

AGENDA: March 3, 2005

TO: Regional Transportation Commission
FROM: Kim Shultz, Senior Transportation Planner
RE: 2005 Legislative Agenda

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Regional Transportation Commission:

1. Review and adopt the proposed 2005 Legislative Agenda;
 2. Forward the Legislative Agendas to our State and Federal representatives; and,
 3. Direct staff to continue to keep the Commission, local agencies and public informed on impacts to local transportation projects resulting from measures to address the state budget.
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BACKGROUND

Every year the Commission adopts a legislative agenda to guide its support and opposition of state and federal legislative or administrative actions. The Commission approved a preliminary Draft 2005 Legislative Agenda at its January 2005 meeting and released it for review by the Commission's Committees.

DISCUSSION

Attachment 1 is the SCCRTC's proposed 2005 Legislative Agenda, with separate sections for state and federal issues. Since the Commission's meeting in January, staff has revised the Legislative Agenda based upon input from the Bicycle Committee, the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee, the Interagency Transportation Advisory Committee, and SCMTD staff. In development of the initial draft agenda, staff attended a Legislative Workshop for Regional Transportation Planning Agencies held by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Regional Transportation Planning Agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. At this workshop, legislative analysts from all over the state compared notes and exchanged their agencies' preliminary draft 2005 agendas. The draft 2005 Legislative agenda was also reviewed by the Commission's Washington Assistant, Carolyn Chaney.

The draft 2005 Legislative Agenda (Attachment 1) is shown with changes in underlined italics, and deleted sections marked with ~~strikeout~~. Attachment 2 is a matrix of changes made to the draft by RTC's committees and staff.

This year's program reflects the continuing state budget deficit, RTC's goal of securing local revenue sources for transportation, the need for additional state and federal funding for high priority projects, and the long awaited reauthorization of the federal transportation act.

State Issues

As you know, the Governor has once again proposed to fully suspend Proposition 42 (the sales tax on gasoline, dedicated by the California Constitution to a variety of transportation projects and programs), leaving the entire \$1.31 billion in the General Fund. In response to the continued diversion of transportation revenues, an effort was initiated in the fall to “Rescue Transportation” through a privately sponsored constitutional amendment in 2006. Recent statewide polls, however, have shown greater public support for funding issues involving education and public safety.

Accordingly, there is increasing sentiment to work within the framework of the Governor’s budget and a legislatively sponsored constitutional amendment to implement stricter budget controls. While the specifics of such a measure are still being developed, focus is on: creating a firewall around the gasoline sales tax (Proposition 42 funds) and future funding guarantees, trading next year’s Prop 42 funds for a larger share of Indian Gaming Revenues, assessing interest on previous Prop 42 “loans” to be paid back in 15 years, and the Governor’s support for lowering the sales tax voter threshold from the 2/3 voter-approval requirement to 55%.

Santa Cruz County is represented this year by two State Senators, Abel Maldonado and Joseph Simitian. Both State Senators are members of the Senate Transportation Committee, and Assemblyman John Laird is serving as Chair of the Assembly Budget Committee.

Staff proposes to continue to keep the Commission, local agencies and public informed on impacts to local transportation projects resulting from measures to address the state budget.

Federal Issues

Reauthorization of the TEA-21 remains the highest priority transportation issue at the federal level. The House has agreed to a 6 year measure in the amount of \$284 billion, while the Senate is considering a 5 year bill in the amount of \$278 billion. Both Houses of Congress are reportedly interested in early passage of a transportation measure ahead of other appropriation actions and mounting concern with the projected level of the federal deficit.

The Project Evaluation Criteria for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Merge Lanes Project TEA-21 earmark request was transmitted to Congressman Farr’s office prior to the February 7th deadline, with the support of the RTC’s Washington Assistant. Letters of support for the project are forthcoming from AMBAG and Caltrans.

SUMMARY

Based upon input from SCCRTC’s Committees, SCMTD and other Regional Transportation Planning Agencies, staff has revised the Commission’s Draft 2005 Legislative Agenda as submitted in January 2005. Attachment 1 is the proposed final 2004 Legislative Agenda.

Attachments:

1. Draft 2005 Legislative Agenda: Federal and State Issues
2. Summary of Changes to the Draft 2005 Legislative Agenda