

DATE: March 1, 2007

TO: Regional Transportation Commission

FROM: George Dondero, Executive Director  
Kim Shultz, Senior Planner

RE: 2007 Annual Transportation Research Board Meeting and Meetings with  
Federal Delegation

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

This item is for information only.

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## **BACKGROUND**

Each year in January the RTC sends one or two staff members to the annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board (TRB) in Washington D.C. The trip also affords time to meet with congressional representatives and their staff and inform them of the RTC's priorities, develop strategies for upcoming legislation or regulatory issues, and provide progress reports on existing or recently completed projects in Santa Cruz County.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) Legislative Assistants Carolyn Chaney and Chris Giglio arranged meetings with staff of Senators Boxer and Feinstein and Representatives Eshoo and Farr. The RTC Executive Director and Senior Planner Kim Shultz provided information packets, and quick overviews on the RTC Federal Legislative Agenda. As the Majority Chair of the Environment and Public Works Committee, Senator Boxer places California in a better position as new federal transportation bills are being crafted. The two major issues to be addressed are the writing of the next authorization bill for transportation funding and developing a means of restoring and or improving the level of revenues available to transportation in years ahead.

Current predictions are that the federal Highway Trust Fund will be depleted by 2009 or 2010 if nothing changes. The trust fund is the holding pot for federal fuel tax revenues, and is distributed to the states through various programs defined every six years. The current program goes by the acronym of SAFETE-LU. The Bush Administration has appointed the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission to study the issue and provide recommendations on how to address the problem of meeting increasing needs with a declining revenue source. Not surprisingly, the issue was the subject of a full day workshop at the TRB Meeting, and the focus of many sessions throughout the week. The commission's work to date has emphasized looking to private-

public partnerships (P3) to meet the revenue challenge. That solution has seen less than enthusiastic response from many Democratic Senators as well as many transportation professionals. While toll roads and congestion pricing have utility in certain situations and could provide some new revenue, it is not likely they will provide an overall solution to the shortfall in revenues.

Congresswoman Eshoo and Congressman Farr both met with the RTC group and were supportive of RTC's efforts to implement a multi-modal approach to addressing the county's transportation needs. Congress has determined to change its practice regarding federal earmark projects, so no suggestions were made for this type of funding. Past earmarks awarded prior to the current federal fiscal year remain viable, however.

Carolyn Chaney and Chris Giglio produced a summary update of federal transportation issues and it is included as Attachment 1. Staff attended a number of TRB sessions and produced a summary of some of those sessions (Attachment 2).

## **SUMMARY**

Every year staff attends the annual TRB meeting in Washington, DC and meets with federal legislators and their staffs. Staff discussed with legislators transportation projects and issues in Santa Cruz County as well as federal transportation issues. Staff attended a number of TRB sessions and a summary of some of those sessions is included.

Attachment 1: Federal Transportation Update from Carolyn Chaney and Chris Giglio  
Attachment 2: Summary of Some of the Sessions Attended by Staff at the TRB's 86<sup>th</sup>  
Annual Meeting