

**California
Rural Counties Task Force**

January 15, 2021, 12:30 p.m.

Teleconference/Webcast

DRAFT MINUTES

A. Introductions All

The meeting was called to order at 12:30. New Humboldt County Association of Governments Executive Director Beth Burks introduced herself.

B. Approve Minutes of November 20, 2020 W. Deloria

Chair Woody Deloria asked the group to contact him with changes due to the limited time to review.

C. Ceremonial Matters W. Deloria

The group acknowledged and thanked retirees, Marcella May and Dan Landon, for their many years of service.

Woody thanked Marcella for her leadership and partnership, service as RCTF chair and many accomplishments at HCAOG. Other RCTF members and Caltrans representatives spoke to congratulate and thank Marcella.

Mike Woodman thanked Dan for his many years of service at Nevada County Transportation Commission, RCTF, and as an advocate for rural issues at the state and federal level. Other RCTF members and Caltrans representatives spoke to congratulate and thank Dan.

Woody presented certificate of appreciation to the retirees.

D. Information Sharing/Topics of Significance All

Mike noted that RCTF should continue working with the agency on the action plan that's being developed to alert them of concerns that still need to be addressed.

Woody commented that EDCTC is looking into CARES money for staff telework costs.

Debbie Hale explained that TAMC just attempted a ribbon cutting on Facebook Live, but later discovered that the live stream didn't work. She asked the group about other platforms used for this type of even. The group mentioned videos that Caltrans Districts 3 and 1 put together for similar events, but they weren't live streamed.

Ivan Garcia commented that BCAG is doing a post camp fire study with new assumptions to be used in their RTP. The group discussed long term travel patterns post COVID for models and planning

documents. Woody noted that EDCTC has pre COVID Bluetooth data that can be used to compare resulting from a big data purchase by SACOG (possibly Replica data). Frances Dea-Sanchez noted that UC Davis is doing a survey and comparing pre and post COVID responses.

Maura Twomey explained that EDCTC and AMBAG have entered into an agreement for an updated manual and training, so she and Diane Eidam are beginning work.

E. CTC Update

CTC Staff

Legislative Update/Federal COVID Relief - Paul Golaszewski reported that the legislature came back into session on Monday. They've been tracking bills, but there are only a few transportation related so far, and none particularly noteworthy. Federal COVID relief funds were passed by Congress and signed into law just after Christmas. The bill included \$14 billion for transit and \$10 billion to be distributed by FHWA. An estimated \$900 million will go to California to be used for variety of purposes including revenue losses. Debbie asked, if it goes through CT, what are they considering using it for. Keith Duncan explained that the State is awaiting guidance on distribution. They anticipate the traditional Fast Act distribution (60% state, 40% local). Debbie noted that the STIP would be good method to allow flexibility. Keith stated that flexibility will be important.

Woody commented that he had spoken with Michael Pimentel about loss of revenue for transit agencies. They are pushing for an effort at the federal level.

Mike explained that CalSTA's recent budget briefing mentioned additional funding for transit and potential TDA reform measures.

ATP Staff Recommendations Update – Laurie Waters congratulated Dan and Marcella on their retirements. She noted that CTC staff would release recommendation for ATP grants on February 8, ahead of schedule. Funds aren't going to go very far due to the overall high cost of projects. In the first cycle, the average cost of funded projects was \$1.5 million. In the last cycle it was \$4.6 million, and this one will be higher. The cutoff score will also be high. She noted that if they aren't able to get more funds for program, they will have to consider changes, because so much effort is being made for so little return.

The state will deallocate cost savings from old projects to add another \$20 million for new ATP projects. The administration supports the goals of the program, but hasn't added funding and does not support using Cap-and-Trade for the program. Laurie explained that they received \$2.3 billion total requests for a fund estimate of \$446 million. The previous low numbers of grants resulted in legislative attempts to change the program and give more control to MPOs, but that doesn't solve the problem. Very large projects will still eat up the money. When the recommendations are released, it will demonstrate the lack of resources. She said that staff is doing analysis on the results.

Mike suggested coordinating as a group to push for Cap-and-Trade funding for the ATP after recommendations are released.

Local Partnership Program – Christine Gordon noted that there's little happening currently with LPP.

Solutions for Congested Corridors Program – Matthew Yosgott reported that Cycle 2 was adopted in September. They are currently working on baseline agreements. Questions regarding baseline

agreements can go to him or Hannah. Regarding CAPTI, CalSTA will be engaging with transportation stakeholders starting in February, so RCTF members should watch for announcements from the Agency.

Ivan noted that CalSTA did reach out for an RTPA CAPTI workshop in February.

Trade Corridors Enhancement Program – Hannah Walter commented that applicants approved in Cycle 2 needing help with the ePPR and baseline agreement can reach out to Gretchen Chavez or Rambabu Varsity. After the Program of Projects was approved, Caltrans has been working on jointly nominated projects before starting work on the baseline. They are willing to provide assistance.

Local Streets and Roads – Alicia Sequiera-Smith explained that they will be providing an expenditure report update at the CTC meeting. They received reports from all agencies. A little over \$135 million was spent in the FY, 1283 projects completed, 1267 in progress, and 1040 carried over.

Shortline Railroad Improvement Program – Alicia reported that the program received 7 nominations for a total of \$6.45 million, leaving \$750K unprogrammed. The funds came from TCIF cost savings, so they will recommend that the \$750K be rolled into TCEP program along with other TCIF cost savings.

State Transportation Improvement Program – Teresa reported that they are overprogrammed and will likely not have enough allocation capacity for the current year. This means they will have to borrow from next year's capacity in order to avoid an allocation plan. If regions have projects that aren't on schedule, they should let them know ahead of time. They're trying to avoid an allocation plan in the current FY.

Teresa clarified they're about \$100 million short, absent any relief funding. However, towards the end of the FY, many projects get delayed. Normally agencies wait until June for extensions, but they're encouraged to come in earlier.

F. Caltrans Update

Caltrans Staff

Planning – Erin Thompson noted that the due date for Sustainable Transportation Planning grants is February 12. Districts have been doing well with outreach. Tribal government outreach is scheduled for January 26 and a statewide webinar scheduled for January 28 for agencies that missed previous webinars.

If any local agencies need extensions on grants, they should contact the Districts. They're seeing many extensions because of the difficulty collecting data due to pandemic.

She explained that Caltrans has always had OWP meetings with MPOs and has now started to do them with rural counties as well. She will share summaries of those meetings for information about virtual public involvement, lessons learned, useful tools, etc.

Draft OWPs are due March 1.

Erin noted that only \$88,000 is available for RPA discretionary grants due to the increased carryover limit of 40%. The RCTF should take action at their next meeting if they're interested in pursuing a joint project other than CARL program scholarships. Woody noted that there was a desire discussed at the last meeting to pursue a group project.

Erin stated that RPA carryover will go back to 25% in the current year. If agencies are having trouble spending money for specific reason, they should reach out to Caltrans Planning.

Erin confirmed that an announcement went directly to tribes for the January 26 workshop.

The handbook update is underway, and they're aiming for a summer release. Jackie Kahrs is now working in Programming so they are conducting a hiring process.

Local Assistance – Mark Samuelson reported that they released the 2021 LAPM. A couple updated items include Chapter 9 DBE payment instructions and running tallies, which is of high importance to FHWA. Also updated is Chapter 13 ROW regarding property management and excess land disposal. Invoicing in Chapter 5 provides clarifying language on processing language. LAPG Chapter 6 gives new instructions for the bridge program. In updating the LAPM they reached out to several agencies to review policies including SANDAG, Humboldt, San Joaquin, LA, etc.

Cost increases in bridge construction projects have resulted in the 15-year program becoming a 20-year program. They're recommending that the latest applications be placed on hold due to increases. They're proposing reforms to the overall program. Once fully vetted and implemented, they will go back and review new projects. Changes will include requirements for field reviews and hydrotechnical reports, capping spending on aesthetic treatments (excepting historic bridges), and regular reports. Cost escalation factors will be included with project programming.

Obligation Authority – FY 20/21 appropriations sets limits for the federal aid program. As of Dec 31, only about 5% of annual OA has been met. Last year at this time 19.3% had been met. Caltrans is working with RTPAs on OA best practices. Monthly committee meetings are being held. Three priority items include making the OA plan template more usable, looking at the OA policy memo (most recent is 2009), and sharing urban RSTP funds.

Ivan suggested allowing an earlier exchange for rurals to help with delivery/expenditure.

CARES Act 5311 Funding – Wendy King reported that \$17 million out of \$90 million has been expended. Standard agreements have been sent to operators for the second phase.

CRRSAA will provide almost \$75 mil to the 5311 program and \$3.2 mil for the 5310 program. They will hold stakeholder meetings to ask for input on distribution. They're considering a formula similar to CARES which could be processed quickly. With additional money, they may consider a needs-based approach.

If agencies can certify that there have been no furloughs for staff, funds can be considered for capital, but the priority should be operating. There's no priority for 15% to intercity bus, but it's still an eligible expense. The 5310 program has no requirement for a 50% split for traditional and capital.

LCTOP workshops will be held Jan 28 and Feb 17. They will go over FY 20/21 allocation requests and guidelines. Next allocation requests are due March 31. No hardcopies are required this time, just email.

State Budget Update – Keith Duncan reported that the new relief act includes FHWA funding, which will equal about \$910 to \$920 mil to CA. It will likely be distributed based on Fast ACT distribution formulas (60% state, 40% local). There will be no required state match. Normal federal eligibility requirements

will apply. Funds will need to be authorized by 2024. There won't likely be an opportunity to capture project savings beyond that year.

An omnibus bill (federal budget) was also approved, including a general fund supplemental of \$2 billion for highways (\$1.1 for infrastructure, including bridge), resulting in about \$23.5 mil for CA. It also includes STBGP funding for EV charging. CA will get \$59 mil of that.

Through December, they've allocated about \$3 billion out of \$7 billion allocation capacity (about 40%), which is similar to last year.

The Governor released the draft budget last week. Caltrans is expecting to be fully funded for all programs, with some minor decreases in some programs. The budget also updated revenues. Gas tax has decreased, but there's been a slight increase in diesel excise, and an increase in registration fees. They're planning to move forward fully funding all programs.

At the next CTC meeting, they'll be providing an overview of the Fund Estimate process and will begin work on assumptions. The FE will be adopted in August.

G. Enhanced Project Oversight Process

J. Espinoza

Jaime Espinoza of Local Assistance gave a presentation of the HQ enhanced oversight effort to improve project delivery.

Of the three types of projects – federally funded projects, state funds and federal funds, and state only—the focus is state only projects. For some projects deemed a risk to the program, Caltrans provides enhanced oversight. They're looking for projects that are complex in nature, and a good representation statewide.

The goals are to have fewer scope changes, reduce delays, fewer lapses, fewer audit findings, and more timely delivery. They're currently rolling out the oversight procedures to the ATP and SB 1 programs. They revised Chapter 22 and 23 and replaced them with Chapter 25 that will cover STIP, ATP and all SB 1 programs. Updated allocation form and will be posted soon for all Local Assistance projects. Other programs will undergo enhanced oversight in coming months with a slightly different focus. District staff will work with locals and report to HQ to catch issues early.

Debbie asked if Local Assistance would give presentation to TAC members. Jaime confirmed that agencies could contact their DLAE or himself.

Currently 50 projects have been identified. DLAEs will be receiving lists.

H. Road Charge Update

H. Walter

Hannah Walter reported that the technical advisory committee will be getting an update from the Mineta Transportation Institute on state revenues post-COVID through 2040 and demonstration and research for the road charge. The pay at pump demonstration started this month.

I. ITSP Update

F. Dea-Sanchez

Frances Dea-Sanchez reported on workshop highlights. Safety was the number one priority of participants. They received lots of input about what safety means for regions, particularly in northern

and central regions. Multi modal connectivity was another highlight, including enhancing connections at transportation hubs. Regarding freight, infrastructure is the biggest concern, as well as congestion in Southern California. The presentation is available on the ITSP website. Key findings focus on east west connectivity, rural to urban connectivity, maintenance and rehab, and gap elimination. Planning for emergency evacuations with vulnerability assessment data will be integrated with the work.

COVID 19 impacts on travel are being assessed in a UC Davis, but more outreach and data is needed for rural regions, not just about decline in mode choices, but also how people access work (broadband).

Frances noted that she will be on maternity leave starting in March so Scott will be taking over the project.

Mike noted that the group has expressed the need for strategic rural capacity projects that don't induce significant VMT or demand. Toks Omishakin gave an interview that in urban areas capacity increasing projects are less likely going forward, but did acknowledge the need for strategic capacity projects in rural areas.

J. Miscellaneous

All

In response to questions, Chris Lee of CSAC, noted that they would be updating their platform this year. They're close to finishing the local streets and roads needs assessment, which will be the first showing results of SB 1 funding.

Rick Tippet asked of the COVID relief funding might be used to backfill the STIP. Teresa responded that they're waiting for guidance from FHWA.

Rick commented that he would like to see programs such as HSIP and HBP get supplemental funding.

Rick noted the current call for projects for FLAP. He encouraged interested applicants to work with federal lands management agencies to put together applications.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:42 p.m.