

# 2010 SANTA CRUZ COUNTY REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**T**he Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (herein referred to as the “RTC” or “Commission”) periodically completes a Regional Transportation Plan to guide short- and long-range transportation planning and project implementation for the county.

This 2010 Regional Transportation Plan (called the “2010 RTP”) is a minor update of the last version, completed in 2005, and provides guidance for transportation policy and projects through the year 2035. The 2010 RTP is the RTC’s comprehensive planning document, which identifies the goals, projects, and programs that will maintain and improve our transportation system over the next twenty-five years. Individual projects listed in the 2010 RTP must still undergo separate design and environmental processes, and can only be implemented as local, state and federal funds become available.

### 2010 PLAN ORGANIZATION

The 2010 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 2010 RTP
Chapter Six	Greenhouse Gas Emissions- Meeting the Challenge

### DEVELOPING THE 2010 RTP

The 2010 RTP is a minor update of the 2005 Plan which provides an overview of 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 RTC’s planning and decision-making process. Comments from a wide range of individuals, public interest groups, and local agencies have been solicited over the past five years, most notably during extensive Transportation Funding Task Force workshops in 2006 and 2007. During development of the 2010 RTP, public input was sought through public meetings on key elements of the RTP. Additionally, in submitting projects for consideration, project sponsors take into consideration input they receive 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. Traffic congestion in the county continues to be a source of frustration 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, bikeways, sidewalks, a rail line, 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 congestion exists in Santa Cruz County and 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 and local streets 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 and state cuts to transit funding, bus service reductions will be considered.
- 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 2010 RTP or administered by the RTC. Examples of indirect

transportation subsidies include pollution clean-up costs, law enforcement, emergency response costs and parking subsidies.

- The RTC has discretion over less than 10% of the transportation funds typically available to the region. The vast majority of transportation funding is dedicated to specific uses—such as airport improvements, highway safety and transit operations.
- The ebb and flow of federal, state, regional, and local funding affects project timing. Many needed projects with already identified funding have been delayed several years as the result of downturns in the economy that affect the availability of those funds.
- 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, different and seemingly incompatible values, and the inevitable impacts of major projects. In an attempt to generate sufficient funds for local transportation projects, the RTC 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 2010 RTP assumes that voters will approve a new tax in the next few years.

## **GOALS AND POLICIES**

The 2010 RTP carries forward goals from the 2001 and 2005 RTP, 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 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- ❖ 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**

RTP Goals and Policies, 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 over 450 transportation improvement projects and programs that are needed to 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 2010 RTP's "Investment Program," described in Chapter 4 and Appendix B.

## **FUNDING PROJECTIONS**

During the next 25 years, approximately \$2.6 billion from federal, state, and local funding sources is projected to be available to finance transportation projects in Santa Cruz County.

Of the \$2.6 billion projected to be available, over 75 percent is dedicated to specific types of projects. Approximately \$1 billion of that dedicated funding is slated for transit service and capital improvements. A large proportion of transit revenues come from our county's dedicated half-cent local sales tax for transit.

As noted earlier, the RTP also assumes that the region's voters will approve a new half-cent transportation sales tax measure in the next few years. Approximately 14 percent of the \$2.6 billion is anticipated from that new sales tax, and it would be up to the discretion of the voters which specific projects receive those funds, though this RTP assumes that those funds will be dedicated to projects and programs listed in the 2010 RTP.

Less than 10% of the \$2.6 billion, \$200 million over the coming 25 years, are discretionary funds under the direct control of the RTC.

It is important to note that transportation funding can be incredibly unpredictable. State and federal actions can result in elimination of certain funding programs or diversion of transportation funds to the State General Fund, as has happened regularly to transit funds over the past several years. Inevitably, some of the funding sources assumed within the financial projections for this plan will not actually be realized, depending on decisions made by voters and the state and federal governments.

Even if all of the revenues assumed in this document are realized these projected funds are insufficient to keep up with maintenance, operational, safety, and major improvement needs of the region. As such, this document identifies additional sources for new funds that could be made available for "unconstrained" projects. The RTC works with entities locally, statewide, and nationally to seek new transportation revenue sources. These could include new local or state gas taxes, vehicle registration fees, transportation impact fee programs, statewide transportation bonds, special federal funding programs (such as economic stimulus bills), special state legislative budget requests, and new grants.

## FUNDING PROJECTS

The costs of individual projects and programs listed in the Investment Program are divided in two categories based on priority, funding availability, and potential environmental effects. Transportation improvements that can be funded with foreseeable transportation revenues between 2010 and 2035 are shown as "Constrained". This group includes already funded projects to be constructed in the short term, and planned projects that could be constructed anytime within the 2010 RTP's 25-year time-line as projected funds become available. Transportation improvements to be implemented if new revenues are generated or become available show their funding as "Unconstrained". Some projects are identified with both constrained and unconstrained funds, indicating a need for additional funds to complete the entire project, though portions of those projects may be completed using anticipated funding.

The 2010 RTP assigns future transportation funds to a range of projects and programs designed to maintain the current transportation system, provide traffic congestion relief and broaden transportation options. Key proposals include:

- ❖ Maintenance of the existing transportation network including roads, highways, bike lanes, sidewalks, and transit
- ❖ Safety and operational improvements to Highways 1, 9, 17, 129 and 152
- ❖ Adding auxiliary lanes and High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on Highway 1 between Aptos and Santa Cruz
- ❖ Modifications to major arterial roads -- including bus, pedestrian and bicycle facilities
- ❖ Expanded bus service, with additional Highway 17 Express buses and more Park and Ride lots to serve Silicon Valley, University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC), and south county commuters
- ❖ Construction of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail Network along the coast
- ❖ Local bicycle and pedestrian projects designed to increase bicycle commuting, and provide safe bicycle and pedestrian routes to schools
- ❖ Expansion of specialized transport services in response to projected increases in senior and disabled populations
- ❖ Increased availability of information about road conditions, transit operations, and other transportation options
- ❖ Landscaping and lighting improvements to make transportation corridors part of livable communities

## **IMPLEMENTING THE INVESTMENT PROGRAM**

Development of the RTP project list is only a preliminary step towards actual implementation of the projects identified in the 2010 RTP. Prior to the beginning of construction for each project a number of steps must be taken which can take from 6 months to 20 years, depending on the particular project's complexity, impacts, level of public interest, and availability of funds. These steps include: developing a detailed project cost estimate; obtaining local, state and/or federal funds; designing the project; determining the project's environmental impacts; securing right-of-way, if necessary; and throughout the process, incorporating public input.

## **GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS STRATEGIES**

New for the 2010 RTP, the RTC has included a discussion on greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) in relation to transportation planning. In the absence of tools to measure the effectiveness of specific RTC policies towards reducing GHGs and without having the specific GHG reduction targets from the state during development of the 2010 RTP, the new chapter introduces some of the best practices which could be included in a portfolio of strategies to meet future emission reduction goals in Santa Cruz County. The discussion suggests that a combination of strategies is essential to bending the curve of future emissions downward. While technological developments in vehicle design and clean fuels are outside the purview of the RTC, the RTP can focus on strategies that transform mobility (options for getting around) as a way to affect GHG trends. The RTP includes many projects that pro-actively implement GHG reduction strategies such as: operating a Commute Solutions program to encourage ridesharing; funding freeway service patrols to remove incidents and improve traffic flow; adding high occupancy vehicle lanes in the Highway 1 corridor to encourage carpools, vanpools and transit use; acquiring the rail corridor for goods movement, bicycle and pedestrian access and possible passenger service; and supporting bicycle, pedestrian and transit projects.

A more extensive discussion on reducing GHG through better coordination between transportation and land use will be included in the next RTP update. The RTC is currently involved in a Blueprint planning process, led by the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), to identify a preferred growth scenario for the region. This preferred growth scenario will be the foundation for determining a transportation/land use Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) that will comply with the requirements of California Senate Bill 375.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL AND AIR QUALITY REVIEW OF THE 2010 RTP**

The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) requires that the environmental effects of the 2010 RTP be analyzed. This analysis was prepared as a separate program level Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) to the 2005 RTP EIR, released along with the 2010 RTP. The SEIR, prepared in coordination with the Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments (AMBAG), Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC), and the San Benito Council of Governments (SBCOG), collectively evaluates the Regional Transportation Plans for Monterey Bay region - Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties. The SEIR evaluates changes to the project

lists and policies and addresses new information not previously available. The SEIR analyzes the potential environmental impacts of the 2010 RTP, including alternative investment scenarios, and identifies potential mitigation measures for impacts of the transportation program for the whole region. The SEIR 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 is initiated.

Together Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties comprise the North Central Coast Air basin (NCCAB). Many projects in the plan implement the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District's (Air District) approved Transportation Control Measures for the region, which are developed to reduce transportation-related emissions by reducing vehicle use or improving traffic flow. The three county region (or NCCAB) is an attainment area for ozone precursors and therefore exempt from conformity analysis.