

2005 Regional Transportation Plan Executive Summary

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (herein referred to as “the Commission”) periodically completes a *Regional Transportation Plan* to guide short- and long-range transportation planning and project implementation for the county. This *2005 Regional Transportation Plan* (called the “*2005 RTP*”) is a minor update of the last version, completed in 2001, and provides guidance for transportation policy and projects through the year 2030. The *2005 RTP* is the Commission’s comprehensive planning document, which identifies the goals, projects, and programs that will improve and maintain our transportation system over the next twenty-five years. Individual projects listed in the *2005 RTP* must still undergo separate design and environmental processes, and can only be implemented as local, state and federal funds become available.

2005 PLAN ORGANIZATION

The *2005 RTP* is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter One	Introduction
Chapter Two	Our Transportation System
Chapter Three	Goals and Policies
Chapter Four	The Investment Program
Chapter Five	Environmental and Air Quality Review of the <i>2005 RTP</i>

DEVELOPING THE 2005 RTP

The *2005 RTP* is a minor update of the *2001 Plan* and continues to build upon the 1999 *Major Transportation Investment Study (MTIS)*, which focused on the most heavily traveled corridor in the county—between Watsonville, Santa Cruz and the University of California at Santa Cruz. Unlike the 1999 *MTIS* study, however, the *2005 RTP* addresses the existing transportation system and transportation needs of the entire county. Such a comprehensive plan necessarily involves the cooperation of many local, regional and state agencies. Public input is also critical to the Commission’s planning and decision-making process. Comments from a wide range of individuals, public interest groups, and local agencies have been solicited throughout the *2005 RTP*’s development. For the year and a half that the *2005 RTP* was under development, public outreach was conducted through televised public meetings, website information, materials at local libraries, and presentations to community groups. Additionally, in submitting projects for consideration, project sponsors took into consideration input they received directly from the public.

INCREASED TRAFFIC CONGESTION AND COMPETING DEMANDS FOR LIMITED TRANSPORTATION DOLLARS

Public sentiment on policy and funding decisions can be strong in Santa Cruz County, and transportation issues are no exception. The growth of traffic congestion in the county has caused much public outcry and the community has expressed many ideas about how the limited funds available for highway, transit, road, and alternative transportation projects should be spent. A number of factors are clear:

- **Santa Cruz County has a rich multi-modal transportation network.** The county's existing transportation network comprises a broad range of transportation facilities and modes, including: state highways, local roads and streets, an extensive bus system and specialized transport system for seniors and people with disabilities, rail lines, bikeways, sidewalks, an airport, and traffic management systems such as carpool programs, Park and Ride lots, Intelligent Transportation System technology, and signal synchronization. This "multi-modal" transportation network is crucial to meeting the travel needs of all county residents, including drivers, non-drivers and commercial traffic. Notably, approximately one-third of county residents do not drive, and an aging population is likely to increase the demand for transit, safe pedestrian routes, and specialized transport services.
- **Traffic in Santa Cruz County is worsening,** and congestion will not go away in the foreseeable future. Population growth and region-wide jobs to housing imbalances that encourage driving as the mode of choice result in more drivers making more automobile trips. The daily traffic jams on Highway 1 are only the most obvious example of increasing congestion on county roadways.
- **Transit service is limited by available revenues.** In response to reduced revenues from the half-cent local transit sales tax, route cuts and service reductions have resulted in a decline in ridership since 2000.
- **Maintenance needs for the existing transportation network are increasing.** Roadway, bikeway, sidewalk, bridge and other repairs must be addressed in parallel with capacity and operational enhancements. If ongoing routine maintenance needs are not addressed, the cost of deferred maintenance will grow exponentially, leaving little funding for major improvements.
- **The complexity of transportation solutions is increasing** as communities find that new projects must be shoe-horned into existing urban areas. Adding new highway lanes, widening city streets, building new roads, adding passenger rail service, or building new bus facilities are neither simple nor inexpensive propositions. Project delays, environmental concerns, neighborhood opposition, and right-of-way needs can increase cost, and, in some cases, may cause a funded project to be withdrawn.
- **All transportation modes and facilities are subsidized with public funding generated from tax revenues**—including freeways, local roads, bus and rail transit, and transportation for people with special needs. Many of the subsidies are indirect and are not covered in the *2005 RTP* or administered by the Commission. Examples of indirect transportation subsidies include pollution

clean-up costs, law enforcement/emergency costs and parking subsidies.

- **Since 1998 the Commission has gained more control of the local share of state and federal funds**, even though the vast majority of transportation funding is dedicated to specific uses—such as airport improvements, highway safety and transit operations. Funding flexibility allows decisions to mirror local priorities.
- **The ebb and flow of federal, state, regional, and local funding affects project timing.** Many needed projects have been delayed several years as the result of downturns in the economy. For example, the State diverted over \$5.5 billion from transportation coffers between 2002 and 2005 to fund non-transportation programs in the State General Fund. Long-planned projects, such as the Highway 1/17 Merge Lanes project, have been delayed several times over the past 15 years as a result of these economic cycles.
- **Existing funds are insufficient** to finance major transportation improvements and ongoing maintenance. Additionally, the competition for limited state and federal funds favors large urban areas with local sources of revenues, such as local transportation sales taxes. New revenue sources will be needed to make major modifications to our transportation system and to eliminate the backlog of maintenance needs.
- **Reaching consensus on transportation improvements is difficult**, especially in light of limited funds, competing interests, and the inevitable impacts of major projects. In an attempt to generate sufficient funds for local transportation projects, the Commission proposed a new half-cent sales tax on the November 2004 ballot. Though voters rejected this first attempt, efforts continue to generate consensus and the 2005 RTP assumes that voters will approve a new tax in the next few years.

GOALS AND POLICIES

Extensive public participation and input from a variety of other sources—public and private agency comments, the 1994 *Regional Transportation Plan*, the 1999 *Major Transportation Investment Study*, the federal Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century, and regional transportation plans from other areas in California—helped shape the 2001 RTP's Goals and Policies. The 2005 RTP carries over these goals, which are to:

- Preserve and maintain the existing transportation system, emphasizing safety and efficiency.
- Increase mobility by providing an improved and integrated multi-modal transportation system.
- Coordinate land-use and transportation decisions to ensure that the region's social, cultural, and economic vitality are sustained for current and future generations.
- Ensure that the transportation system complements and enhances the natural environment of the Monterey Bay region.
- Make the most efficient use of limited transportation financial resources.

- Solicit broad public input on all aspects of regional and local transportation plans, projects, and funding.

THE INVESTMENT PROGRAM

The Goals and Policies—along with local priorities, potential environmental impacts, safety, economic and transportation equity considerations, funding constraints, and identified gaps in the existing transportation network—provided the basis for the identification of approximately 500 transportation improvement projects and programs that are needed to address the region’s mobility, accessibility, and economic and environmental sustainability needs over the next 25 years. Together with a discussion of how they will be funded, these projects and programs constitute the 2005 RTP’s “Investment Program”.

FUNDING PROJECTION

During the next 25 years, approximately \$2.9 billion from federal, state, and local funding sources is projected to be available to finance transportation projects in Santa Cruz County. Because federal law requires that the total cost of the *Within Projected Funds* project list does not exceed total expected revenues over the 2005 RTP’s 25-year time span, revenue forecasts are therefore a crucial part of the 2005 RTP.

Of the \$2.9 billion projected to be available for transportation projects in the county, about 87 percent is dedicated to specific types of projects. Almost three-quarters of this dedicated funding is slated for transit service and improvements, with the bulk of the remainder designated for highway projects. A large proportion of transit revenues come from our county’s dedicated half-cent local sales tax for transit.

Approximately 13 percent of the total \$2.9 billion figure is available for discretionary spending, including funds for projects that will be selected by agencies other than the Commission. Discretionary funds under the direct control of the Commission are projected to be approximately \$295 million over the coming 25 years. New for the 2005 RTP is the assumption that the region’s voters will approve a new half-cent transportation sales tax measure in the next few years. It is anticipated that those funds will be dedicated to some of the projects and programs listed in the 2005 RTP. Extensive public outreach will be necessary in order to determine which projects in the plan should be included in the next tax proposal.

It is important to note that the new sales tax measure funds, Proposition 42 revenues generated from the sales tax on gasoline, and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) funds that are assumed within the financial projections for this plan, are not guaranteed and may not actually be realized, depending on decisions made by voters and the state and federal governments.

However, even if additional transportation half-cent sales tax revenues are realized these projected funds remain insufficient to keep up with maintenance, operational, safety, and major improvement needs of the region. As such, this docu-

ment identifies additional sources for new funds that could be made available for projects included in the *Need New Funds* list. These include new local or state gas taxes, statewide transportation bonds, federal funding “earmarks,” state legislative budget requests, and new grant or transportation impact fee programs.

“WITHIN PROJECTED FUNDS “AND “NEED NEW FUNDS” PROJECT LISTS

Individual projects and programs listed in the Investment Program are divided into two groups based on priority, funding availability, and potential environmental effects. The 2005 RTP’s highest priority transportation improvements, those that can be funded with foreseeable transportation revenues between 2005 and 2030, are listed as *Within Projected Funds* projects (called “Constrained” projects in transportation planning terms). This group includes already funded projects to be constructed in the short term, and planned projects that could be constructed anytime within the 2005 RTP’s 25-year timeline as projected funds become available. A second group of transportation improvements to be implemented if new revenues are generated, or become available, is listed as the *Need New Funds* (“Unconstrained”) set of projects. Some projects are shown on both lists, indicating a need for additional funds to complete the entire project, though portions of those projects may be completed using anticipated funding.

The 2005 RTP assigns future transportation funds to a range of projects and programs designed to provide traffic congestion relief and broaden transportation options. Key proposals include:

- Widening Highway 1 with High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes between Aptos and Santa Cruz (designated the Commission’s Highest Priority Project in 2001)
- Safety and operational improvements to Highways 1, 9, 17, 129 and 152
- Maintenance of existing roads, highways, bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit
- Improvements to major arterial roads, including bus, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, to better accommodate local and commute traffic
- Expanded bus service, with additional Highway 17 Express buses and more Park and Ride lots to serve Silicon Valley, UCSC, and south county commuters
- Acquisition of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line for future transportation uses and construction of a bike/pedestrian path adjacent to the train tracks
- Local bicycle and pedestrian projects designed to improve the feasibility of bicycle commuting, and provide safe bicycle and pedestrian routes to schools
- Expansion of specialized transport services to meet the projected increases in senior and disabled populations
- Increased availability of technology for information about road conditions, transit operations, and other transportation options
- Landscaping and lighting improvements to make transportation corridors part of livable communities
- Airport improvements to serve business, law enforcement, and leisure travelers.

IMPLEMENTING THE INVESTMENT PROGRAM

Development of the *Within Projected Funds* and *Need New Funds* project lists is only the first step towards actual implementation of the projects identified in the 2005 RTP. Prior to the beginning of construction for each project, a number of potentially time-consuming steps must be taken, requiring from 2 to 20 years, depending on the particular project's complexity, impacts, and level of public interest. These steps include: developing a detailed project cost estimate; obtaining local, state and/or federal grants; designing the project; determining the project's environmental impacts according to state and federal laws; securing right-of-way, if necessary; and throughout the process, incorporating public input.

At the same time, state and federal "use it or lose it" regulations, enacted to ensure that transportation funds are used effectively, mean that once projects are approved for funding, they must move forward in a timely manner. The Commission closely monitors the expenditure of federal and state funds for local transportation projects to ensure funds are not lost. The county benefits from the resulting steady progress in project implementation. As new projects identified in the *Within Projected Funds* project list receive funding during grant cycles (which occur roughly every two years), the Commission will monitor their implementation.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND AIR QUALITY REVIEW OF THE 2005 RTP

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) requires that the environmental effects of the 2005 RTP be fully analyzed. This analysis was prepared as a separate program level *Environmental Impact Report* (EIR), released along with the 2005 RTP. The EIR was prepared in coordination with the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) and the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) and analyzes the potential environmental impacts of alternative transportation investment scenarios and other aspects of this 2005 RTP, as well as the 2005 *Monterey County Regional Transportation Plan* and AMBAG's 2005 *Metropolitan Transportation Plan*. The EIR also identifies potential mitigation measures for impacts of certain types of projects. The EIR does not analyze impacts of, or mitigations for, individual projects, as each project will undergo a separate environmental review process. The respective agency sponsors will conduct this project-specific review once funding is received and the project development process is initiated.

In addition to the EIR, an air quality assessment of the 2005 RTP has been prepared by AMBAG as part of the development of its 2005 *Metropolitan Transportation Plan* for Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties, which comprise the regional air basin. Through this analysis the plans were found to be in conformity with air quality standards.