

Memo

From: Jeff Hansen, KUOW Program Director
To: KUOW Listeners
Date: May 9, 2008
Sub: Traffic Reports on KUOW

Over the years as I've read and answered listener mail, it had become clear to me that the value of regular traffic reports was an issue. I can't point to anything else we do that gets as much sustained and unrelenting negative email from listeners.

So when, we commissioned our own research in 2006, and then I reviewed the national research on the subject that was released last year, I felt it was time to take a serious look at the traffic coverage on KUOW.

My conclusion about regular traffic reports was that we needed to move forward and replace them with other higher value and program specific content. It is counter productive to attempt to provide additional services such as traffic that simply do not measure up to the high expectations that you, our listeners have for KUOW programming.

As always, I welcome your input.

Jeff

P.S. Following is some Q & A that should provide answers to questions you might have about my decision.

Q: Why stop doing regular traffic reports on KUOW?

1. Multiple national research surveys indicate that the majority of our listeners do not tune in to public radio for traffic and do not value traffic reports. And, many of those listeners that do value them are dissatisfied with the quality of the reports we provide.
2. In addition to surveys we also have extensive input from our listeners providing vivid examples of the problem.
 - a. *If it is not possible to have timely and accurate reports, why have any report?*
 - b. *If Ms. Brown could provide more accurate reports rather than generic WSDOT camera view opinions on traffic - it would be appreciated.*
 - c. *It would have been helpful this morning if you had given some information on air concerning the ferry failure on the Vashon Island to Fauntleroy run. I got in line at 8:33 with a back-up of about a mile. There were two traffic reports on KUOW before 9 which made no mention of the problem.*
 - d. *I am only making this comment in that I have been changing stations to KOMO 1000 to get the Point to Point Traffic Report.*
 - e. *What's happening to Tacoma traffic is almost always given as an afterthought.*
 - f. *I can't believe I could ever find something to complain about regarding your coverage, but I have to say I was sorely disappointed with your traffic coverage last night. It was one of the biggest storms to hit the area in decades, but almost nothing was mentioned of the exceptionally bad traffic other than 'lots of delays, watch out for standing water'. I was stuck on the Viaduct for 2 hours but never heard a word about northbound 99 and Western Avenue being blocked: this would have been very helpful.*
 - g. *Your reporter at the 12:30 to 1:00 pm local news today said that the bridge to Bainbridge Island over Agate Pass Bridge was closed due to an accident and would be closed "for hours or days". If this was meant to be funny, it was not. That announcement caused parents at the school I was at to call in frantic that they could not get home in time to pick up their children; it caused me to spend time looking for other ways to get to the island tonight; it cost the school secretary time answering calls about the "hours or days" the bridge would be down. We listen to your station and want to believe*

that what you say is at least close to the truth. I left work early to get over the bridge before rush hour and there was no delay at all!

- h. The Vashon ferry breaks down at 4:30 am on Wednesday and you say NOTHING about it on air??? - Dear KUOW, As you may recall from my previous emails to you, I've long been critical of the extent to which KUOW favors those who drive their cars to work every day, as opposed to those of us who take public transit.*
- i. The Main Line - For many years I have heard your traffic reporters refer to the "main line," and I have always wondered what it is.*
- j. I love listening to KUOW and have been a long time contributor. Today, however, I was so annoyed and frustrated I was not inclined to call with a pledge. (I will after I calm down from sitting in traffic for 2 hours.) In all that listening time, while you went on and on babbling about pledging, you never once mentioned that the Alaskan Way Viaduct was shut down and that traffic all over Seattle was at a standstill. I count on you for that kind of information even when it is not a work day.*
- k. I continue to be dismayed at Harmon Shaye's traffic reports. They are absolutely useless most mornings. ... Why KUOW continues to air these useless traffic reports every morning I just don't understand? They are given such a sliver of time to squeeze in the report, but it really tells us nothing. ... Am I unrealistic in expecting a traffic report that actually is useful to the listener? Chris Jaehne Lynnwood, WA*
- l. Shame on you folks for your failure to keep the public informed about today's breakdown of the Rhody on the Pt. Defiance/Tahlequah run! Although the breakdown itself--which apparently happened around 8 pm last night--may have been unforeseeable, your collective failure to let the public know about this problem once it occurred is downright shameful.*
- m. Could someone please check and see if your traffic reporter is just sitting in a room somewhere making up the traffic reports. Unfortunately 3 members of my family commute to downtown every day from the suburbs and its a running joke for us that we could make more accurate traffic reports at home snug in our beds. Maybe it doesn't matter if KUOW wastes some air time on phony traffic reports, but it really fried me this morning because when I couldn't handle it anymore and had to mute this inane fellow, when I turned it back on I had missed almost all the Iraq book reviews!*
- n. It IS news if the Vashon/Southworth ferry line extends back to California, the largest boat is broken, and the ferry is on an EMERGENCY two-boat schedule. Is it too much to ask for a brief mention of this traffic information as part of the traffic report since it affects everyone who rides the ferry, everyone who has to travel Fauntleroy, and everyone at home wondering where all those people are?*
- o. I'm not sure how you get your information, but this a.m. I listened to two or three traffic reports trying to take the Alaska Way Viaduct from West Seattle to Green Lake and neither mentioned the back up or work going on which greatly increased our commute time. If I had known in time, I could have taken the freeway and saved a lot of time.....*
- p. Hi there, I'm curious about how your traffic reporters get their information, and how they decide what to report on the air. I live on the west side and commute to the eastside by 520; it seems some of the time when 520 westbound is mentioned between 3:30 and 4 p.m., the report is "backed up to 84th", which essentially means no traffic at all. Other times, 520 is left out of the report when it's backed up all the way to 405 and I could have gone around had I sufficient warning. Just curious how this works and if there's a better way for either you to give or me to get this information.*

Q: What about the big traffic related news items - will you report on those?

We will report the "news worthy" traffic items that have a major impact across our region, in our local newscasts. We may still miss items that some listeners consider to be important for their specific commutes, but again our region is served by regular traffic reports on other radio stations and by online traffic updates.