

2001 Regional Transportation Plan Executive Summary

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (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 *2001 Regional Transportation Plan* (called the “*2001 Plan*”) updates the last version, completed in 1994, and provides guidance for transportation policy and projects through the year 2025. Both a vision for improving mobility in Santa Cruz County and a detailed list of the projects and programs that will transform the vision into transportation solutions, the *2001 Plan* is the Commission’s comprehensive planning document. Individual projects listed in the *2001 Plan* must still undergo separate design and environmental processes, and can be implemented as local, state and federal funds become available.

2001 PLAN ORGANIZATION

The *2001 Plan* is organized into the following chapters:

Chapter One	Introduction
Chapter Two	Today’s Transportation System
Chapter Three	Goals and Policies
Chapter Four	The Investment Program
Chapter Five	Environmental and Air Quality Review of the <i>2001 Plan</i>

TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND PUBLIC INPUT

The *2001 Plan* builds 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 *2001 Plan* 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, and comments from a wide range of individuals, public interest groups, and local agencies have been solicited at every stage of the *2001 Plan*’s development. For the year and a half that the *2001 Plan* was under development, public outreach was conducted through televised public hearings, web site information, materials at local libraries, mailers and presentations.

WORSENING 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 in recent years has caused much public outcry and the community has had many ideas about how the limited funds available for highway, transit, road and alternative transportation projects within the county should be spent. A number of other factors are clear, however:

- **Santa Cruz County has a rich multimodal 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 and sidewalks; an airport; and traffic management systems such as carpool programs, Park and Ride lots, Intelligent Transportation System technology, and signal synchronization. This "multimodal" transportation network is crucial to meeting the travel needs of all county residents, including drivers and non-drivers. Nearly 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 near future. There are more drivers making more automobile trips, and patterns of land-use and development continue to encourage driving. The daily rush-hour traffic jams on Highway 1 are only the most obvious example of increasing congestion on county roadways.
- **Maintenance needs for the county's existing transportation network are mounting.** Roadway, bikeway, sidewalk, bridge and other repairs must be addressed in parallel with capacity and operational enhancements to ensure optimal use and capacity of the county's transportation system.
- **Transit ridership in the county is increasing,** up 17 percent over ridership a decade ago. This trend is occurring in many other areas throughout the state.
- **The Commission has more control of the local share of state and federal funds than at any time in recent history,** even though a high percentage 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 complexity of transportation solutions is increasing** as communities find that new projects must be shoe-horned into built up urban areas. Adding new highway lanes, widening city streets, or increasing transit capacity by building new bus facilities is not a simple nor inexpensive proposition. 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 *2001 Plan*. Examples of indirect transportation subsidies include pollution clean-up costs, law enforcement/emergency costs and fuel cost subsidies.

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 Plan's* Goals and Policies. The goals of this plan are:

- Preserve and maintain the existing transportation system, emphasizing safety and efficiency.
- Increase mobility by providing an improved and integrated multimodal transportation system.
- Coordinate land-use and transportation decisions to ensure that the region's social, cultural, and economic vitality is 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 selection of almost 500 transportation improvement projects and programs that will address the region's mobility, accessibility, 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 *2001 Plan's* Investment Program.

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 *2001 Plan's* highest priority transportation improvements, those that can be funded with foreseeable transportation revenues between 2001 and 2025, are listed as *Within Projected Funds* projects (called "Constrained" projects in transportation planning terms). This group includes already programmed projects to be constructed in the short term, and other planned projects which could be constructed anytime within the *2001 Plan's* full timeline. 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.

Building on the results of the *1999 Major Transportation Investment Study*, the *2001 Plan* relies on a comprehensive program of improvements. The *2001 Plan* 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 or High Occupancy Toll lanes between Aptos and Santa Cruz (Highest Priority Project)
- Safety and operational improvements to Highways 1, 9, 17, 129 and 152
- 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 right-of-way for future transportation uses and construction of a bike/pedestrian path adjacent to the train tracks
- Local bicycle projects and a program subsidizing residents’ purchase of electric bicycles, all designed to improve the feasibility of bicycle commuting
- 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

FUNDING PROJECTION

During the next 25 years, approximately \$1.94 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 *2001 Plan’s* 25-year time span, revenue forecasts are a crucial part of the *2001 Plan*.

Of the \$1.94 billion projected to be available for transportation projects in the county, about 78 percent is dedicated, according to local, state and federal laws, to specific types of projects. Almost three-quarters of this dedicated funding is slated for transit improvements, with the bulk of the remainder designated for highway projects. A large proportion of transit revenues come from the dedicated half-cent local sales tax for transit. Approximately 22 percent of the total \$1.94 billion figure is available for discretionary spending, including funds that will be spent by agencies other than the Commission. Discretionary funds under the direct control of the Commission are projected to be approximately \$340 million over the coming 25 years.

Potential sources for new funds that could be made available for *Need New Funds* projects include local sales or gas taxes, statewide transportation bonds, federal funding “earmarks,” state legislative budget requests, and new grant or impact fee programs.

IMPLEMENTING THE INVESTMENT PROGRAM

Completion of the *Within Projected Funds* and *Need New Funds* projects lists is only the first step towards actual implementation of the projects, as the majority of the projects are not yet scheduled to receive funding. Prior to the beginning of construction, a number of potentially time-consuming steps must be taken, requiring from 2 to 20 years, depending on the particular project’s complexity and level of public interest. These steps include: developing a detailed project cost estimate and initial design; incorporating public input; obtaining local, state and/or federal grants; creating a final design for the project; and determining the project’s environmental impacts according to state and federal laws.

At the same time, new state “use it or lose it” regulations enacted to ensure that transportation improvement funds are used effectively mean that once projects are approved for funding, they must move forward in a timely manner. The Commission is closely monitoring the expenditure of federal and state funds for transportation projects proposed by local agencies, and to date these monitoring efforts have been successful: almost all grant recipients have met funding deadlines or obtained extensions, and 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 that occur roughly every two years, the Commission will monitor their implementation.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND AIR QUALITY REVIEW OF THE 2001 PLAN

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) requires that the environmental effects of the *2001 Plan* be fully analyzed. This analysis was prepared as a separate *Environmental Impact Report* (EIR) released along with the *2001 Plan*. The EIR analyzes the potential environmental impacts of alternative transportation investment scenarios and other aspects of the *2001 Plan*. It also identifies potential mitigation measures for impacts of the transportation program as a whole. The EIR does not analyze impacts of, or mitigation for, individual projects, as these undergo a separate environmental review process conducted by their agency sponsors once they receive funding and are ready to be developed.

In addition to the EIR, an air quality assessment of the *2001 Plan* will be prepared by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments as part of the development of its *2002 Metropolitan Transportation Plan* for Santa Cruz, Monterey and San Benito Counties, which comprise the regional air basin.