



MENDOCINO
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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PHILLIP J. DOW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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April 21, 2017

To: MCOG Board of Directors
From: Janet Orth, Deputy Director/CFO
Subject: Information Packet of May 1, 2017 Meeting - No Action Required

* * * * *

The following items are attached.

1. Caltrans Mile Marker Publication – Willits Bypass – Article summarizing the project’s history and lessons learned, in this quarterly online magazine dated March 2017. More info: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/milemarker/docs/2017/MM-2017-Q1.pdf>
2. Correspondence Received – Albion Community – Letter dated March 22, 2017 addressed to various government representatives from homeowners in the town of Albion, describing needed road repairs and requesting assistance, including photographs of problem areas.
3. Comments on State Affordable Housing/Sustainable Communities Program – Letter dated April 5, 2017 from Executive Director Dow to the Strategic Growth Council submitting comments on the draft 2016/17 guidelines for this grant program, citing rural conditions and raising issues with the program’s definitions of “disadvantaged community.”
4. Letters of Support for Last Chance Grade Alternatives – Two letters dated this week from Executive Director Dow on behalf of MCOG and North State Super Region, in support of identifying route alternatives for this section of US-101 in Del Norte County, where a geologic failure (i.e. slip-out), is causing transportation and economic disruption through the region.

Willits Bypass: The Wait is Over

Six Decades After It Was First Proposed, North Coast Route Becomes Reality



Caltrans photos by Scott Lorenzo

The southbound U.S. Highway 101 bridge spans State Route 20 at the new southern interchange of the Willits Bypass. Note the unique redwood cone pattern designed just for this project. These redwood cones adorn all the concrete structures of the bypass, which opened in November 2016.

The Willits Bypass, first envisioned more than 60 years ago, had become to many living along California's North Coast a mythical tale, like Bigfoot, something you only hear stories about but never see for yourself. Until ground was broken for construction in the fall of 2012, many locals believed it would never be completed.

U.S. Highway 101 is considered the lifeline of the northern California coastal range. For decades, travelers through the city of Willits experienced delays that would often reach 30-60 minutes or more during summer. The purpose of the Willits Bypass is to ease congestion for interregional traffic along this important trucking and tourism corridor.

After being shelved numerous times due to funding shortages in the 1960s and 1970s, the project was revived by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) in 1988 — only to be put on hold due to funds diverted to seismic retrofit projects.

But after many challenges, construction did begin and the bypass saw its first vehicles on November 3, 2016.

Funding issues

After getting past the funding shortages due to the seismic retrofit projects, Caltrans moved forward on an environmental document, with the final document completed in 2006. Funding for construction from the CTC seemed to be automatic after so many years of work, but when Caltrans brought the project to the CTC in early 2007, the economy was starting to falter, and highway funding shortages were looming on the horizon.

The CTC told Caltrans that funding for Northern California projects was too competitive at that time to pay for the full proposed four-lane bypass, but was more feasible if the project was divided into two phases. Staff quickly drew up such plans, held a public meeting to gain local support and returned to the CTC. Funding for Phase 1 of the Willits Bypass was allocated, for two lanes over the full length of the project.

Lesson learned: Large, expensive projects are getting harder to fund, so breaking them up into prioritized phases, or sections, may be the only way to get them funded over time.

Protests

While some in the community voiced concerns about the scope of the bypass, or whether it was really needed, organized protests did not begin until after the 2012 groundbreaking. The first of these protests, the so-called “Boot Print” tours, trespassed onto various areas within the footprint of the bypass. These protests gradually faded after construction began.

Tree sitters then began to occupy trees within the bypass construction area in January 2013, about one month before tree and brush removal began. The protests continued through the summer, until there were no more trees along the project route to occupy.

Other actions initiated by the protesters included chaining themselves to equipment and blocking trucks on the highway, while others chained themselves to the trucks or gathered at the local construction office to block employee access.

However, a strong show of support for the bypass also emerged, by those who backed construction of a new route. Counter-protests were sometimes staged on behalf of the bypass at the same time as rallies against it.

Due to the ongoing protests, CHP maintained a large presence on this project, paid for through the Construction Zone Enhanced Enforcement Program (COZEEP). This program is normally used to enhance work zone safety by reimbursing CHP to provide off-duty officers with vehicles to be present at each end of a work zone. Six officers within the six-mile project area were assigned around the clock to discourage trespassers, among them specially trained officers to safely remove tree sitters.

Lessons learned: COZEEP can be used rather than hiring private security for construction projects; it is important to provide safe access for media; and tree sitters may climb more than trees!

Cow vandalism?

While installing water lines on mitigation parcels for grazing cattle, a team of archeologists worked a day or two ahead of the trenching crew, looking for any potential cultural areas to avoid. They found an area that contained a concentration of chert, or stone flakes, left behind when Native Americans made stone tools. They used tall survey stakes to clearly mark the Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA) so the trenching crew would avoid the site.

What the archeologists did not realize was there were cattle in another part of that field. The cattle wandered over to the survey stakes and did what bovines tend to do: they rubbed up against the stakes to scratch themselves, knocking them to the ground, and trampled them into the grass.

The trenching crew, assisted by a tribal monitor looking for any artifacts brought to the surface, had already trenched through the area when one of the stakes was spotted on the ground. Work stopped, and local tribes were notified of the mistake. Caltrans staff discussed the issue with the tribal monitor, and it was agreed that since no artifacts had been dug up, work should proceed with pipe laying and backfilling.

Lessons learned: The quick reporting to the local tribes kept the situation from escalating, but when local media found out about the mistake, there was initial disbelief about the cattle. However, the issue was resolved because Caltrans was truthful early, owned the mistake, and explained the changes implemented so it would not happen again.

Falsework collapse

It would be difficult to talk about Willits Bypass challenges without mentioning the falsework collapse that injured several workers. Falsework is the temporary structure that supports the concrete forms until the concrete hardens and the bridge can support itself.

The 1.1-mile-long viaduct is the type of challenging project that every structural engineer wants in their work history. Built in eight frames, or segments, its foundations rest on friction piles (steel



These columns, or bents, rise over 20 feet to support the 1.1 mile viaduct. In all, 64 of these columns support the viaduct's roadway.



Mitigation and relinquishment work will be completed over the next few years.

piles that do not extend into the bedrock) due to the very deep soils in that area of the valley. Designed to withstand large earthquakes, the viaduct crosses two local roads, several waterways and a 100-year floodplain.

On January 22, 2015, a section of falsework collapsed as it was being loaded with wet concrete.

Caltrans concluded that the falsework was not installed as shown on the approved falsework drawings provided by the contractor, that certification by the contractor's Engineer of Record's designated representative may have been ineffective, and that the collapse was rapid with no prior indicators of an emerging loss of stability.

Recommendations included:

- revising the Standard Specifications regarding delegation of certification of the falsework and timing of certification;
- evaluating the need for horizontal forces to be positively restrained; and
- providing internal training for reviewing best practices in design, construction and inspection of the falsework.

Late design change minimizes delays

The bypass was scheduled to be a three-season project, breaking ground in the fall of 2012 and opening to traffic in the fall of 2015. However, after the first season it was clear that the protests had delayed the project schedule a full year, and the completion was changed to the fall of 2016.

After the second construction season, the continuing protests, a lawsuit against the project, and a temporary suspension of Caltrans' permit by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, it seemed the bypass would not open until fall 2017.

Another reason for the second year of delay was due to the original design of the north interchange. The bridge foundations were designed to require a full 300 days of settlement from the time the fill was placed before the bridges could be constructed. This lowered the cost for pilings, and was considered to be a good tradeoff when the original schedule allowed for the long settlement.

Facing approximately \$10-12 million in costs for a second year of delay, Caltrans' construction staff brainstormed with design staff to see if the foundations could be quickly redesigned to reduce the settlement time, saving significant time and money. Plans were modified to reduce the settlement time from 300 days to just 30, a change order for about \$3 million was initiated, and steel friction piles ordered. This change did add increased risk due to potential settlement issues, but paid off by paring the project delay to one year.

Challenges will continue

The main Willits Bypass project has been completed, but there are several related projects still in progress. Mitigation and relinquishment work will be completed over the next few years. The main mitigation project is the largest of its kind ever to be designed and constructed by Caltrans. To make up for the approximately 40 acres of wetlands permanently impacted during construction of the bypass, as well as another 20 acres temporarily impacted, more than 2,000 acres of land were purchased to create and rehabilitate wetlands, improve riparian areas along creeks, remove non-native invasive plants, and replant almost 800,000 native species. After the mitigation is completed, the work will be monitored for 10 years to assure success. There are sure to be more challenges waiting to be met, and still more to be learned from this project. **MM**

Source: District 1 Chief Public Information Officer Phil Frisbie Jr.

From: Homeowners in the town of Albion, California
P.O. Box 485, C/O Albion Mutual Water Company
Albion, California 95410

To: Our Government Representatives

Date: *March 22, 2017*

We, the homeowners and residents of the town of Albion, have an issue that all previous efforts have failed to resolve. We are turning to you in hopes that you will help us.

There are very serious problems with the roads in the town of Albion. The most pressing need is to repair the paving at the west end of East Lane at the intersection where it meets Albion River South Side Road.

There is a spring that drains downhill on the east side of ARSSR. It flows in a culvert under the driveway of 33861 ARSSR. At the south east corner of the intersection, it should flow into the uphill end of a culvert that goes diagonally under ARSSR and opens on the west side of ARSSR. From there it should flow down to the river.

But the water from the spring apparently misses the culvert, because it flows out and over East Lane. Also, for the last few years this overflow has had an oily sheen on the surface. It is clearly some type of petroleum product. You can see it and it smells like kerosene.

As the water flows over the pavement, it degrades the pavement. It is an absolute mess. There is broken asphalt, multiple attempts to patch it, loose gravel, and pools of oily water, which are flowing downhill to the Albion River. This water flows directly across the driveway and walkway of the house on the north east corner of the intersection.

The Albion Mutual Water Company is an excellent system, and right in the middle of this mess we must maintain the integrity

and access to three important valves to manage our water supply. The valve casings are flooded and when the county crew did perfunctory repairs they covered up our access plates for the valves. Furthermore, when they have been contacted regarding this problem any response has been to throw a few shovelfuls of asphalt on it. This quickly washes away, taking the oil with it.

The oil appearance and odor were so bad last year that we contacted the county health department. They said the odor was like decomposing organic matter. I assure you, the smell of petroleum is obvious.

The EPA sent a biological scientist out. We looked at the situation together. She believed it was not an EPA issue even though oil is flowing into the Albion River.

There is no sidewalk. In order for a pedestrian to walk west out of East Lane onto ARSSR, one must walk through this mess. It is particularly inconvenient and unsafe for our pets that walk there.

We suggest that the existing culvert be repaired, that no water should flow across the road, that the source of the oil slick be repaired, and that the road be paved in a manner that will be dry and safe.

Also we request a repair at the east end of East Lane where it turns south and goes uphill to intersect Albion Street. That has also been a continuing problem with broken asphalt and loose gravel. Patches are ineffective.

We love and respect our town and work diligently to maintain it. As homeowners, citizens, and taxpayers, we believe that we deserve better service regarding this issue.

Your consideration is appreciated.

Cordially,
Residents of Albion,
Signatures attached:

.....

The page with the attached signatures and addresses has been purposely left out to ensure the confidentiality of the individuals.

Copies of this letter sent to the following:

Phil Dow

Kent Stanley

Howard Dashiell

Carmel Angelo

Dan Hamburg

Jim Wood

Mike McGuire

Jared Huffman

Kamala Harris

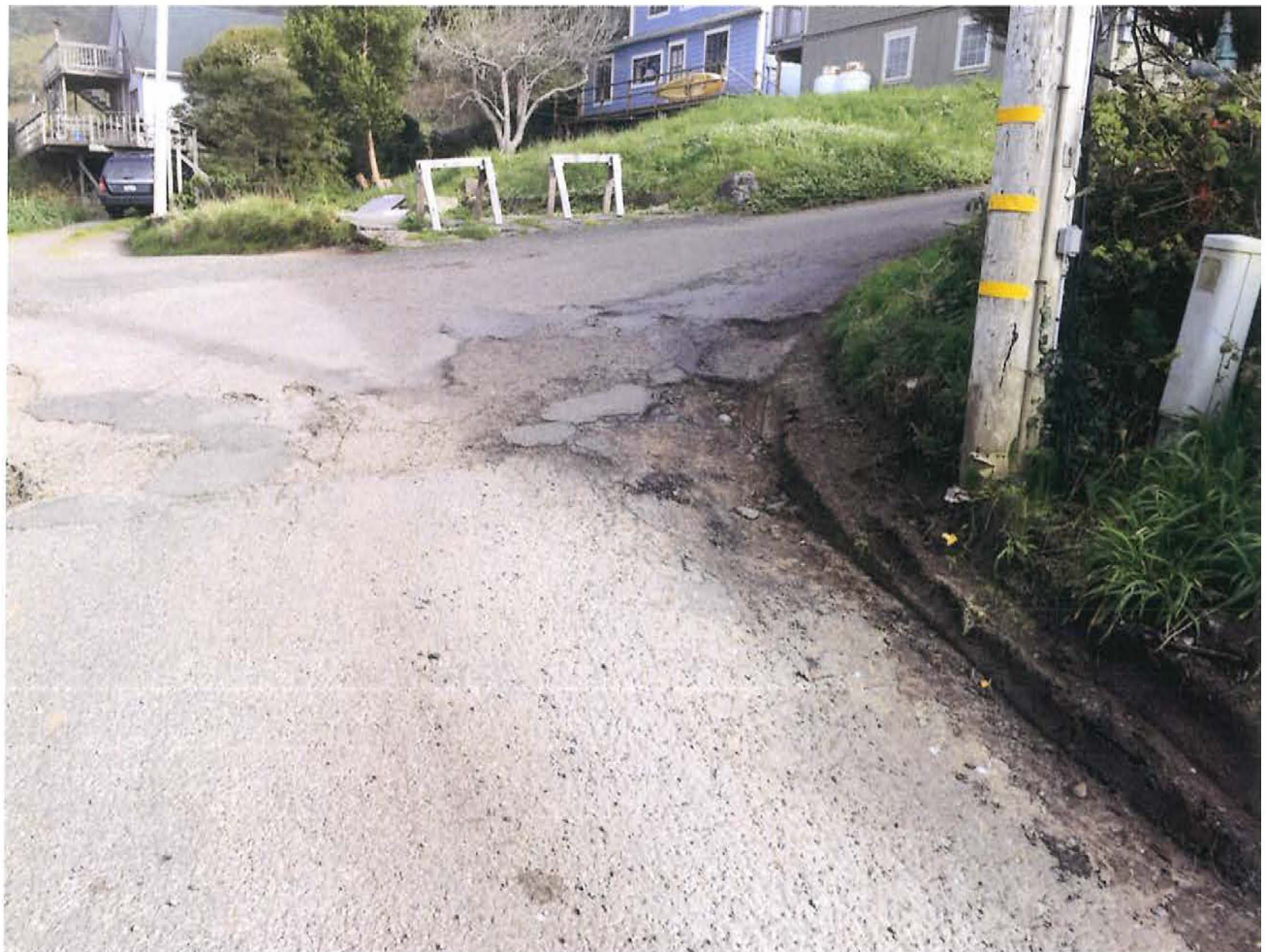
Dianne Feinstein

Jerry Brown











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April 5, 2017

Mr. Randall Winston, Executive Director
Strategic Growth Council
1400 Tenth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Information # 3
MCOG Meeting
5/1/17

RE: Comments on Draft 2016/17 AH/SC Program Guidelines

Dear Mr. Winston:

I attended a forum entitled “Barriers to Accessing Transportation, Housing, and Energy Efficiency Programs” at the Consolidated Tribal Health Project Wellness Center in Redwood Valley on August 31, 2016. Since I was not provided a program with the invitation, I was unaware that Strategic Growth Council (SGC) staff were in attendance and in fact, utilizing this forum for rural outreach. Early in the program, discussion between panelists and attendees focused on a general lack of public transit in Mendocino County. Tribal members and others provided specific examples that indicated that there are many areas where service is not available or too infrequent to be relied upon when needed. With no representative of Mendocino Transit Authority in attendance, I explained to the panel and the public that funding constraints and performance measures constrain the countywide public transit system.

At the conclusion of the August meeting, I was approached by SGC staff regarding specific obstacles to AH/SC implementation in rural areas. I explained there are several and that I had specifically outlined eight major issues in my written comments on the 2015/16 draft guidelines. Asked if there was a single issue that most limited rural access to the AH/SC program, I replied that is the required link to transit (rail, bus and flexible transit). I felt that the testimony heard earlier that day by tribal members and other public attendees had verified my assertion. Rural transit systems generally provide a lifeline service for the transit-dependent population. Although Mendocino’s transit authority operates a county-wide system, it does not provide service everywhere. Only along a very few routes in the three larger cities can the “Qualifying Transit” criterion be met. Again, rural transit generally provides service for a transit-dependent population; to a much lesser extent does it provide commuter service where peak-hour stops are critical.

I am attaching a map entitled “Public Bus Rides Per Person Per Year” that was produced by the Center for Economic Development (CED), based at California State University, Chico. The map indicates that public transit ridership in the CSU, Chico Service Region (12 of the most northern counties) is only about one-sixth as that of the State of California as a whole. The map is a little dated now (2011), but I believe it remains relevant. Things change slowly in rural California.

A second map produced by the Center for Economic Development is also attached. This one, entitled "Commute Time in Minutes" demonstrates that many rural areas experience commutes that rival urban areas. As an example very rural Sierra County experiences commute times higher than Santa Clara, San Mateo, Sacramento, Ventura, Orange and San Diego counties.

Considering both of these maps together, one can conclude that many rural residents spend as much time involved in commuting as their urban counterparts, but only a small fraction of those are on a public bus system. Requiring a linkage to transit may make sense for developed urban areas with extensive public transit and even passenger rail, but not for rural California.

Perhaps it was a result of the Mendocino County meeting, but the draft AH/SC guidelines now include Indian Tribe eligibility for program funding. There are well over 100 federally recognized tribes in California, and ten of these are in Mendocino County. The Strategic Growth Council is to be commended for extending eligibility to tribal governments, but obstacles to accessing this funding are substantial.

If a tribal government in Mendocino County or in most other rural counties in northern California were to apply for AH/SC funding, they would soon find that their prospects for funding are cut in half because of the requirement that 50% of AH/SC program funding must be expended for projects benefiting disadvantaged communities. The Strategic Growth Council's use of CalEnviroScreen as the sole determinant of disadvantaged community status is extremely limiting for applicants in rural areas where air quality remains good.

A third map that I have attached is based on a statewide CalEnviroScreen map that identifies disadvantaged communities based on a pre-selected level of 29% highest scored areas (the AH/SC threshold is 25% and above). Even with this slightly lower threshold there are no communities that CalEnviroScreen identifies as disadvantaged communities in the geographic area identified as the North State Super Region in 14 of the 16 member counties. The North State Super Region encompasses all counties to the north of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC - nine Bay Area counties) and the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) - over 26% of the land mass of California.

Utilizing widely used criteria codified in California Public Resources Code (PRC) Section 75005, 14 of the 23 Census Designated Place(s) and cities in Mendocino County are designated disadvantaged communities based on household income; ten of these 14 are designated as severely disadvantaged communities. Mean household income must be 80% of the statewide average to qualify as disadvantaged under the PRC. Sixty percent or less qualifies a community for designation as severely disadvantaged.

Economic conditions as described in Mendocino County are representative of rural areas throughout the state. As the stated purpose of the AH/SC program is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it should be recognized that rural areas contribute proportionately to greenhouse gas production and guidelines should be developed to allow all areas of the state to compete for funding for projects that will meet the intent of this program.

Mr. Randall Winston, SGC
April 5, 2017

To conclude, conditions in rural areas tend to be much different than urban areas. Program guidelines that are to include all of California should recognize this fact. For at least the Rural Innovation Project Area (RIPA) component, I recommend that the transit requirements be waived. There are no doubt rural projects that can address the remaining seven (non-transit) objectives of the program.

I also recommend that the guidelines be amended to also accept identification of disadvantaged community based on household income, per the Public Resources Code. CalEnviroScreen is so heavily weighted in favor of poor air quality that the health impact of low income is completely overlooked in much of rural California. Public health officials in Mendocino County inform me that extremely low incomes not only influence frequency and quality of medical care, but also food choices that can have profound and long term effects on the health of children.

My comments are intended to be constructive with the goal of enabling all areas of California to participate in the implementation of local projects that advance the goals and objectives of the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program.

Sincerely,



Phillip J. Dow, P.E.
Executive Director

Copies: Dan Gjerde, MCOG Chair
Bill Higgins, California Association of Councils of Governments
Ivan Garcia, Vice-Chair, North State Super Region
Maura Twomey, Chair, Rural Counties Task Force
Rebecca Long, Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Hasan Ikhata, Executive Director, Southern California Association of Governments

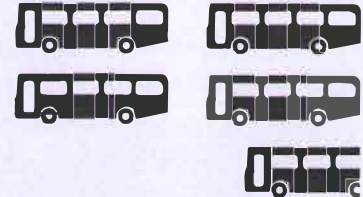
Attachments

Public Bus Rides Per Person Per Year By County, 2011

Rides Per Person Per Year:

California Total:

23.9



CSU Chico Service Region*:

4.1

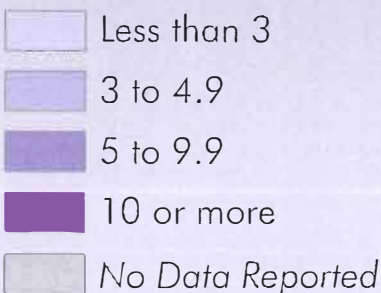


*The CSU Chico Service Region includes the counties of Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Yuba.



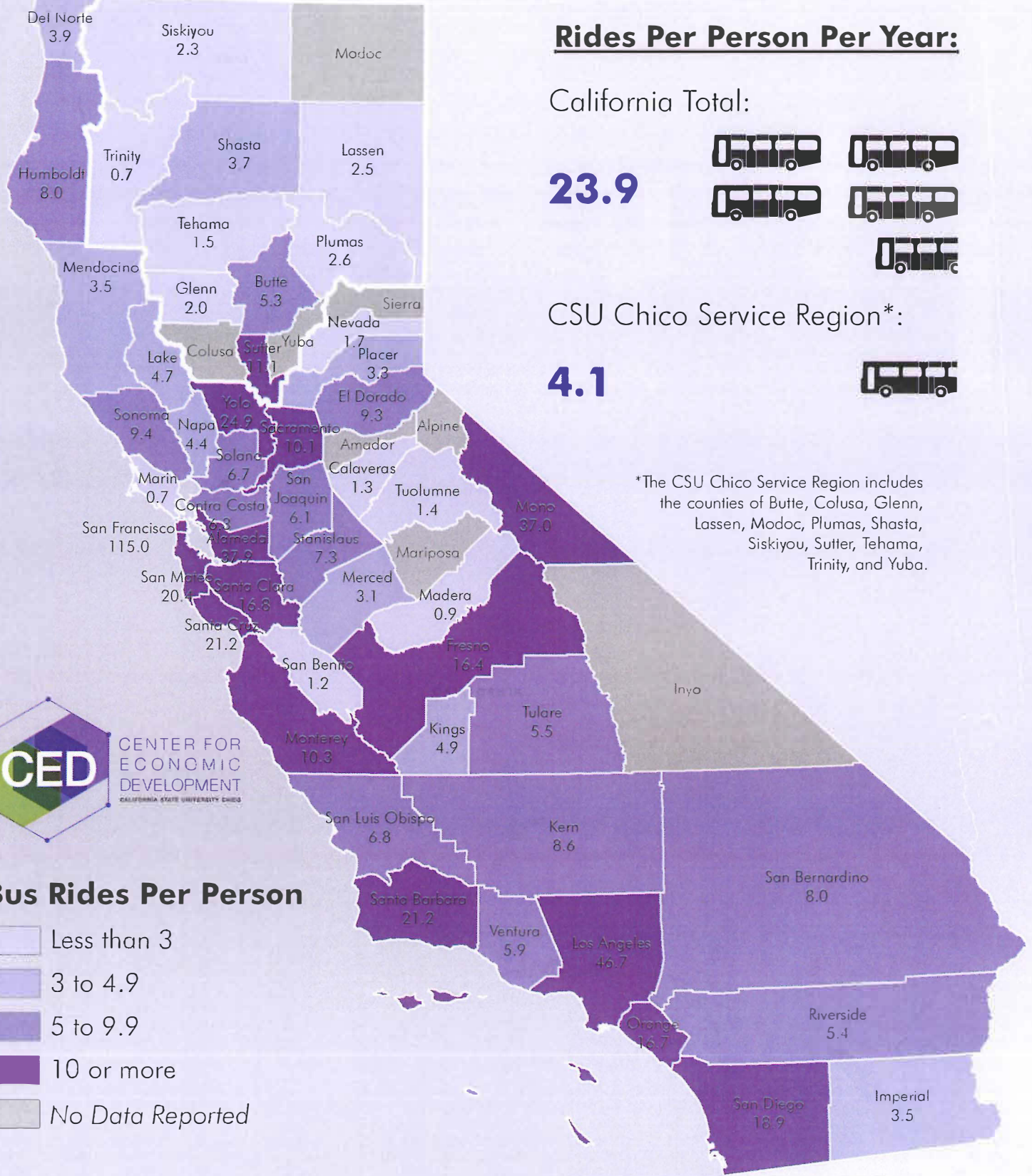
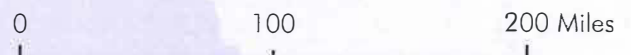
CENTER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHICO

Bus Rides Per Person



Sources:

State Controller's Office: Transit Operators Annual Report 2006-11



Commute Time in Minutes

By County, 2009-13 Average

Average Commute Time:

(minutes)

California:

27.2



CSU Chico Service Region*:

22.1



*The CSU Chico Service Region includes the counties of Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, and Yuba.



CENTER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY CHICO

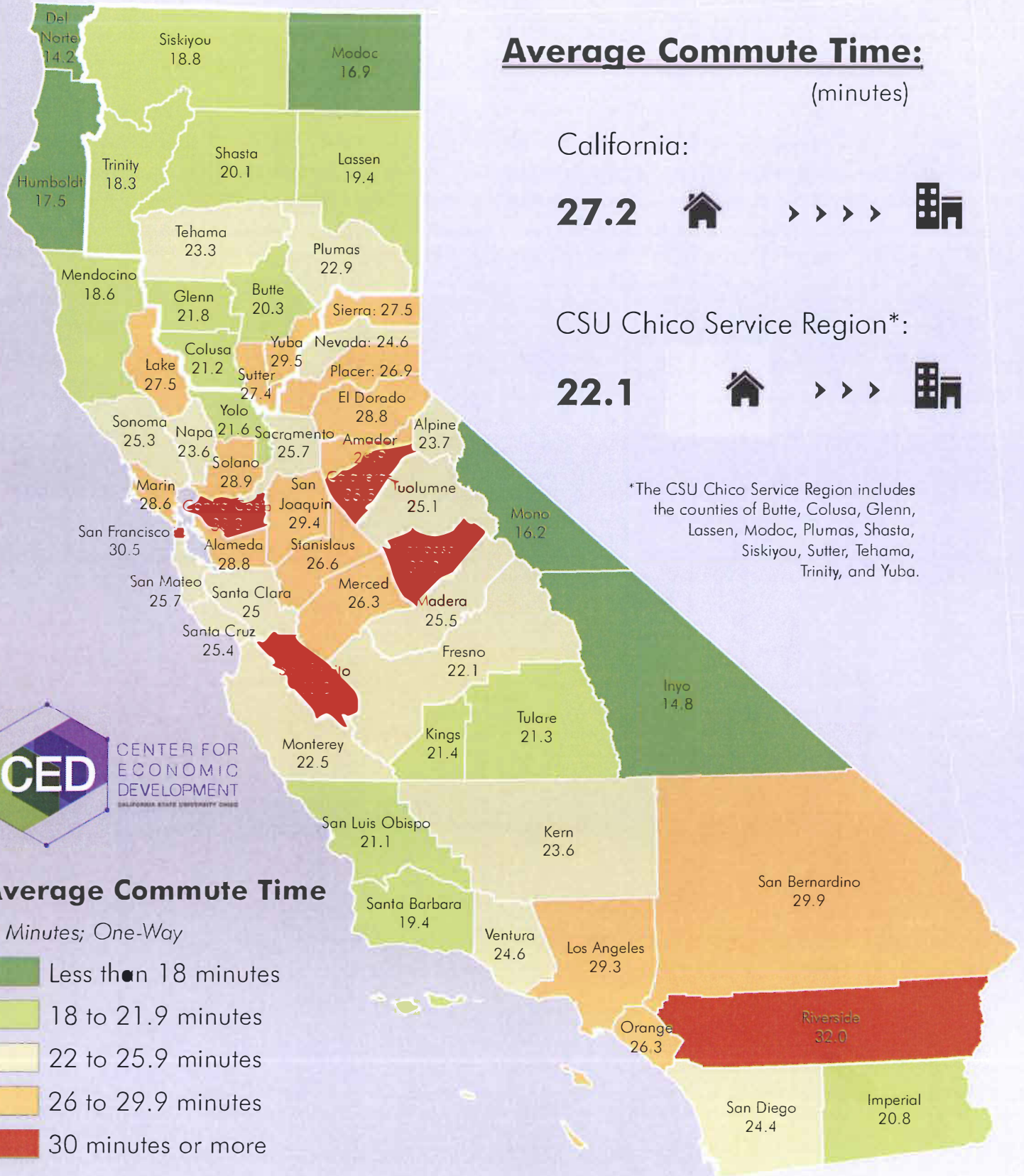
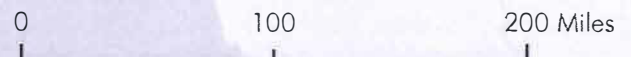
Average Commute Time

In Minutes; One-Way

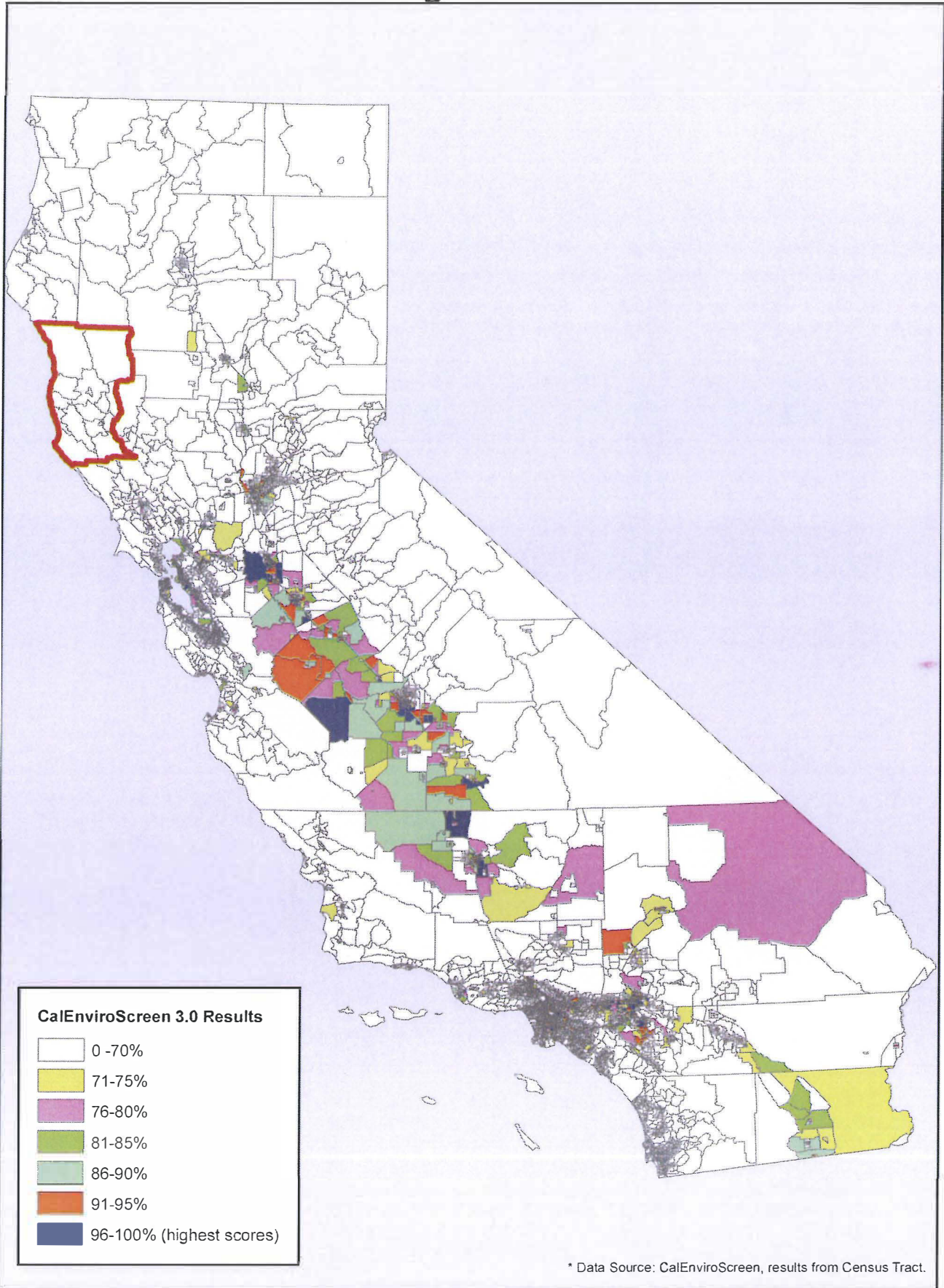
- Less than 18 minutes
- 18 to 21.9 minutes
- 22 to 25.9 minutes
- 26 to 29.9 minutes
- 30 minutes or more

Sources:

US Census Bureau: American Community Survey (2009-13 Estimates)



CalEnviroScreen Disadvantaged Communities



Top 29% Statewide



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April 20, 2017

Mr. Bob Alvarado, Chair
California Transportation Commission
1120 N. Street, MS-52
Sacramento, CA 95814

Information # 4
MCOG Meeting
5/1/17

RE: US 101- Last Chance Grade

Dear Commissioner Alvarado:

North Coast transportation took two giant leaps forward last year with the opening of long-awaited projects on State Route 299 and U.S. 101. Now we are confronting the potential for a giant leap backward as winter storms have contributed to more slide activity along Last Chance Grade on U.S. 101 in Del Norte County. A new slide collapsed a lane earlier this season and the historic slide in this area continues to move.

Caltrans has estimated that full closure of U.S. 101 at last Chance Grade will result in an economic loss of about \$130 million per year to the Del Norte economy. The economic impact would also be felt to the south in Humboldt and Mendocino counties, as through traffic to/from the Pacific Northwest is diverted inland to the I-5 corridor. This is validation of what has often been stated about the importance of U.S. 101 to our area – it is truly “the lifeline of the North Coast”.

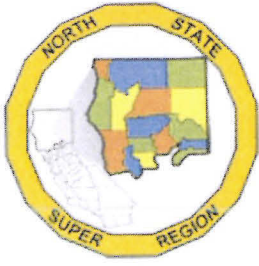
It is my understanding that Caltrans will be seeking funding from the Commission at the May meeting to initiate the environmental and geotechnical investigation of potential new alignments of U.S. 101 in the Last Chance Grade segment to avoid slide prone areas. Despite tens of millions of dollars spent on repairs in recent decades, Last Chance Grade remains precarious. It is time to identify alternative alignments so that a permanent solution can be pursued.

I am supportive of the Caltrans request to initiate work on viable alternatives so that we can ensure that in the future the “lifeline of the North Coast” will remain un-severed.

Sincerely,

Phillip J. Dow, P.E.
Executive Director

Copies: Dan Gjerde, MCOG Chair
Congressman Jared Huffman
Tamera Leighton, Executive Director, Del Norte Local Transportation Commission



North State Super Region

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Phillip J. Dow, Chair

Jon Clark

Butte County Assn. of Governments

Scott Lanphier

Colusa County Transportation Comm.

Tamera Leighton

Del Norte Local Transportation Comm.

Di Aulabaugh

Glenn County Transportation Comm.

Marcella Clem

Humboldt County Association of Govt.

Lisa Davey-Bates

Lake Co City/Area Planning Council

Cynthia Raschein

Lassen County Transportation Comm.

Phil Dow

Mendocino Council of Governments

Debbie Pedersen

Modoc County Transportation Comm.

Daniel Landon

Nevada County Transportation Comm.

Robert Perreault

Plumas County Transportation Comm.

Daniel S. Little

Shasta County Transportation Agency/MPO

Tim Beals

Sierra County Transportation Comm.

Melissa Cummins

Siskiyou County Local Trans. Comm.

Gary Antone

Tehama County Transportation Comm.

Richard Tippet

Trinity County Transportation Comm.

April 21, 2017

Mr. Bob Alvarado, Chair

California Transportation Commission

1120 N. Street, MS-52

Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: US 101 – Last Chance Grade

Dear Commissioner Alvarado:

Last year was a banner year for highway transportation in the far north of California. Two major highway projects were opened to traffic that each took decades to plan, fund, and construct. The Buckhorn Summit project on State Route 299 and the Willits Bypass on U.S. 101, once referred to as “Notorious Projects”, are now open to traffic.

Now that these two major steps forward have been completed, the unstable geology of northwestern California is again threatening a huge step backward in the State’s transportation system – the potential severing of U.S. 101 in Del Norte County. The notable slide on Last Chance Grade is again on the move.

Along with Interstate 5/S.R. 99, U.S. 101 is only one of only two north-south routes in our region that are identified as Priority Interregional Highways in California’s *Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan*. The designation of U.S. 101 as one of only ten *Focus Routes* in California recognizes its important role in statewide highway connectivity. Within the North State Super Region, U.S. 101 is known as “the lifeline of the North Coast”.

Winter storms this year have resulted in significant damage to the roadway south of Crescent City, including the development of a new slide area. Closure of this highway would result in severe economic damage to the local economy and result in a detour route of over 300 miles.

As partners of a coalition of 14 regional transportation planning agencies and two small Metropolitan Planning Organizations, we share the concern of the Del Norte Local Transportation Commission that the slide issue at Last Chance Grade must be addressed in a timely fashion. Many millions in State resources have already been spent on the U.S. 101 current alignment, resulting in only temporary benefit. Investigations into potential alignments in more geologically stable areas need to proceed.

It is our understanding that Caltrans will be seeking funding from the Commission at the May meeting in San Diego for environmental and geotechnical investigation of potential new alignments of a segment of U.S. 101 to circumvent the Last Chance Grade slide areas. The North State Super Region is wholly supportive of this initial step toward a permanent solution to this critical statewide transportation issue.

Sincerely,



Phillip J. Dow, P.E., Chair
North State Super Region

Copies: Congressman Jared Huffman
Tamera Leighton, Del Norte Local Transportation Commission