

2025 Legislative Roundtable

October 21, 2025

2 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Brummer, Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Swope, County Manager Ryan Barrett, Sen. John Braun, Rep. Joel McEntire, Rep. Jim Walsh, Rep. Peter Abbarno, Clerk Scott Tinney, Treasurer Arny Davis, Becky Butler, Matt Patana, Meja Handlen, Mindy Brooks, Sheriff Rob Snaza, Undersheriff Kevin Engelbertson, Richard DeBolt, Todd Chaput, Jami Lund, Stacy Denham, Fionna Velazquez, Grace Jimenez, Matt Thuston, Kate McDougall, Noah Sullivan, Sarah Hensley, Shelly Stewart, Casey Mauermann, Ashley Hamilton

Guest(s): Jacob Moore, Otto Rabe, Paul Crouner, Tim Wood, Tracy Croshaw, Kevin Hoffman, Usha Sahadeva-Brooks, unnamed members of the public

Recorder: Rieva Lester

Public comment: None.

Lewis County representatives and legislative liaisons outlined the county's legislative priorities for 2026, including the following:

North Lewis County Industrial Access (NLCIA): Ryan Barrett, Geoff Soderquist and Commissioner Swope addressed the need to ensure funding continues to be available to improve the Interstate 5 corridor.

Failing bridges: Commissioner Pollock and Geoff Soderquist outlined the county's struggles to maintain century-old bridges throughout its jurisdiction, noting that the county is responsible for 200 bridges. Commissioner Pollock suggested making Climate Commitment Act funds available for bridge and road maintenance. The state legislators requested the county compile a list of its funding priorities for bridge repair / replacement.

Interstate 5 Exit 72 at Napavine: Commissioner Pollock, Commissioner Brummer and Geoff Soderquist outlined the struggles related to congestion at the Napavine freeway exit. Sen. Braun voiced frustration with the Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the city of Napavine for not forcing developers to address transportation needs as part of their project planning. Sen. Braun suggested the county reach out to WSDOT.

Southwest Washington Fairgrounds 4-H Barn: Matt Patana and Commissioner Brummer discussed upgrades needed at the Southwest Washington Fairgrounds and noted that they had met with Rep. Peter Abbarno the previous day to discuss the topic and formulate a plan. The legislators discussed grants for which the county can apply.

HVAC systems at the Law and Justice and Public Health buildings: Meja Handlen outlined the exorbitant costs of heating and cooling the Public Health Building. She bemoaned wasting taxpayer dollars on temperature control due to outdated systems that are failing. The legislators suggested looking into grants for natural gas conversion.

Southwest Washington Fairgrounds drain lines: Matt Patana discussed the county's efforts to follow the Dig Once model as it applies to work being done at the fairgrounds. He said the county is replacing water lines and would like to address its failed drain lines while the area is dug up. Rep. Peter Abbarno suggested the county explore funding opportunities through the State Fair Association, the Community Economic Revitalization Board (CERB) and the Public Works Board. He said the county also could submit a Local Community Project application to area lawmakers as a last resort.

Water Lab: Meja Handlen discussed Public Health and Social Services' outdated and obsolete water lab infrastructure. Meja said the lab is vital to protecting public health and responding to contamination or disasters, yet key instruments can no longer be repaired or replaced. She and the commissioners stressed the need for upgrades to ensure the lab continues to be available for residents without being subsidized through General Fund dollars.

Packwood Sewer: Mindy Brooks, Geoff Soderquist and Sheriff Snaza outlined the need for infrastructure investment in the Packwood area to create housing opportunities for the needed supportive workforce, stressing that infrastructure improvements would translate into tax benefits for the state and local economies. They noted that the project had been earmarked to receive funding from the state Department of Commerce but that the investment was later clawed back. The legislators suggested the county take a phased-in approach for funding, expanding its request during the full budget season.

Onalaska's Carlisle Lake: Kevin Hoffman and Tracy Croshaw said the dam at Carlisle Lake is failing and faces costly repairs. They said they are seeking help securing funding for the necessary studies, design work and repairs, and they highlighted the recreational and educational impacts the lake has on the area. Rep. Abbarno suggested they reach out to the Department of Fish and Wildlife, among other state entities, given the lake's use as an aquaculture classroom for Onalaska students who raise rainbow trout from eggs then release the fish into the lake.

Statewide policy priorities: Staff also shared statewide policies the county wants state lawmakers to focus on, including:

- **Foundational Public Health Services Funding:** Meja Handlen said Department of Commerce restrictions essentially hamstringing what the county can use funding on. She requested lawmakers work with Commerce to ease the restrictions and expand the approved uses.
- **Tort reform:** Becky Butler urged the lawmakers to help the Washington Counties Risk Pool in its push for tort reform in response to costly litigious practices currently in place, which have made insurance prices astronomical.
- **Jail Medicaid reimbursements:** Sheriff Snaza and Commissioner Pollock described the predicament in which the county is placed because Medicaid coverage for inmates is suspended, forcing the county to pay for inmates' state-mandated medical care.
- **Funding for Public Defense:** Becky Butler outlined the high costs of providing state-mandated legal representation for individuals deemed indigent and noted that the state reimburses the county for a tiny fraction of what is spent providing those legal services.

Meeting adjourned at 3:36 p.m.