

Agenda: February 5, 2004

To: Regional Transportation Commission
From: Linda Wilshusen, Executive Director
RE: Process for Programming Transportation Enhancement Activities (TE) Funds and Submitting an Application for the Coastal Rail-Trail

RECOMMENDATION

The Interagency Technical Advisory Committee and staff recommend that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Approve the attached Transportation Enhancement Activity (TE) program grant scoring criteria (Attachment 1) and proposed process to program \$1.8 million in Santa Cruz County's projected share of regional-TE funds;
2. Set a target of funding at least one project per agency (includes local jurisdictions, UCSC, SCCRTC, etc.) at a minimum of \$100,000 per project.

Staff also recommends the Commission:

1. Approve the attached resolution (Attachment 2) authorizing staff to submit an application for the Bicycle and Pedestrian Path adjacent to the Rail Right-of-Way.
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BACKGROUND

The Regional Transportation Commission is in the process of developing its *2004 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP)*. The California Transportation Commission (CTC) has decided to include regional Transportation Enhancement Activity (TE) funds, anticipated through TEA-21 reauthorization, in the 2004 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). As such, the Regional Transportation Commission will need to submit a list of projects to program its share of TE funds as part of its 2004 RTIP, due to the CTC by April 12, 2004. Also, all projects programmed to receive TE funds will be subject to the same strict "use-it-or-lose-it" deadlines as STIP projects.

At the Commission's January 8, 2004 meeting, staff recommended the Commission trade Santa Cruz County's new regional-Transportation Enhancement Activities (TE) funds with existing Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) or Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP) programmed to eligible projects, thereby ensuring that none of Santa Cruz County's share of TE funds are left unprogrammed in the STIP and at risk of being shifted to other region's in the state. The traded CMAQ and RSTP funds would then be placed in reserve for future programming.

At the January 15, 2004 Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC) meeting, in light of the statewide funding crisis and need for new funds to deliver projects in Santa Cruz County, the **ITAC voted to recommend that the Commission instead conduct a quick competitive process to program the \$1.8 million in TE funds projected to be available to the region between FY04/05 and FY08/09.**

DISCUSSION

TE-eligible projects are enhancements to traditional road projects above and beyond required environmental mitigation. Eligible projects include: pedestrian or bicycle facilities and safety programs, acquisition of natural lands, historic preservation, landscaping and scenic beautification, rail-trails, outdoor advertising, archaeological projects, water pollution control, transportation related museums, and vehicular related wildlife mortality prevention.

Staff did not initially recommend a competitive process for programming the region's new TE funds, due to the timing constraints for submitting the 2004 RTIP to the CTC. However, given the ITAC's recommendation to program these funds to new projects as part of a quick competitive process, staff worked with the ITAC at a special meeting on January 23, 2004 to identify possible projects and recommend a process for programming these funds.

How Much Money Is Available?

\$1.8 million in TE funds (approximately \$390,000 per year) are projected to be available for programming to new TE-eligible projects. This funding level is tentative pending reauthorization of the Federal Transportation Act, TEA-21. Since these are federal funds, the federal process must be followed for these projects.

An additional \$470,000 in regional TE-projects, previously programmed to receive funds TE funds, will also be shifted into the 2004 RTIP.

The CTC has indicated that it will annually allocate TE funds programmed in each region, regardless of statewide funding shortfalls that may affect the remainder of the STIP. The program adopted by the RTC should generally match our region's annual apportionments.

Process for Programming Funds

The ITAC and staff propose the following process and abbreviated timeline to program the available TE funds:

- February 5, 2004: RTC Establishes Selection Criteria: Based on federal and state guidelines, as well as the *Regional Transportation Plan*. Consider ITAC recommended scoring criteria to rank project applications (Attachment 1).
- February 5, 2004: Issue Call for Projects: Notify eligible agencies of grant opportunity.
- February 12, 2004: Workshop for Potential Applicants: To explain application and processing procedures
- February 27, 2004: Applications Due: Project sponsors submit applications. All projects must be sponsored by an eligible agency (by formal action, e.g. a resolution).
- March 2004: Project Review: Staff recommendations developed and presented to Commission Committees (Bicycle Committee – March 8; ITAC – March 18; E/D TAC – if meeting held in March)
- April 1, 2004: Selection and Programming: RTC selects projects and programs funds as part of adoption of the 2004 RTIP.

Project Selection Criteria

Rather than develop new scoring criteria for this grant program, **the ITAC recommends the Commission reuse the scoring criteria developed for the 1999 TE-grant program (Attachment 1)**. Staff has since modified the 1999 Scoring Criteria to include the funding priorities identified in the Policy Element of the 2001 *Regional Transportation Plan* and to include project cost-effectiveness criteria. In addition to scoring criteria, project sponsors will be asked to provide project description, cost, and schedule information in the grant application. As with other grants, the grant application will provide information for Commissioners to use in their decision-making process, but final project selection by the RTC may take into account other factors and will not solely be based on project score.

The ITAC further recommends that the Commission set a target of funding one project per agency (includes local jurisdictions, UCSC, SCCRTC, etc.) at a minimum of \$100,000 per project. Each of these agencies has at least one project to submit and some agencies have several projects (see separate agenda item on Minutes to the January 23, 2004 ITAC meeting for more information).

The Interagency Technical Advisory Committee and staff recommend the Commission approve the proposed grant scoring criteria (Attachment 1) and grant application and selection process listed above. The project sponsors will need to get approval to submit their application(s) from their board or council.

The Coastal Rail-Trail

One of the projects approved by the Commission as part of the 1999 Watsonville-Santa Cruz-UCSC *Major Transportation Investment Study* (MTIS) is development of a bicycle/pedestrian path on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line right-of-way, also known as the Coastal Rail-Trail. This project is in the Coastal Conservancy Coastal Trail Plan, is TE-eligible and as such **staff recommends the Commission approve the attached resolution (Attachment 2) directing staff to prepare an application for \$500,000 in TE funds for construction of a portion of the trail.** The project already has \$332,000 in RSTP funds secured for development of a Master Plan and environmental review. Construction of the entire trail will cost several million dollars; however, staff anticipates that the Master Plan will identify segments that can be developed incrementally.

SUMMARY

The Interagency Technical Advisory Committee has requested that the Regional Transportation Commission conduct an abbreviated competitive process to program \$1.8 million in TE funds to projects in the region. Staff and the ITAC recommend the Commission approve the proposed process and scoring criteria (Attachment 1) for the funds. Staff also recommends the Commission direct staff to prepare an application for \$500,000 of the funds for the Coastal Rail-Trail project.

Attachments: 1. TE Grant Scoring Criteria
 2. Resolution

Prepare by: Rachel Moriconi

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