TO: Regional Transportation Commission (RTC)  
FROM: George Dondero, Executive Director  
RE: Director’s Report  

For Information Only

Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (Branch Line) Acquisition Project

RTC Commissioners, consultants and staff have been working diligently to communicate with and provide information to Caltrans staff, California Transportation Commission (CTC) staff and CTC Commissioners. Past and present local legislators and members of the community joined in the effort. In particular Senator Joe Simitian and his staff have been extremely helpful. The initial Caltrans and CTC staff reports recommended that the Branch Line Acquisition not be funded. Those recommendations have changed thanks to the efforts of everyone involved in providing additional information and highlighting the facts that make this a good project and illustrate that the RTC has met all requirements and conditions. Caltrans will now recommend that the CTC approve the RTC’s funding request and CTC staff will take a neutral position.

CTC Commissioner Carl Guardino continues to be a strong supporter of the project. Other CTC Commissioners have also expressed support and some CTC Commissioners have expressed some concerns. Everyone involved is working to address those concerns. The project is on the CTC agenda for Wednesday, January 19th and the meeting will be held in Sacramento beginning at 1:30 pm. RTC Commission Chair Mark Stone will be at the CTC meeting and will address the Commissioners. RTC Commissioner John Leopold and members of the community are also planning to attend the CTC meeting and show support for the project.

RTC staff and consultants have been working with the Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Department, Granite Construction and the Central Coast Regional Water Control Board to ensure that the work to address contamination on the Branch Line next to the Granite Construction facility in Watsonville continues. The Central Coast Regional Water Control Board and the Santa Cruz County Environmental Health Department have reviewed the soil and water sampling work done by ARCADIS U.S. Inc. under contract with Union Pacific. Additional sampling work will be necessary.
Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Federal Planning Funds

One of the main sources of funding used to fulfill the RTC’s federal planning responsibilities is the FHWA federal planning funds. These funds are assigned by formula to the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG) as the region’s Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). The funds are then divided among the transportation planning agencies of the region - AMBAG, RTC and the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) - by formula agreed to by those agencies. Based on that agreement AMBAG retains 50% of the FHWA planning funds plus the portion corresponding to San Benito Council of Governments (SBCOG). The remainder of the funds is distributed to RTC and TAMC.

RTC and TAMC recently received a letter from AMBAG stating that they will be working with their Executive Committee and their Board to retain a higher percentage of these funds and distribute less to RTC and TAMC due to the added planning responsibilities imposed by SB375. SB375 is also imposing additional requirements on RTC and TAMC. AMBAG has been very successful in securing grant funds for the Blueprint planning process, improvement and update of the regional transportation model, development of a sustainable communities strategy and addressing other requirements of SB375, including a recent grant of $750,000. In addition, AMBAG uses RTC’s and TAMC’s state and local planning funds as match funds for the federal funds and grants that they receive. TAMC and RTC staff believe that shifting federal money away from RTC, TAMC and SBCOG to meet their state planning requirements and address their other budget shortfalls is not appropriate. TAMC has already written a letter to AMBAG opposing this strategy and I plan to do same on behalf of the RTC. TAMC and RTC staff will also work together to communicate this opposition to AMBAG board members. AMBAG intends to put this item on their February agenda.

Meeting with Harbor High School District

On January 5th, RTC staff, project consultants, and key Caltrans staff attended a meeting at Harbor High School to discuss issues related to the Soquel/Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes Project. The focus of discussion was on the noise studies taken as part of the environmental studies and proposed mitigation actions to be taken associated with the removal and reconstruction of the La Fonda Avenue Overcrossing.

Participants in that meeting included John Collins, Trustee of the Santa Cruz City Schools, Gary Bloom, Superintendent and Alvaro Meza, Assist Superintendent; Richard Davis and Henry Michel, Harbor High Principal and Vice-Principal, respectively; a couple of teachers, and a few parents, and students.

It was a productive meeting in terms of explaining methodology used in conducting the noise studies, state and federal standards used to justify noise attenuation actions, and a pledge from RTC staff to continue to work with the school and the district to investigate potential funding opportunities to address existing conditions at the school.
Court hearing date set
The Sacramento Superior Court has set a hearing date of March 4 to consider the outcome of the legal action against the environmental document for the Soquel-Morrissey Auxiliary Lanes project.

Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce presentation
On January 12 Senior Planner Karena Pushnik and I made a presentation to members of the Pajaro Valley Chamber at the Green Valley Grill. The noon session was part of the Chamber’s “Lunch and Learn” series. We provided an overview of RTC’s programs and responsibilities, some highlights of current and recent projects, and introduced some key issues contributing to sustainable transportation. A lively discussion followed the talk.

Specialized Transportation Guides available
Guides for Specialized Transportation for Seniors and People with Disabilities living in Santa Cruz County are now available. Copies have been provided to commissioners, and they are available at the table as one enters this chamber. The public may contact our office or drop by for free copies of this great resource.

RTC’s Transportation Cafe
Just a reminder that anyone can view the most recent offering of our very own hosted program on Community TV on their website at:

http://www.communitytv.org/programs/online/rtcs-transportation-cafe-2-bike-ped

(or just go to the homepage, and do a search on "transportation café").

This episode focuses on how to get around safely on foot or bicycle in Santa Cruz County. The 15 minute program features RTC Senior Planner Karena Pushnik as host, Senior Planner and Bicycle Coordinator Cory Colletti, and Veronica Elsea, Chair of the RTC Pedestrian Safety Workgroup.
Preliminary Summary
Governor Brown’s January 2011 State Budget Proposal

On January 10, 2011, Governor Brown released his State Budget proposal. Based on a preliminary review of the budget, RTC staff has prepared the following summary of proposals that may impact local transportation programs and projects. Caltrans and California Transportation Commission (CTC) staffs are currently reviewing the proposal and will provide additional analysis at the CTC meeting next week.

1. Tax Swap for Transportation: The Governor’s budget recognizes that with passage of Prop 26 the “gas tax swap” will need to be reenacted by 2/3s of the legislature. As described in the staff report for the RTC’s January 13 meeting, if this swap is not reenacted, State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), local streets and roads, and transit funding will be severely reduced. Staff recommends that the RTC support the Governor’s proposal. If it is not approved, the following could be impacted locally:
   a. STIP Projects: RTC planning and programming functions and rail line acquisition and improvements
   b. Local Streets and Roads: approx. $3.8M/year to cities and County
   c. Transit: Metro’s share of diesel sales tax revenues

2. Bond sales: The Governor’s budget includes $2.3B for Proposition 1B bond projects. We are awaiting additional information on how this compares to the backlog of needs/programmed projects statewide. The Governor indicated at his press conference that there would be no spring 2011 bond sale. If a bond sale is not forthcoming, the CTC may postpone the release of funds to some projects and will not have funds for other projects anticipating allocations in the next few months. Outstanding Proposition 1B bond-funded projects in our region:
   a. Prop 1B CMIA Program: Soquel-Morrissey Aux Lane construction
   b. Prop 1B PTMISEA Program: Santa Cruz Metro projects
   c. Prop 1B State-Local Partnership Program: Metro’s unallocated share is approximately $5M through FY11/12.

3. Planning Program Project Initiation Document (PID) Workload: The Governor proposes to shift the cost of development of these preliminary planning documents onto local agencies. This is a carryover of Schwarzenegger’s line item veto last fall. It will immediately impact projects which the Cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville are working on (San Lorenzo River Bridge widening and Main Street/Hwy 152 - Freedom Blvd Roundabout). The RTC’s 2011 Legislative Program notes that it is opposed to this shift of oversight costs onto locals.

4. Elimination of Redevelopment Agencies (RDA): The Governor’s proposal to eliminate RDA could impact transportation programs and projects. Locally many transportation projects are funded through RDAs, including roadway repairs, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and the planned Highways 1/9 intersection modifications.

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Helheim Glacier

This large glacier in southeastern Greenland had a recent increase in speed, which was paired with a thinning of its ice front.

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Helheim Glacier empties into Sermeq Fjord, where temperature measurements reveal deep layers of warm water, which may be melting the glacier from below and increasing iceberg calving.
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Related Links

As Glaciers Melt, Science Seeks Data on Rising Seas

SLIDE SHOW: Reading Earth's Future in Glacial Ice
Restless Ice

Many of Greenland’s glaciers flow directly into the sea, carving fjords and forming massive walls of ice that periodically calve icebergs into the water.

Glacial earthquakes caused by iceberg calving can be detected around the world. The number of these “icequakes” in Greenland has more than tripled since 1993.

For more information:

Google search “As Glaciers Melt, Science Seeks Data on Rising Seas” to see online extended New York Times front page story (November 14, 2010) with added slide show. Click on the “Justin Gillis” reporter’s byline to see additional related stories.

In person: UC Santa Cruz Earth Sciences Department is sponsoring a seminar on Tuesday, January 18, 2011, with climate researcher Dr. Jason Box of Ohio State University, Byrd Polar Research Center. Topic: “Arctic climate dynamism and the changing Greenland ice reservoir.” 4pm, Thimmann Lecture Hall, Room 1, UCSC. More info: google search “whole earth seminar ucsc.”