Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission  
Transportation Policy Workshop

MINUTES

Thursday, August 18, 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 9:01 am. Self-introductions were made.

Members present:  
Dene Bustichi    Kirby Nicol  
Greg Caput    Lynn Robinson  
Norm Hagen    Neal Coonerty  
Randy Johnson    Mark Stone  
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  
Grace Blakeslee    Kim Shultz

2. Oral communications

Jack Nelson said that people may be searching for the wilderness experience that is missing from most of life in modern society and cited the names of several cars and SUVs that refer to nature or the rugged outdoors.

Mark Greenfield recommended that METRO sell Caltrain tickets at the downtown transit center.
CONSENT AGENDA

No consent items

The Commission adjourned into closed session at 9:09 am.

CLOSED SESSION

3. Conference with Real Property Negotiator Pursuant to Government Code 54956.8 relating to the freight easement: Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line from Watsonville Junction to Davenport

   Agency Negotiator: Paul Chrisman, Miller & Owen
   Negotiation Parties: SCCRTC, Sierra Northern Railway, Union Pacific
   Under Negotiation: Price and Terms

OPEN SESSION

4. Report on closed session

   The Commission reconvened into open session at 9:33 am. There was nothing to report.

REGULAR AGENDA

5. Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) Responsibilities

   Executive Director George Dondero said that staff from the RTC, Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC), Caltrans, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration met in June to collect information regarding legal and administrative requirements associated with RTPA’s also becoming MPO’s. Mr. Dondero explained how a decision to become a single county MPO would be made and clarified that the decision to do so was not before the Commission and would not be made by the Commission. He introduced Andrew Chesley from San Joaquin Council of Governments who gave a presentation on that agency’s experience as a single county MPO.

   Mr. Chesley described the advantages of local decision making and the areas in which a coalition of MPOs in the San Joaquin Valley made policy decisions as a group. He also said that the voluntary coalition often presented a unified agenda to Sacramento. Mr. Chesley said that within the Central Valley, each MPO has tailored its structure to best serve each agency’s individual needs.

   Commissioners discussed challenges with the Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), achieving air quality targets and cost factors. It was noted that working regionally with TAMC on some issues would be beneficial.
TAMC Executive Director **Debbie Hale** said that her research indicated that tax dollars could be saved by becoming a single county MPO. She noted that a Central Coast Coalition consisting of all the Regional Transportation Agencies within District 5 has been formed to discuss regional coordination issues.

**Chris Schneiter**, City of Santa Cruz Public Works, said that AMBAG’s modeling has not been useful in the past and supported the idea of developing and managing the model by the RTPA’s. He added that there seems to be a duplication of services regarding transportation planning.

Commissioner Pirie moved and Commissioner Stone seconded to approve the staff recommendations that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC):

1. Accept the report on a possible single-county MPO scenario and a presentation from Andrew Chesley, Executive Director of the San Joaquin Council of Governments on single-county MPO operations and regional collaboration efforts in the San Joaquin Valley;
2. Determine that the RTC would accept the responsibilities of becoming a single county MPO for Santa Cruz County, should that be the desire of the region’s cities and counties; and
3. Direct staff to work with TAMC and San Benito Council of Governments to determine how to work regionally and return with possibilities describing what a regional coalition would look like.

Responding to a question from Commissioner Lane, AMBAG Executive Director Les White said that concerns for AMBAG board members included financing without transportation planning funds and performance issues. Mr. White said that there may have been a lack of coordination between AMBAG and local jurisdictions which he is working to improve.

Commissioners discussed preserving AMBAG for non MPO issues, the membership of the RTC if it were to determine housing issues, and ensuring that housing allocations were equitable towards smaller cities.

The motion passed unanimously.

Commissioner Stone departed the meeting.

6. **Highway 1 HOV Lane project- Tiered Environmental document**

   Senior Planner Kim Shultz reviewed the reasons for developing a tiered environmental document for the HOV lane project saying that the compelling argument to adopt a tiered approach is to be able to begin construction on the Tier 2 phase – auxiliary lanes between Soquel Drive and 41st Avenue – and avoid being penalized by the “10 year rule”, which could require paying back the $5.5 million in federal funds already spent. Since the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has notified the RTC that revenue from a possible sales
tax can no longer be factored into a funding scenario, the HOV Lanes project is considered to be not completely fundable which would trigger the “ten year rule”. He said that attachments to the staff report include a revised scope of work, costs and a schedule.

Mr. Shultz introduced Parag Mehta, Nolte, and Jeff Bingham, Parsons, who gave a presentation outlining the pros and cons of tiering, as well as CEQA and NEPA statutes and guidelines regarding tiering. It was noted that Tier 1 of the project would be a program level environmental document for the entire HOV Lane project while Tier 2 would be a project level environmental document specifically for the proposed auxiliary lanes.

Commissioners discussed costs, the process used to determine the location of the Tier 2 project, public outreach, and the difference between tiering and segmentation. It was noted that the umbrella program level EIR for the entire HOV Lanes project prevented the Tier 2 project from being considered a segmented part of the overall project.

Commissioner Pirie asked that agency counsel investigate whether the Federal Highway Administration can impose the ten year rule on the basis of not having secured sales tax funding since it was accepted as a possible source of revenue for so many years. Commissioner Coonerty echoed the concern and added that there had not been a public process regarding this alternative yet.

Mr. Dondero said that the RTC has an email from the FHWA stating the basis for triggering the ten year rule and said that if federal money is used in developing an environmental document and the FHWA cannot approve the project, the spent money must be paid back.

Chris Schneiter, City of Santa Cruz, said that tiered documents are very common in city project.

John Herr said that the environmental document will be worthless in 5 years.

Zoe Altermich said that car use is decreasing and if the RTC is building for the future it should build for what people want the future to look like.

Stacy Falls said that she doesn’t want to widen the highway at all and that the plan doesn’t seem to include alternative transportation modes.

Micah Posner said that travel on Highway 1 has decreased because of the price of gas and asked if this trend has been factored into the long range plan. He added that he would also like a lawyer to look at the FHWA rule.

Jack Nelson said that he is concerned that if this item is approved, the next item will have to be approved which will remove funding that could be used for local roads. He added that his understanding was that STARS was supposed to help determine widening scenarios and that the RTC should get their report
before deciding whether to proceed with tiering the project.

**Peter Scott** asked if any origin and destination studies had been performed. He said that during the Transportation Funding Task Force meetings, widening the highway wasn’t as important to the public as maintaining local roads and thinks a new survey should be undertaken.

**Zach Wolensky** said he is concerned that widening is not the best use of funds and doesn’t think it will make it safer or ease congestion on Highway 1. He thinks improving roads and ways to encourage people to drive less would address the root of congestion.

Commissioners clarified that there was no new money being requested for STARS, noted that growth has taken place without infrastructure growing to take care of it and said that there may be fewer cars on the freeways because there are fewer jobs.

Commissioner Montesino moved and Commissioner Pirie seconded to approve the Interagency Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC) and staff recommendations that the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) recommend that Caltrans develop a combined tiered environmental document for the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project consisting of:

a. Tier 1 - program level environmental documentation for the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project; and
b. Tier 2 – project level environmental documentation for auxiliary lanes between 41st Avenue and Soquel Drive and a bike/pedestrian crossing at Chanticleer Avenue.

Staff further recommends that the RTC approve a resolution amending the FY 2011/2012 Budget for the Highway 1 HOV Lanes Project to carryover unspent funds from FY 2010/2011 and move funds within the project budget to allow the environmental work to proceed.

Commissioners commented that Highway 1 has been improved in a staged way for years starting with Mission Street, that moving forward is necessary to make the transit work, that the question is what is the strategy to complete the EIR and there may be a need for more public input.

Commissioner Nicol called the question. The motion (Resolution 01-12) passed with Commissioners Nicol, Montesino, Bustichi, Hagen, Pirie, Robinson and Johnson voting “aye” and Commissioners Coonerty, Caput, Leopold and Lane voting “no”. Commissioner Stone was absent for the vote.

Commissioner Nicol tabled the remaining items to the 9/1/11 meeting.

7. 2012 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) development (*Rachel Moriconi, Senior Transportation Planner*) – Tabled to 9/1/11 meeting
8. Federal legislation oral report - Tabled to 9/1/11 meeting  
   (Rachel Moriconi, Senior Transportation Planner)

9. Rail Line Acquisition project oral report - Tabled to 9/1/11 meeting  
   (Luis Pavel Mendez, Deputy Director)

10. Next meetings

   The meeting adjourned at 12:23 pm.

   The next SCCRTC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 1, 2011 at  
   9:00 a.m. at the Board of Supervisors Chambers, 701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz,  
   CA.

   The next Transportation Policy Workshop is scheduled for Thursday,  
   September 15, 2011 at 9:00 am at the SCCRTC Offices, 1523 Pacific Avenue,  
   Santa Cruz, CA.

   Respectfully submitted,

   Gini Pineda, Staff

   ATTENDEES

   Chris Schneiter  City of Santa Cruz
   Mark Greenfield
   Jack Nelson
   John Herr
   Larry Lopp
   Les White  SCMTD
   Peter Scott  CFST
   Debbie Hale  TAMC
   Jeff Bingham  Parsons
   Andy Chesley  San Joaquin COG
   Les White  AMBAG
   Zoe Altermich
   Stacy Falls
   Micah Posner
   Zach Wolensky