Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys’ (WAPA) Annual Spring Training Program. WestCoast Gateway, Yakima.

April 26-28
Washington State Association of County Clerks’ and Superior Court Administrators’ Joint Conference, Lakeway Inn, Bellingham

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<th>JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS</th>
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<td><strong>Whatcom County, Bellingham, WA</strong>, has an exciting opportunity for a <strong>PC/LAN Technician II or III</strong>, DOQ. Salary Range: PC/LAN Tech II: $17.59-$22.95/hr., DOQ, and PC/LAN Tech III: $19.09-$24.93/hr., DOQ. Qualifications are as follows: <strong>PC/LAN Tech II</strong> requires a bachelor's degree in business or computer science and 4 years of experience INCLUDING 2.5 years of experience directly supporting personal computers and 1.5 years of experience directly supporting network systems, and the <strong>PC/LAN Tech III</strong> requires a bachelor's degree and 6 years of experience including 4 years of experience directly supporting personal computers and 3.5 years of experience directly supporting network systems and 2 years of experience at or above the PC/LAN Technician II level, OR an equivalent combination of education, training and experience that provides the required skills, knowledge and abilities. Experience dealing with Internet connectivity, troubleshooting, security, and Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) addressing and routing is preferred at both levels. Whatcom County offers excellent employer-paid medical, dental &amp; vision benefits for employee and family, generous vacation and sick leave, average 12 holidays per year, and WA State Retirement system. Optional deferred comp &amp; Flex 125 available. This position will remain open until filled with preference given to applications received by 3/5/01. For required application packet contact Whatcom County Human Resources, 311 Grand Ave., Suite 107, Bellingham, WA, or call (360) 676-6802. For detailed job announcement visit our website at <a href="http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us">www.co.whatcom.wa.us</a> or call the jobline at (360) 738-4550. Equal Opportunity Employer.</td>
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**Douglas County Transportation and Land Services** has an opening for a **Draftsperson** in the East Wenatchee office. Salary range is $2,613 - $2,968 depending on qualifications, attractive benefits package. Requirements include but are not limited to a completed application and resume; a valid Washington State drivers license; one year of college course work in drafting and one year of civil engineering or land survey drafting experience; or a minimum of two years progressive experience in civil engineering or land survey drafting with a minimum of one year computer aided drafting experience. Position is open until filled. For more information and an application packet, please call Angie Collie at (509) 884-9451 or email at acollie@co.douglas.wa.us or the information can be found at our website, [www.douglascountywa.net](http://www.douglascountywa.net).