

Rural Counties Task Force (RCTF) Meeting Minutes

Date: May 8, 2026

Time: 12:30 – 2:30 PM

Location: Zoom

A. Introductions

Presenter: All

Chair Aaron Hoyt called the meeting to order and welcomed participants. Attendees provided brief introductions, representing a range of rural transportation agencies and partner organizations. It was noted that this meeting marked Chair Hoyt's final meeting in his leadership role, and members acknowledged his service at the outset.

B. Approval of Minutes

Presenter: Aaron Hoyt

The previous meeting minutes were presented for approval. Members reviewed the materials and, with no substantive corrections or objections raised, the minutes were approved by consensus.

C. Information Sharing / Topics of Significance

Presenter: All

Members shared updates from their respective regions, highlighting ongoing transportation challenges, including project delivery timelines, staffing capacity, and funding uncertainty. Several participants reiterated concerns about the volatility of both state and federal funding sources, emphasizing the importance of timely guidance and predictable program cycles for rural agencies.

D. Election of Officers

Presenter: All

The group discussed the transition of leadership for the upcoming term, reflecting briefly on the contributions of outgoing Chair Aaron Hoyt. Members expressed appreciation for his leadership, particularly his advocacy on behalf of rural interests. The RCTF proceeded with the election of officers, confirming Heather Addison (AMBAG) as Chair, Michael Zeller (TAMC) as Vice Chair, and Cory Peterson (PCTPA) as Secretary. These changes will take effect in July 2026 and represent a continuation of leadership within the organization, with each officer stepping into an advanced role.

E. Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan (ITSP) Update

Presenter: Florigna Feliciano

Florigna Feliciano from Caltrans provided an overview of the accelerated update to the Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan (ITSP), outlining a condensed schedule intended to deliver the plan by early 2027. The timeline includes stakeholder engagement and data collection through mid-2025, followed by workshops in August, release of a draft plan in late 2025, and finalization in early 2026 before presentation to the California Transportation Commission.

Caltrans indicated that, due to the compressed timeline, the current ITSP update would not revise existing strategic corridors or priority interregional facilities. The presentation also introduced an updated definition of interregional travel, intended to better capture movement across regions, states, and international borders within the designated system.

RCTF members raised substantial concerns regarding both the schedule and proposed methodological changes. Many participants emphasized that the accelerated timeline would significantly limit the ability of rural regions to conduct meaningful analysis and engage stakeholders. Concerns were also strongly expressed about the proposed integration of Climate and Social Investment Strategy (CSIS) criteria into the Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP) project evaluation process. Members noted that CSIS metrics appear to be oriented toward urban, multimodal contexts and may not appropriately reflect the characteristics or needs of interregional highway projects common in rural areas.

Additional discussion focused on statutory requirements, with members stressing that the ITSP must align with Government Code 14244.4 and the California Transportation Plan (CTP), rather than being driven primarily by CAPTI or CSIS frameworks. Participants cautioned that replacing or modifying the existing ITIP evaluation criteria could undermine the program's statutory intent and effectiveness.

Questions were raised regarding how stakeholder feedback would be incorporated given the tight schedule, and whether recent updates to CSIS freight metrics had undergone the required public outreach process. Members requested additional opportunities for direct engagement with Caltrans staff to ensure rural perspectives are adequately considered. Caltrans acknowledged these concerns and committed to continued engagement through workshops, surveys, and one-on-one meetings.

F. CTC Updates

1. Legislative Update

Presenter: Benjamin Williams

Benjamin Williams provided an overview of current legislative activity relevant to transportation. He highlighted several bills of interest, including AB 2059, which would allow projects in predominantly non-metropolitan counties to be presumed to have less-than-significant VMT impacts, and AB 2679, which would create a loan mechanism for smaller jurisdictions with limited local streets and roads funding. Additional updates included proposed changes to Active Transportation Program guidelines under AB 2168 and SB 1423, as well as SB 1087, which would modify sustainable community strategy requirements and certain SB1 programs. He noted that policy committee deadlines had passed and that upcoming appropriations decisions would determine which bills continue forward.

2. Active Transportation Program (ATP)

Presenter: Anja Aulenbacher

Anja Aulenbacher provided an update on ATP Cycle 8, noting that applications are due June 22, 2026, and that the evaluator recruitment deadline had been extended to May 13. She emphasized a significant gap in rural representation among evaluators, with only seven of twenty-six rural counties currently participating. Members were strongly encouraged to volunteer staff to ensure rural perspectives are reflected in project scoring. She also outlined expectations for evaluators, including training requirements and workload.

3. SB 1 Programs

Presenter: Beverley Newman-Burckhard

Beverley Newman-Burckhard outlined the timeline for SB1 Cycle 5 programs, including the release of draft guidelines in June 2026, adoption in August, and a call for projects immediately thereafter. Applications are expected in November 2025, with award decisions anticipated in June 2027. She also reminded members that office hours are available through May to assist with preparation questions.

4. Local Streets and Roads

Presenter: Alicia Sequeira

Alicia Sequeira reviewed key deadlines for the Local Streets and Roads program, including a July 1, 2026 deadline for eligibility submittals and project lists. She encouraged agencies to submit draft resolutions early to streamline review and ensure timely inclusion in the August CTC adoption cycle. She also noted that a significant portion of recent training

participants were new staff, signaling a need for continued outreach and technical assistance.

5. State & Local Transportation System Needs Assessment

Presenter: Lale Tiejiao

Lale Tiejiao provided a general update on the statewide needs assessment, with no major items requiring action from the group at this time.

G. Caltrans Updates

1. Local Assistance

Presenter: Zhongren Wang

Zhongren Wang reported that approximately seventy projects statewide are at risk of losing funds due to obligation deadlines, particularly in Districts 4, 7, and 8. He emphasized the importance of timely coordination with District Local Assistance Engineers to ensure projects are obligated before the September 30 deadline.

2. Obligation Authority (OA)

Presenter: Abhijit Bagde / Belinda Hon

Abhijit Bagde and Belinda Hon provided an update on federal obligation authority, noting that approximately \$1.5 billion is available for local assistance programs, but only 29.5 percent has been delivered. Due to low utilization, a statewide pool was opened earlier in the year. They highlighted upcoming deadlines for authorization and fund transfers and encouraged regions to advance projects quickly.

3. State and Federal Budget Update

Presenter: Keith Duncan / Garrett Franklin

Keith Duncan and Garrett Franklin discussed ongoing uncertainty in both state and federal funding. They noted that the status of SB125 transit funding for its third year remains unclear pending the May budget revision. Additionally, they highlighted that Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund allocations may be affected by ongoing CARB rulemaking. At the federal level, they indicated that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act is expected to be extended, with a surge of discretionary funding opportunities anticipated before the end of the federal fiscal year.

4. Planning

Presenter: Erin Thompson / Brenda Caruso

Planning staff shared updates on several programs, including the early release of FY 2026–27 planning grant awards and forthcoming changes to application guidelines. They also noted that Overall Work Programs are due June 1, 2026, and that an in-person RTPA training is planned for September 2026. Additional updates included changes to funding timelines and program requirements.

5. Division of Mass Transportation

Presenter: Wendy King

Wendy King provided updates on transit programs, including the upcoming deadline for TIRCP applications and the anticipated release of FTA program calls. She also described ongoing updates to coordinated transit plans, including a statewide effort to conduct inventory and gap analyses and encouraged agencies to enroll by the end of May to participate.

H. Miscellaneous

Presenter: All

During miscellaneous discussion, members formally recognized Aaron Hoyt for his service as Chair and acknowledged his contributions to advancing rural transportation priorities. The group also noted the upcoming retirement of Abhijit Bagde and expressed appreciation for his long-standing work supporting rural counties. Additionally, Lassen County Transportation Commission shared information about an open fiscal officer position.

I. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the RCTF is scheduled for July 17, 2026, which will be the first meeting led by incoming Chair Heather Addison.

J. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following completion of all agenda items.