

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION
THIRD QUARTER FY 05-06 PROGRESS REPORT
January to March 2006

101 Work Program and Budget

During this quarter, the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) approved an amended FY 05-06 budget and work program and approved a FY 06-07 budget and work program.

General Administration

The Budget and Administration/ Personnel (B&A/P) Committee met five times during this quarter including two closed sessions on the Executive Director recruitment. The Committee directed staff and consultants in the implementation of the RTC's Autonomy Project. The Committee made recommendations to the RTC on a number of items including amendments to the RTC FY05-06 budget, approval of a FY 06-07 budget, recruitment and appointment of a new Executive Director, and establishment of an RSTP Exchange Advance Project Delivery Policy.

112 Plan Coordination

During this quarter, staff attended regular meetings of the California Transportation Commission (CTC), the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) Group, the California Association of Councils of Government (CALCOG), the Caltrans Regional Coordination Group, and the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (SCMTD) Board of Directors.

After input from the RTC committees, the RTC approved the final 2006 State and Federal Legislative Agendas. The RTC discussed infrastructure bond measures, which included funds for transportation, proposed by the Governor and the Legislature for the June 2006 primary election. The RTC took a position advocating use of the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) as a preferred process to identify projects for funding provided through a bond measure. As a fall back position, the RTC in adopted a short list of Proposed Priority Projects in the county in the event the Statewide Transportation Bond Measure focuses on earmarked projects. Staff maintained communication with legislators and their staffs regarding the RTC legislative priorities and support for funding of priority projects. While in Washington DC for the Transportation Research Board (TRB) conference RTC staff met with the staff of the RTC's federal legislators to discuss federal funding for projects.

The Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC) met twice this quarter. Discussions focused on RTIP development, state and federal legislation, and the State Highway Operations and Protection Program (SHOPP).

113 Public Information

The SCCRTC provided the media, local jurisdictions and chambers of commerce press releases about the approval of a project list totaling \$20 million in new state funds to

submit to the California Transportation Commission for the 2006 State Transportation Improvement Program and about the availability of three seats appointed by the SCCRTC on the Transportation Funding Task Force. In addition, the RTC continued to provide information/highlights about Commission actions at its monthly meetings.

SCCRTC staff, Caltrans and City of Santa Cruz staff began implementation of the public information campaign for the Highway 1/17 Interchange Merge Lanes project by mailing a project flyer to everyone within zip code areas near the project. A project hotline was installed which includes weekly updates about project conditions and road closures and Caltrans staff is available to directly answer inquires during regular business hours. In addition, a project enews distribution list was developed and project updates are sent out weekly. Improvements are made to the project web site on an ongoing basis. Work began this quarter on the displays and outreach for an Informational Open House to be held in the 4th Quarter.

In February the RTC authorized the expenditure of funds to produce a Spanish language version of the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project newsletter and work has begun to prepare that document. The proposal to hold Informational Open Houses in late March - early April was revised so as not to conflict with the initial meetings of the Transportation Funding Task Force (TFTF). The meetings are now scheduled to occur in the summer after the initial round of meetings of the TFTF.

Early in this quarter, Caltrans established a website for the Highway 1 Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes project with a hot link from Caltrans's District 5 website. The website features the presentation given by the Highway 1 Consultant Team at the RTC Public Hearing on the Auxiliary Lanes project in November 2005. A draft Summary Report of the combined Open House hosted by Caltrans and RTC's Public Hearing was prepared by the Highway 1 consultants and delivered to Caltrans for review.

Improved organization, updates and maintenance to the current website continued. These included: posting current Commission packets and Committee agendas, minutes and highlights, press releases, meeting schedules and reports and providing links to websites of transportation partners such as Caltrans. The first section of the Commission's redesigned website about the RTC's new Transportation Funding Task Force was developed and will be launched in April. Work on the remainder of the redesigned site continued. Staff continued to administer the E-News program to alert subscribers about news regarding the Commission's high priority projects.

177 Freeway Service Patrol (FSP)

Staff continued to administer the FSP Program including the preparation of invoices and administration of FSP Program contracts. Staff worked with MTC to finalize a new draft Cooperative Agreement for related FSP Program administrative duties shared by MTC and SCCRTC. Staff completed the 2005 FSP Operational and Financial Report. Staff attended the quarterly Statewide Freeway Service Patrol Program meeting where new FSP data collection techniques and performance evaluations for FSP contractors were discussed.

178 Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE)/Call Boxes

SCCRTC staff continued to work with the Commission's call box service providers, including Comarco Wireless Technologies, Cingular wireless and Connections Communications to maintain the system. Staff began to negotiate a contract with Cingular Wireless for call box digital cellular service. Staff developed a call box mobility access site survey to be completed in conjunction with the call box upgrades.

Staff continued to administer the Safe on 17 Program. Staff amended the funding agreement with MTC for the Safe on 17 Program to extend an additional three years. Staff also finalized a new contract with the California Highway Patrol for extra enforcement on Highway 17 through 2008.

Staff worked in conjunction with CHP to host a Safe on 17 Task Force meeting. Meeting participants discussed collision and citation rates on Highway 17 to date for 2006, public outreach for 2006, participation in the Transportation Funding Task Force, communication among different CHP areas and Caltrans districts, Caltrans maintenance and planned Highway 17 safety projects. Staff coordinated and participated in a ride-along with CHP for local media and partner agencies

179 Transportation Demand Management (TDM) - Commuter Services

Through employer contacts, the website, the 429-POOL phone line, and follow up contacts, Commute Solutions produced match lists and provided follow up services and referrals. Staff continued collaborating with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and its new contractor, Parsons Brinckerhoff, for instant on-line ride matching system access and prepared licensing arrangements for Santa Cruz data.

Commission staff prepared Clean Air Month mailers to area employers/organizations for the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments' yearly promotion. Commission staff also continued working with employers, partner agencies, the Santa Cruz Area Transportation Management Association (SCATMA), and the Pajaro Valley Transportation Management Association (PVTMA) on general sustainable transportation outreach. Staff continued to distribute relevant TDM materials developed for the Commission's former Don't Drive One in Five campaign.

Staff worked with the SCATMA on the Folding Bikes in Buses Program development. The grant for the program was secured from the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District with SCCRTC public agency sponsorship. Program development and implementation is being conducted by the SCATMA with SCCRTC collaboration and oversight.

Staff provided assistance to various entities in their promotion of sustainable transportation modes and coordinated with area agencies and employers. Topic highlights have included obesity rates due to inactivity, dispersed land use patterns and dependence on single occupancy vehicles, as well as rising gas prices.

231 Transportation Monitoring and Evaluation

In August, the Commission approved entering into a contract with Field Data Services (FDS) for traffic monitoring services. FDS has now conducted 27 scheduled traffic counts and 4 unscheduled counts (City of Watsonville) during this fiscal year, and the resulting data has been entered into the RTC online traffic count database.

411 Land Use/Transportation Coordination

Staff continued to monitor and review draft environmental documents for projects with potential transportation impacts. Staff provided comments on the University of California at Santa Cruz Long Range Development Plan Draft EIR and Revised Draft EIR. In addition, staff commented on the Glenwood Curve Safety Improvement Project proposed by Caltrans. Staff also commented on the Arana Gulch Master Plan EIR and the Watsonville General Plan.

614 Bicycle and Pedestrian Planning Program

The Bicycle Committee met three times during this quarter. Staff provided the Bicycle Committee with a monthly packet of information on current issues and followed up on projects as directed. Staff organized meetings with local jurisdictions, Board of Supervisors' aides and school district personnel related to the new Watsonville High School's need for improved bike access. Staff also wrote letters in response to draft environmental reports on behalf of the Bicycle Committee.

Staff attended monthly meetings of the Community Traffic Safety Coalition, coordinating with this group on issues relating to bicycle and pedestrian safety throughout the county. Staff continued to coordinate with the Electric Bicycle and the Bike to Work/School Programs and prepared reports for the Commission's consideration of continued funding to the alternative transportation programs.

Staff communicated with public works department staff at the various local jurisdictions regarding bicycle hazard report forms submitted by members of the public. Staff distributed bike racks through the Bikes Secure Program and advertised the program to area entities.

Staff continued implementing and promoting the new Pedestrian Access Reporting Program whereby members of the public report sidewalk problems and other pedestrian access issues to the Commission. Commission staff then forwarded the submitted forms and followed-up with local jurisdictions.

621 Specialized Transportation

During this quarter, the Elderly and Disabled Transportation Advisory Committee (E/D TAC) met once. Discussion focused on: taxi ordinances, the inclusion of elderly and disabled provisions in the SCCRTC's legislative agenda, selection of a local review committee for the Section 5310 grant applications and representation on the Transportation Funding Task Force. Also included were reports and presentations from service providers and planning staff.

622 Regional Transportation Plan

Staff continued to work with local agencies to implement the projects and policies included in the *Regional Transportation Plan* through their planning and capital improvement program actions and monitor projects to ensure consistency with the RTP.

631 Transportation System Management

Staff hosted a Traffic Operation Systems Oversight Committee meeting in conjunction with the joint Safe on 17 Task Force. The Committee discussed the handling of incidents on the Highway 17 corridor, the use of Changeable Message Signs and the Highway Advisory Radios, communications between stakeholders, Highway 17 safety projects and maintenance needs and the coordination between Traffic Management Centers in Caltrans Districts 4 and 5. Staff also reviewed the TOS elements associated with the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Improvements Project including the live web feed of traffic cameras.

Staff continued to coordinate with Caltrans and the CHP on enhancements to the existing traffic information system. Staff discussed the opportunities to provide live web feed of existing and new traffic cameras to the public via internet.

641 Transportation Improvement Program

Staff prepared the *2006 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP)* and coordinated a public hearing on the proposed project list. Public hearing notices and news releases were distributed to the media and members of public. Staff monitored indicators at the state level which may affect the inclusion of the Santa Cruz County RTIP in the *2006 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)*.

Staff attended monthly meetings of the California Transportation Commission and the Regional Transportation Planning Agencies group that centered on the impacts of the state budget on State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and State Highway Operation Protection Program (SHOPP) projects and proposals for the 2006 STIP.

Transportation Funding Task Force

This project has been the major focus of staff time this quarter, with the majority of staff devoting some or all of their time to launching the project. Tasks included: hosting two orientation meetings for Transportation Funding Task Force members; developing a Participation Guide with input from all local transportation partners on past/present/future projects; developing a Workbook to gain input on the public's perception of problems/solutions/funding options; developing and posting a project website and an interactive version of the Workbook on the website; translation of materials into Spanish; securing five workshop locations that meet specific criteria (night time bus service, handicap accessible, bike and car parking, availability of tables/chairs and a mix of weekday evenings/weekends); and development of outreach materials for the upcoming workshops. To assist in accomplishing this ambitious project, weekly planning meetings were held with convener Fred Keeley, consultants and staff.

682 **Rail/Trail Authority**

Staff and consultants negotiated necessary amendments to the right of entry agreement with Union Pacific in order to produce a detailed assessment of select structures on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line. The RTC authorized the expenditure for a contract with HNTB Corporation to produce the detailed assessment and with Biggs Cardosa Associates for peer review of the work. Union Pacific provided all of the information required for the detailed structural assessment work including as-built plans, inspection information, maintenance records, information on recent repairs and current freight loads. HNTB Corporation initiated the work. Union Pacific completed their repairs to the La Selva Beach Trestle before the detailed structures assessment began.

Staff and consultants began their review of the draft agreement for the \$10 million Coastal Conservancy reimbursable grant. The reimbursable grant agreement language will be reviewed by the RTC in the fourth quarter for approval.

The RTC received a comprehensive report on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line Acquisition project and approved a revised timeline for the project. The RTC also decided on producing a general inspection of the entire rail line. Staff began seeking proposals for the work. Staff and consultants continued to work with the appraisers to ensure completion of the appraisals soon.

The Rail Acquisition Task Force met several times during this period and worked with staff on language for the amendments to the right of entry agreement, potential changes to the review appraisal contract and other aspects of the project.

The RTC continued to negotiate with Union Pacific on the rail line acquisition through its negotiator, Kirk Trost of Miller, Owen and Trost, and the RTC was informed of progress in closed sessions.

Staff and consultants continued to work on the responses to all of the received comments for the draft environmental impact report (EIR) for the proposed recreational rail service between Capitola and Aptos with an extension to Seascapes.

683 **Highway 1 Widening- Project Approval/Environmental Document (PA/ED)**

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RTC staff, Caltrans staff and consultants worked on identifying acceptable design exceptions to define the Standard and Reduced Geometry Alternatives. Well defined project foot prints help to minimize the environmental analyses required and reduce costs. Consensus on the footprint of the respective build alternatives is expected by the Spring of 2006.

Preliminary traffic projections of the existing and 2035 projected conditions for the build and no-build scenarios were produced and submitted to Caltrans and local agency staff for review. The traffic data includes traffic volumes at various locations along the Highway 1 corridor from Larkin Valley to Highway 17, and at select locations on Soquel Drive, Capitola Road and Park Avenue. This information together with the freeway ramp volumes will be used to determine freeway design requirements to better accommodate the projected traffic demand.

The Highway 1 consultants and staff initiated meetings with staff of the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) to discuss design criteria and potential areas where transit facilities could be located within the highway rights-of-way, potentially on the freeway on and off ramps. This assessment is being conducted as part of the project alternative, entitled "Improved Transit Access at Interchanges". The goal is to augment the HOV Lane Build Alternatives by improving transit access to/from the HOV lanes thereby optimizing potential bus service realized through the construction of HOV lanes.

The Highway 1 Project Development Team continues to review details of the project schedule to determine if any time savings can be realized in the PA/ED process. The current schedule leads to selection of the preferred project alternative in the Fall of 2007. Approval of the Environmental Document is currently scheduled for January 2010, nearly two years later than originally anticipated, if subsurface archaeological excavation is required following identification of the preferred alternative.

Chris Metzger, the Highway 1 Consultant Project Manager provided an update on the project schedule as part of the Highway 1 Quarterly Progress Report presented to the RTC in March. To prepare for the potential increase in contract costs resulting from the extended project schedule, an additional \$500,000 is requested for the PA/ED phase in the RTC's 2006 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) submitted to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) for approval. The request for additional funding in the STIP does not authorize the expenditure of those funds. The RTC will have to take a separate action to amend the consultant contract, and this action would occur later in the project schedule only if the contract increase becomes necessary.

As discussed elsewhere in this report, the proposed Informational Open Houses for the Highway 1 project, previously scheduled for late March – early April, are now scheduled for the Summer 2006. Work continues on preparation of a Highway 1 newsletter including preparation of a Spanish language version of the newsletter.

Highway 1 Soquel Avenue to Morrissey Boulevard Auxiliary Lanes Project

The Highway 1 consultants prepared a draft Summary Report of the November 2005 Open House and Public Hearing. The report was submitted to Caltrans for review and will be incorporated into the environmental documentation for the project.

At the RTC's request, the RTC's counsel in the Office of the County Counsel prepared a legal opinion evaluating the proposed Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project to determine whether it is in compliance with state and federal rules which prohibit "piece mealing" projects through the development process. After reviewing historic actions taken by Caltrans and the RTC regarding this project, including review of a draft Logical Termini Paper prepared by Caltrans, RTC's counsel concluded in March 2006 that the project does not constitute an improper piece mealing or segmentation under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) or the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Caltrans, the Highway 1 consultants, and staff worked on a range of activities to secure funding and initiate the next step of the project development process. A final draft of the

Supplemental Project Study Report (PSR) was submitted to Caltrans for approval (to replace the expired PSR prepared by Caltrans in 2002) and thereby qualifies the project for funding in the 2006 STIP. Early in this quarter, staff was informed that Caltrans District 5's request for \$1.9 million in Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP) funds for this project would not be granted in the current program cycle due to cost increases of existing ITIP approved projects.

Accordingly, staff prepared a funding proposal to complete the funding package for the project with new funds in the 2006 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). At a minimum, sufficient non-federal match funds are necessary to draw on the available \$2.9 million federal earmark secured by Congressman Farr and available in the new federal transportation bill (Safe Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA – LU)) to advance the project to the next phase.

The recommendation of the Supplemental PSR, is to prepare a mitigated Categorical Exemption to satisfy environmental documentation requirements on this project. Preparation of this environmental document is anticipated to take 18 –to- 24 months to complete and is estimated to cost \$1 million. Some cost savings will be realized due to the environmental and design activity already underway as part of the Highway 1 HOV Lane Project.

683 Highway 1 Planning

Highway 1 Construction Authority (HCA)

The HCA did not meet through this period.

Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes Project

Caltrans awarded a contract for the tree removal associated with the project but did not issue a notice-to-proceed pending receipt of the construction bids. Caltrans received five construction bids and the lowest bid was about 21% above the engineers' estimates due to recent increases in the price of construction materials and fuel. Due to the number of bids, the fact that the lowest bid was a sound responsible bid and the fact that other construction projects around the State were getting bids at even higher levels above the engineers' estimates, Caltrans was confident that the additional funding would be secured. Therefore, Caltrans issued a notice-to-proceed for the tree removal to ensure that trees were removed before the birds' nesting season and prevent a one year delay in the project. Caltrans appealed to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) staff for the additional funding needed. The CTC Executive Director approved the additional funding making this the only one out of 19 in the State to receive the additional funding necessary through the CTC staff authority. Caltrans awarded the construction contract and began preparations for construction.

City of Santa Cruz staff and RTC staff in cooperation with Caltrans staff began the public awareness campaign (as shown in the Public Information section above) and made preparations for their responsibilities in the traffic management plan.

Santa Cruz Area Transportation Management Association

631 TMA Outreach Services Program

The progress report is being submitted with the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Transportation Systems Management quarterly invoice.

LOCAL JURISDICTION PLANNING PROJECTS FUNDED BY FEDERAL CMAQ/STP AND STATE TSM FUNDS

The progress reports are attached to the invoices.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION PROGRAM (STP) EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Staff made payments to projects previously approved to receive RSTP Exchange funds and continued to monitor projects receiving those funds. Staff worked with County Counsel to refine the ITAC's recommended revisions to the Commission's RSTPX policy.

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