



Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission Transportation Policy Workshop

MINUTES

Thursday, June 16, 2011
9:00 a.m.

NOTE LOCATION THIS MONTH
SCCRTC Conference Room
1523 Pacific Ave
Santa Cruz Ca

1. Introductions

Commissioner Nicol called the meeting to order at 9:05 am. Self-introductions were made.

Members present:

Dene Bustichi	Kirby Nicol
Greg Caput	Lynn Robinson
Norm Hagen	Andy Schiffrin (Alt)
Randy Johnson	Donna Ziel (Alt)
John Leopold	Don Lane
Eduardo Montesino	Ellen Pirie
Aileen Loe (ex-officio)	

Staff present:

George Dondero	Karena Pushnik
Luis Mendez	Yesenia Parra
Gini Pineda	Cory Caletti
Rachel Moriconi	Tegan Speiser
Daniel Nikuna	Nathan Luedtke
Amy Naranjo	Matt Leal
Grace Blakeslee	Ginger Dykaar
Kim Shultz	

2. Oral communications

Commissioner Hagen thanked staff for the Commissioner orientation workshop.

Bill Malone asked for an update on STARS. George Dondero said that there was nothing new to report.

CONSENT AGENDA (Hagen/Schiffrin – unanimous)

Deputy Director Luis Mendez gave a status update on the rail purchase saying that the Surface Transportation Board (STB) is trying to deal with another transaction in Wisconsin before dealing with the RTC's transaction but that it should be completed soon.

Fiscal Officer Daniel Nikuna clarified some terms for commissioners regarding fund balance reporting categories.

3. Approved Fiscal Year 2011-12 budget and work program amendment (Resolution 32-11)
4. Accepted Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) Statement No. 54 fund balance reporting

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Responsibilities

Executive Director George Dondero said that the discussion is a continuation of prior discussions going back to 2007 and that other agencies are considering assuming MPO responsibilities. He emphasized that discussions of these options do not reflect badly on AMBAG staff. Mr. Dondero highlighted some of the functions of an MPO including the regional housing needs assessment; producing the regional travel demand model; producing the Federal Transportation Improvement Plan (FTIP) and other federal planning efforts.

Mr. Dondero described options for assuming MPO responsibilities and some of the costs and staff requirements. He said that more fact-finding was necessary and asked the Commission for further direction.

Commissioners discussed the effects on the regional housing needs assessment (RHNA) which has been problematic in the past. Commissioners discussed the possibility of creating bylaws to keep a particular area from being overused for required housing. Commissioner Pirie asked for hard information on RHNA and Commissioner Johnson said he wanted the process to introduce protective bylaws.

Commissioners discussed the process required for the RTC to become a single county MPO, how non-transportation decisions would be dealt with, consultant costs if necessary to produce the traffic demand model and financial ramifications of no longer belonging to AMBAG. They also discussed if setting up a local MPO is a step back from regionalism.

Commissioner Leopold said that the role of Councils of Government should be investigated as they may be getting more responsibilities in the future.

Debbie Hale, Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC), said that some jurisdictions within that agency support the idea of a single county MPO and some don't.

Aileen Loe, Caltrans District 5, said that census data will be critical in making this decision and that the new federal transportation bill may have language regarding MPOs.

Commissioner Hagen asked for a comparison between the AMBAG format and alternate MPO format regarding how it would work. Commissioner Bustichi asked how staff time is being used to research a possible merger between Santa Cruz METRO and the RTC.

Michelle Cain, City of Santa Cruz, said the city is working on a general plan update and that she thinks there is a big disconnect between land use planning and AMBAG. She cited a grant for infill development that was distributed fairly but inefficiently since most of the infill development will happen in urban areas and grant monies were distributed to rural areas where it would not be used as much.

Bill Malone asked for clarification regarding modeling for Santa Cruz.

George Dondero said that the issue is not the quantity of the modeling but the quality and timeliness of the models. He said that land use modeling helps inform transportation decisions.

Les White, AMBAG, said that the questions raised were important for AMBAG to consider.

Aileen Loe said that one function of the regional travel demand model is to monitor attainment levels of air quality.

Bhupendra Patel said that AMBAG has secured \$800,000 to improve the model.

Commissioner Schiffrin moved to direct staff to continue to explore the pros and cons of becoming a single county MPO and report back including political feedback from local jurisdictions and to develop more information on the housing needs process and what options there are to be responsible for it; land use planning needs and the associated responsibilities; and additional work on modeling options. Commissioner Lane seconded.

Mr. Dondero noted that staff level support and elected level support may be different. Ms. Hale said that TAMC is considering a small subcommittee of elected officials to gather information.

Commissioner Leopold asked for a friendly amendment that staff be directed to answer the questions raised during discussion, which was accepted.

Commissioner Schiffrin suggested that staff attend AMBAG meetings.

The motion passed unanimously.

6. Highway 1 HOV Lane project- environmental document

Senior Planner Kim Shultz reviewed the history of the HOV Lane project mentioning schedule delays due to setbacks in the release of the AMBAG traffic demand model and funding delays. He said that the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) had modified enforcement provisions regarding the "10 year rule" and the timely use of federal funds. Because there is no commitment of funds to complete the project, FHWA officials might not sign the environmental document which could trip the 10 year rule, endanger completion of the project and make it necessary to pay back \$5.6 million in federal funding already spent.

Mr. Shultz said that funding for a Tier 2 project, which could meet the 10 year rule, may be available from existing and future apportionments of State Transportation Improvement (STIP) funds. He said that a set of projects has been identified that could constitute a Tier 2 project. Mr. Shultz introduced environmental consultant Jeff Bingham who continued to explain the Tier 2 concept.

Commissioners questioned if the Commission was told about the 10 year rule in the past, if it could be challenged and if the rule could be provided to the Commission in writing. Mr. Shultz said that the rule has been in place for some time but what has changed is the federal government's enforcement and appeal procedures. In addition, the definition of available revenue linked to a committed source of funding has been changed and a future sales tax measure is no longer considered an acceptable funding source, especially in California due to the two-thirds requirement to pass a tax measure. Deputy Director Luis Mendez added that FHWA accepted a future tax measure for the adoption of the 2010 Regional Transportation Plan in June of 2010 but that is not acceptable now. It was noted that the Soquel/ Morrissey project would not satisfy Tier 2 requirements because it was identified as an independent project.

Commissioners discussed environmental review, cost of a Tier 2 project, the list of projects that could be reprogrammed to fund a Tier 2 project, right of way issues and any effect on STARS.

Aileen Loe spoke in favor of the Tier 2 approach as a way to preserve project funding.

Bill Malone said that there was no comprehensive Environmental Impact Review for nine years and that a Tier 2 project was making a mockery of an EIR.

Mr. Bingham said that the Tier 1 document is a comprehensive EIR.

Commissioner Schiffrin asked for the FHWA ruling to be presented in writing and a more detailed timeline.

7. New Regional Transportation Commission websites

Senior Planner Tegan Speiser gave a PowerPoint presentation illustrating the new RTC website. Major features include improved navigation and searchability, rotating graphics, seamless connection between the RTC and Commute Solutions websites and a Spanish language page.

The website is planned to go live in August.

8. Review of items to be discussed in closed session – Removed from agenda

CLOSED SESSION

9. Conference with Real Property Negotiator Pursuant to Government Code 54956.8 relating to the purchase of the right-of-way: Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line from Watsonville Junction to Davenport

Agency Negotiator: Kirk Trost, Miller Owen & Trost

Negotiation Parties: SCCRTC, Union Pacific

Under Negotiation: Price and Terms

OPEN SESSION

10. Report on closed session

11. Next meetings

The next SCCRTC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 4, 2011 at 9:00 a.m. at the Watsonville City Council Chambers, 275 Main St., Watsonville, CA.

The next Transportation Policy Workshop is scheduled for Thursday, August 18, 2011 at 9:00 am at the SCCRTC office, 1523 Pacific Ave., Santa Cruz, CA.

Respectfully submitted,

Gini Pineda, Staff

ATTENDEES

Bhupendra Patel
Enrique Sabagun
Jeff Bingham
Debbie Hale
Mark Dettle
Bill Malone
Peter Scott
Les White
Les White
Michelle Cain

AMBAG
CAO office
Parsons
TAMC
City of Santa Cruz
CFST
CFST
SC Metro
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