

# MENDOCINO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Approved MINUTES  
Monday, November 1, 2021

Teleconference Only  
*Pursuant to Brown Act and Assembly Bill 361*

**The Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG) meets as the Board of Directors of:**  
Mendocino Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) and  
Mendocino County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE)

**1. Call to Order / Roll Call.** The meeting was called to order at 1:31 p.m. with Directors Jim Brown, Scott Ignacio, John Haschak, Tatiana Ahlstrand (Caltrans/PAC), and Dan Gjerde present by Zoom teleconference; Chair Gjerde presiding. Directors Greta Kanne and Tess Albin-Smith arrived subsequently. [Clerk's note: the Public Appointee seat was vacant.]

Staff present: Nephele Barrett, Executive Director; Janet Orth, Deputy Director & CFO; Loretta Ellard, Deputy Planner; Lisa Davey-Bates, Transportation Planner; James Sookne, Program Manager; and Danielle Casey, Program Coordinator.

**Note:** Public comment was invited via email and online comment form; staff monitored for incoming comments throughout the meeting, reporting periodically.

**2. Convene as RTPA**

**3. Recess as RTPA – Reconvene as Policy Advisory Committee**

**4 - 5. Consent Calendar.** Upon motion by Haschak, second by Ignacio, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*5 Ayes – Brown, Ignacio, Haschak, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Gjerde; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 2 Absent – Kanne, Albin-Smith*): IT IS ORDERED that consent items are approved.

**4. Adoption of Resolution Making Continued Findings Pursuant to Assembly Bill 361 to Conduct Public Meetings Remotely for MCOG's Legislative and Advisory Bodies During the COVID-19 State of Emergency.**

## **Resolution No. M2021-14**

Making Continued Findings Pursuant to Assembly Bill 361  
to Continue Public Meetings Remotely  
for MCOG's Legislative and Advisory Bodies  
During the COVID-19 State of Emergency  
[Reso. #M2021-14 is incorporated herein by reference]

**5. Approval of October 4, 2021 Minutes - as written**

Director Albin-Smith arrived at 1:34 p.m.

**6. Public Expression.** None.

**7. Review/Discussion: Draft 2022 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP).** Mr. Sookne reviewed status of the document, prepared every two years to program projects for Regional Improvement Program (RIP) funding. The Fund Estimate was reported to the Council at the August meeting and reiterated here, with just over \$5 million available for new programming.

Public outreach was somewhat different this cycle, due to virtual means and the concurrent Regional Transportation Plan update. Project applications were due October 1. The only submittal received was from County of Mendocino, to adjust previously committed funds for North State Street Intersection/Interchange improvements, moving a portion from construction to the right-of-way component. Mr. Sookne described details of the project, which is identified as a high priority area in the Local Road Safety Plan. Also Caltrans had indicated a need to increase funds for the current component of the Gualala Downtown Streetscape. Staff prepared the draft RTIP based on the Technical Advisory Committee's recommendations of October 20. The proposal approves the County's request and adds new funds for the Gualala project. Additionally, staff is working with the member agencies to program any remaining COVID relief funds that pass through the program. Staff invited questions.

Director Kanne arrived at 1:42 p.m.

Chair Gjerde reviewed for clarification the projects for the upcoming RTIP adoption to be voted on in December, affirmed by Mr. Sookne. A table will be added to the final version, to include the Coronavirus Response & Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 (CRRSAA) projects. Ms. Barrett added that the only new funding proposed is approximately \$200,000 for Gualala's downtown streetscape project. No new projects were requested. She provided options for the process of future amendments. Board questions and discussion followed. The Chair invited public comment on the item, with no one requesting to speak. No action was taken.

**8. Presentation and Discussion: Draft 2022 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) & Active Transportation Plan (ATP).** Ms. Ellard introduced the item and gave a slide presentation of background and activity to date, including public outreach, tribal consultation, data collection from other agencies, and components of the plan. Sections updated by staff include Goals, Objectives and Policies, executive orders on climate change; modal elements; and funding. Objectives and policies were added or expanded to support healthy communities, affordable housing, active transportation, emergency evacuations, and public transit. Action Plans for each transportation mode listed short and long range projects. Board discussion included:

- Potential of freight service on the California Western Railroad/Skunk Train line, Fort Bragg to Willits. (Haschak) Ms. Barrett encouraged all to review the Rail Transportation Element of the Plan for the latest details.
- Where to find the environmental document for review? The negative declaration will be posted online following a 30-day public review period. (Albin-Smith, staff)
- A policy to prioritize completion of all phases of the Willits Bypass was deleted, while improvements consistent with the Route Concept are covered elsewhere in the Plan.

The Chair invited public comments, summarized as follows:

- Jessica Stull Otto, addressing County Roads & City Streets, asked about an area to consider for improvements on State Route 162 in downtown Covelo. Director Ahlstrand (Caltrans District 1) described a proposal for the Clean California Local Grant Program to implement traffic calming, street trees, and related improvements to that area.
- George Reinhardt questioned seriousness of the California Western Railroad/Skunk Train's interest in resuming freight activities, based on their record of performance. He stated the railroad is trying to present itself as a legitimate rail hauling service, and cautioned MCOG to look into this more closely. Also he requested a safer bicycle lane on State Route 1 at Pudding Creek north of Fort Bragg.

- Peter McNamee asked about the presentation on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, and how the RTP addresses needs for more public electric vehicle (EV) chargers. Staff noted climate change related goals were updated in the Introduction section. MCOG's Mendocino County Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Regional Readiness Plan is one of numerous plans reflected in the RTP/ATP, which is overarching and pulls from those specific plans. Policy CCE 2.6 is expanded and CCE 2.7 added, which address the charging network.

Comments were requested by November 22 for inclusion in the proposed final RTP/ATP, and would be accepted until December 6, when the final document with CEQA Initial Study/Negative Declaration will be presented for possible adoption at the Council's next regular meeting. Ms. Barrett noted the sooner comments were received, the better staff would be able to make any appropriate changes to the document prior to adoption. The presentation slides will be posted. The draft RTP/ATP will go to the Technical Advisory Committee for review and recommendations in November. No action was taken.

**9. Discussion/Direction: Exploration of Options for Regional Energy Network and Climate Protection Agency.** Director Gjerde reported on the ad hoc committee meeting of October 21. Ms. Barrett gave background of research to date on existing programs and agencies, listing several Regional Energy Networks (REN) emerging around the state, as well as options to join or create separately. It was noted that a REN is a program, not an agency. Activities are meant to fill gaps and serve disadvantaged communities, and can be customized for the region, for instance providing rebates for energy efficient appliances. Other examples of REN activities include a County energy audit. A climate protection agency can co-exist with a REN, supporting sustainability programs and local agency staff work.

The ad hoc recommended further investigation and gauging member agencies' interest. Board discussion followed, including:

- Sonoma Clean Power is providing unfunded rebates to Mendocino County, which is not a sustainable subsidy. (Haschak)
- City of Willits initiated energy planning, but was too understaffed to maintain; smaller cities could benefit from a regional program. (Kanne)

Public comments (summarized):

- George Reinhardt: Supports looking into both ideas. Where is funding to form a climate agency if that is pursued? Urgency of climate action is paramount over more studies.
- Ratepayers already pay a public good fee for such activities, for example a climate agency in Napa, staffed by County planning department, serves joint powers members; discussion of limited staff capacity in general. (Barrett)
- Jessica Stull-Otto: Supports both ideas; attended recent multi-county workshop, would like to see more collaboration in these efforts consistent with Mendocino County values, could help to relieve County staff in some of the long-range planning and to provide job training.
- Peter McNamee: Supports pursuing both recommendations; local actions have the greatest results in reducing GHG and carbon emissions; proposal is well suited to MCOG as a regional approach to addressing climate; funding could be available from various sources for planning and development initiatives, such as new Coastal Commission budget for expanding capacity to strategically address sea-level rise; a REN could partner on workforce training to compete in a green economy.
- Workforce development is definitely an eligible activity of a REN. (Barrett)
- James Schoonover: Wholeheartedly supports this idea and encourages the formation of a REN and the Climate Protection Agency. Community members will likely volunteer to assist.

- Thanks to the MCOG staff who have worked on this so far. (Gjerde, others)

Upon motion by Brown, second by Albin-Smith, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (7 Ayes – Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Gjerde; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 0 Absent): IT IS ORDERED that, as recommended by the ad hoc committee, staff is directed to: 1) in collaboration with the ad hoc committee, explore options for joining an existing Regional Energy Network or developing a new Regional Energy Network program and forming a regional climate protection agency; and 2) send requests to MCOG member agencies to endorse further exploration of both a Regional Energy Network program and a regional climate protection agency.

**10. Recess as Policy Advisory Committee – Reconvene as RTPA – Ratify Action of Policy Advisory Committee.** Upon motion by Haschak, second by Albin-Smith, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (6 Ayes – Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, and Gjerde; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 0 Absent): IT IS ORDERED that the actions taken by the Policy Advisory Committee are ratified by the MCOG Board of Directors.

## 11. Reports - Information

- a. Caltrans District 1 – Projects Update and Information. Director Ahlstrand reported 12 projects are moving forward in the Clean California Local Grant Program; she listed various eligible activities including public art. Public comments included:
  - Ms. Stull-Otto again commented on Covelo, relative to the safety of angled parking downtown. Ms. Ahlstrand further discussed the grant project proposed for postmile MEN-162 29.0 through 29.2, subject to modifications by Caltrans Headquarters.
  - Dave Shpak asked whether components of the Gualala Streetscape Master Plan are eligible for funding under the Clean California program. Director Ahlstrand explained the grants are meant to be implemented quickly and conflicts arose with Coastal Commission requirements. Ms. Barrett agreed those Gualala projects were unlikely to be funded.
  - Director Kanne asked about litter removal on county roads or state highways, noting numerous comments received from constituents, particularly south and west of Willits on SR-20. Director Ahlstrand will follow up.
  - Director Haschak reported word from Caltrans staff they are applying for a large grant for a dump amnesty day in Covelo and other parts of the county; Ms. Ahlstrand confirmed.
- b. Mendocino Transit Authority. There was no report.
- c. North Coast Railroad Authority. Director Haschak reported an upcoming meeting is scheduled, though was unsure how many more meetings will convene as the NCRA, while the agency transitions to the Great Redwood Trail Agency.
- d. MCOG Staff - Summary of Meetings. Ms. Barrett referred to her written staff report.
- e. MCOG Administration Staff
  - i. *Position Open – Administrative Assistant.* Ms. Barrett reported two job openings for a similar position with both Dow & Associates (MCOG Administration) and Davey-Bates Consulting (MCOG Planning). Chair Gjerde noted the County has open positions also.
  - ii. *Miscellaneous.* None.
  - iii. *Next Meeting Date.* Monday, December 6, 2021.
- f. MCOG Planning Staff
  - i. *Position Open – Administrative Assistant.* Refer to #11e above.

ii. *Miscellaneous*. None.

g. MCOG Directors. There were no reports.

h. California Association of Councils of Governments (CALCOG) Delegates. No news to report.

**12. Closed Session—Conference with Legal Counsel—Existing Litigation** (Paragraph (1) of subdivision (d) of Section 54956.9), *Dewey-White v. Mendocino Council of Governments*, Mendocino Superior Court Case No. SCUJ-CVPT 18-70179.

Adjourned to closed session at 2:58 p.m. and reconvened in open session at 3:15 p.m. Executive Director Barrett reported that a settlement of the case was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

**13. Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 3:16 p.m.

Submitted: NEPHELE BARRETT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By Janet Orth, Deputy Director