



**REGIONAL ECONOMIC STRATEGY**  
**TOURISM AND VISITOR WORKING GROUP**  
**MEETING #1 SUMMARY: June 26, 2008**

**Working Group Members**

Bob Aylward, Co-chair	Sheila Hughes
Carla Murray, Co-chair	Kate Joncas
Mel Sheldon, Co-chair	Ann Kawasaki
Matt Allen	Jane Kilburn
Donna Ambrose	Eleanor Kittelson,
Lori Banaszak	Josh LaBelle,
Kim Bedier	Brent Lambert ( <i>alternate</i> )
Rick Bender	Chad MacKay
Tammy Blount	Marsha Massey
Michael Campbell	Tom Mayburry,
John Christison	Ralph Morton
Susan Crane	Robert Nellams
Amy Dee	Jim Pearman
Bob Derrick	Ryan Pennington ( <i>alternate</i> )
Bonnie Dunbar	Robin Pollard
Cara Egan	Anne Santisteran ( <i>alternate</i> )
Jamie Fay ( <i>alternate</i> )	Joy Skaardal
Marcia Garrett ( <i>alternate</i> )	Amy Spain
Grant Griffin	Bill Taylor
Nicole Griffin ( <i>alternate</i> )	Brad Walker
Dogan Gursoy,	Sandy Ward
Caren Handleman ( <i>alternate</i> )	Don Welsh
Terri Hiroshima ( <i>alternate</i> )	Frank Welton

## **Staff**

Bob Drewel, Puget Sound Regional Council

Eric Schinfeld, Puget Sound Regional Council

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Chris Strow, Puget Sound Regional Council

## **Consultants**

Bonnie Berk, Berk & Associates

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## **Welcome and Project Purpose**

Bill McSherry, Bob Aylward, and Carla Murray welcomed the Working Group members to the first meeting; discussed their interest and commitment to this important project, and asked each attendee to introduce him/herself and provide a one-sentence overview of why each of them is here, participating in this project. Bill McSherry then presented a slide show that summarized the Prosperity Partnership's work-to-date, the regional strategy, and background information on the tourism/visitor sector. Following brief Q&A, the group launched into a brainstorming session on the current needs, challenges and opportunities for the sector, and a vision for its future.

## **Brainstorming: The Sector's Strategic Needs, Challenges, and Opportunities**

### ***Image and Identity***

- The sector has low visibility; needs a higher profile
- Branding and image issues are a challenge
- Potential students or State boards see tourism/visitor sector as a low-wage industry. State policy people see the industry as a group of "burger-flippers"
- Sell the Puget Sound region as the gateway to the U.S.
- We should focus on being green –that is our brand internationally
- We should create a product to market the existing culture; Austin is an example of a place that has done that well
- We should advertise through films that profile Seattle
- People identify Puget Sound with Boeing, Microsoft, and Amazon – how to capitalize on that identification?
- What are we? Who are we? What do we have? When you start to brand, people scatter
- Need to speak with a unified voice, be a unified brand

### ***Market Niches and Opportunities***

- Eco-tourism really sets Seattle apart, eco-tourism is a growing niche, a fabulous niche
- Luxury tourism – pair wineries, spas, restaurants, luxury hotels; "living cool, loving nature"
- Millennials, especially young, educated women, are an opportunity
- Another opportunity is the millennial demographic; young, Japanese women are a potential market

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Tourism and Visitor Working Group Meeting #1 Summary**

- What we do should be focused on how millennials get and receive information
- Extend the season of tourism in Seattle and the region (beyond the summer)

***International City/Language and Other Support***

- We don't support international visitors when they get here; need infrastructure like currency exchange places and signage
- Washington State has a presence in international locations, and has worked aggressively to sell and market the region, including through FAM tours for operators
- Need to offer places for currency exchange
- Mt. Rainier has a sister mountain in Japan; (no destination ski resort in the region)
- China is a huge opportunity. The scope of market: 250 million people with money to spend
- Seattle is the closest port to China in the U.S. – we should try to attract Chinese visitors
- The more we can be welcoming to our international visitors, the better
- Foreign language speakers in hospitality are necessary
- People from China, Korea and Japan want to stay at a hotel that serves the food they like, especially breakfast
- Canada is our best opportunity. We need to reach out and engage Canadians. They are very price sensitive; how do we get them to stay here longer? The opportunity is huge and our share of the pie has been declining
- We could learn from British Columbia and the city of Vancouver, B. C., which is ten years ahead of Seattle – could share best practices

***Events and Attractions***

- We are competing for events – conventions, etc with others who can offer incentives
- There is fierce competition for large cultural art attractions like "Young F"; Paris and Mexico City are investing heavily to attract the youth culture
- Big events where the entire world looks at the region, that would put us on the map
- Real estate matters; we need enough space for events; beyond use of the Convention Center, Seattle Center
- Our region is a gateway to three National Parks; that's noteworthy – and in order to get to these parks you must go through the region
- The national and State parks here are opportunities
- There are demographic shifts in the wine and food sectors; nationally we are the #1 wine drinkers in the U. S.; there has been an increase in wine spending in the region as well
- Need to speak clearly about the benefit of events, so that governments are open to them
- Baby Boomers want to do something more purpose-filled/meaningful – look at natural resources, Gates Foundation, etc. The new Gates Foundation building is going to be important
- Chambers Bay will host the U. S. Open; golfers will stay a while, the national eye will be on Seattle, partnerships to capitalize on exposure will be needed, etc.
- The number one way of engaging in tourism is a 2-3 day small yacht (luxury) tour
- Real estate is the primary challenge for event production. Other communities, like San Francisco, are offering incentives for events
- There is a new State tourism visitor's guide

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- Some big anniversaries to celebrate: in 2011 – the Port of Seattle will be 100 years old; in 2012 – 50th Anniversary of the Century 21 World’s Fair (celebrating technology and sustainability of the concept); 2016 is the centennial of the National Parks Services

***Specific Needs***

- Locally, cities are not focused on tourism
- Work needs to be done at the State Liquor Control Board to change regulations so that wineries can better promote their products
- Seattle’s signs are too small
- We need to work on land availability issues, liquor control issues, removing barriers

***Partnerships***

- The state is like feudal Europe, we need to work together to get the same messaging across to the public
- The 2010 Olympics will require good relationships and partnerships, to take advantage of the opportunity
- Trying to get people out of their silos, bring people to alignment, coordinated effort
- There are industry crossovers with information technology, security and surveillance, hospitality management and other sectors
- Private tourism; work with people who live here to advocate and educate others, may be a way to combine that with social media
- Seattle Center wants to improve its space and facilities to allow us to take better advantage of arts and culture
- This working group can serve to bring splintered groups together, the groups are all talking about the same thing

***Workforce Needs and Challenges***

- There is a lack of trained, competent mid-level managers in the industry
- The industry is perceived as a low wage occupation; need to increase the recognition that there is a career ladder
- The perception is that the industry doesn’t provide good jobs
- The industry has career opportunities for people with limited English – we need to invest in them
- We have a diverse region; some in the workforce have limited English skills (need more ESL in the workplace)
- The cruise industry is challenged by potential Federal legislation
- Need to educate front-line staff to be more friendly; greetings, for example

***Transportation: Needs, Issues and Challenges***

- Transportation is a challenge
- Transportation, gridlock on the freeways are problems
- Rail line from Bellevue to Snohomish is no longer available
- We need to look regionally at how to move tourists around the Seattle region

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- What are we doing with direct flights that we have now? Airlines tend to look at the front of the plane (business class) when they think about flights
- Fuel prices impact business class seats and international flights
- Most airlines are losing money from domestic travel, but are making money on international travel
- Need to make sure that people who land at Sea-Tac are getting to Seattle and around the State
- Next May and June the Hood Canal Bridge will be closed; what will happen and how will we mitigate it?
- Invite transportation to be a part of the tourism conversation (help them understand how they can be part of tourism) i.e. ferries
- The impact of increasing fuel costs; the radius of travel will be smaller

***Funding Challenges and Opportunities***

- Tourism funding is a challenge; funding is the biggest issue we face
- Funding for tourism is not secure, and there is a substantial match requirement
- We are 34<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states in tourism funding
- We need to be relentless about getting funding and respect
- We need incentives to attract events and tournaments
- We need to educate legislators around decreasing hotel/motel tax collections
- We are receiving a relatively small amount of tax money back
- The ability to locally promote your community depends on the lodging tax formula
- Over a long period of time, the State Legislature has not invested in tourism – they don't see it as a priority and as a result Washington is falling behind other states
- We've done a poor job of working with Olympia
- We need a consistent demonstration of our value to the State Legislature
- Tax revenues to tourism will be less than what they have been over the last five years
- Need audit and assessment of funds and resources now; this is an opportunity

## **Brainstorming a Vision for the Tourism and Visitor Sector**

### ***In 10 years the Region's Tourism/Visitor Sector will...***

- Create a lifestyle-based brand and create the infrastructure to support that brand
- Will develop all the necessary infrastructure and tools to be an international player
- In ten years we won't have a viaduct and we will have an international waterfront park – we'll be better than Sydney
- Will be known as the “green Dubai” of destinations; ultra glamorous, extra luxurious, super green, investment center
- Be known as a place with a culture of food and wine, and sports too
- There will be an interplay between wine and food; people will come for the wine and love the food, and vice versa
- There will be partnerships between food, wine and arts
- Tourism will be recognized as international economic powerhouse, and an industry that generates good jobs
- There will be more tourism industry jobs, and the State will recognize and fund tourism accordingly
- There is an opportunity to create a tax or service fee to go back into the tourism sector
- There will be a well-funded, well-organized and coordinated tourism organization
- Tourism will be well funded AND services will be integrated – we will do a better job working together, so its clear what we are selling
- We would develop all the facilities and infrastructure needed to support tourism
- A can-do attitude in place, to make things happen
- How much is Seattle a “foodie” place?
- Seattle will be known for our fish/seafood
- Need community support for Seattle Center levy
- Do a great job of being a hip, urban environment
- The transportation gridlock will be resolved, there will be free-flowing movement of people
- We will find a key event to host: the World Series, a significant Marathon, the All-Star game
- Arts and teams bring economic impact, quality of life, market visibility
- Be known as a very high-tech city with online social networking sites, and free-of-charge access to the internet
- The State, including the Puget Sound, will outdraw Napa Valley on wine tourism
- There will be a plan to attract people to the tourism and visitor workforce
- There will be better communication!
- Individuals who bring opportunity to the region will get recognition and appreciation, i.e. Paul Allen, Bill Gates, etc.
- Every elementary school kid will know where Mt. Rainier is and ask their parents to let them visit it
- There will be an expanded Convention Center, for larger events on the national stage, ours will be the biggest on the West Coast or we will at least keep up with growth and be competitive
- We will host a Super Bowl, or WNBA All Star team

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- All visitor-related industries will have significant international visitors; we will be nurturing relationships and welcoming visitors
- 365 days a year in which there are compelling attractions for visitors
- All websites will be available in six languages
- Will have websites, printed materials, signs in multiple languages
- Foreign languages will be offered in the primary grades
- In 10 years, increased participation and enjoyment in region by the people who live here

**Additional Information Needed: Ideas and Requests from the Work Group**

- Share the source and report info from today's PowerPoint presentation
- Data on perceptions of the region -- how people view Seattle (domestically and internationally)
- Information on how people feel after they've visited the region
- Survey of millennials (is available)
- Economic impact of tourism revenue generated and invested
- State Tourism Strategic Plan, or the Executive Summary for the Plan
- Recent WSDOT survey on Ferries, who rides them?
- National Park Service visitor statistics
- Information on workforce composition, including wage information
- Cruise industry statistics – does the Port have this?
- Statistics on how long and where people stay
- Information on film as an economic development initiative
- Who is delivering tourism marketing services, how well are they doing this?
- Who visits, how do they decide to do so, and when do they decide?

**Roundtable Comments and Reflections on the Meeting**

- I'm excited about the exchange of ideas and enthusiasm surrounding the project
- I compliment PSRC staff on pulling together this great group; this is serious stuff, and a real opportunity to make things happen
- Its not a question of enough money for tourism in the region, but of how the money is allocated and prioritized
- Thank you, it was a great meeting
- The Port Jobs Office has the wage data on entry level jobs that we've talked about
- Super meeting and group! I appreciate being asked to join this committee; it has a critically important job
- Thank you, it's great to be part of the conversation about working to eliminate barriers to cooperation; I'm excited about the partnership opportunities
- It's a people-to-people business; it would be great to give tourists/visitors access to the wonderful people here
- Kudos to staff and the co-chairs for the diversity of this group, especially the regional representatives, I'm very excited about the partnerships

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- Action items should allow local governments to program lodging taxes, with incentives to program those taxes to support regional strategies
- We need greater integration and greater vision
- Every time a home port or cruise ship pulls up, money comes into the region
- We are poised to help and support the industry through workforce education; to help make us a "green Dubai"
- This has been a long time in coming, glad to be involved
- Let's not lose sight of the importance of large groups of visitors (i.e. conventions). We need strategies to bring that sector here
- Glad we are all moving in the same direction -- we all have the same interests at stake, we will get something done