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MCOG Wins Inter-Regional Grant Award

Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG) has secured a \$260,000 state grant to act as lead agency for an Inter-Regional Partnership named the "Wine Country IRP," to study the impacts of housing, jobs, and transportation imbalances. The grant was awarded to MCOG as lead agency by the State Department of Housing & Community Development, to conduct a three-year project with the Lake County/City Area Planning Council (LC/CAPC) and Sonoma and Napa Counties.

Larry Wright, P.E., MCOG's Deputy Director for Long Range Planning, moved to the region in September 1999 from San Diego, California, where growth has been rampant. He soon noticed the long and difficult, often unsafe, commutes that many workers are compelled to endure because the lack of affordable housing near available jobs. Commuters drive from as far away as Willits, or Hidden Valley in Lake County, to jobs in the Santa Rosa area.

"This realization inspired me to propose that MCOG take on lead agency responsibilities under this grant program. We have a brief window of opportunity right now to deal with this problem before growth overtakes our quality of life here in Mendocino County," said grant writer Wright. "The roads that commuters are driving were just not designed for this type of long-distance commuting."

"By cooperating with our neighboring regions and developing planning tools like GIS (Geographic Information System) data evaluation, and by creating an interregional forum for elected decision makers and community representatives to develop coordinated policies, we can plan proactively for the growth that's working its way north," agreed Patti Campbell, Chair of both MCOG and the Board of Supervisors. "And hopefully, we can avoid the sprawl and negative impacts experienced by so many other regions."

The statewide grant program was funded by Assembly Bill 2054 (Torlakson) enacted in November 2000, and is open to regional councils in both the "established" and "developing" inter-regional partnership categories to develop action plans that will mitigate the impact of imbalances before they become crisis-level problems. The Wine Country IRP falls in the

“developing” category, and with the 25 percent match required, a total budget of \$315,000 has been programmed.

The grant application received enthusiastic support from State Senator Wesley Chesbro and local organizations such as the Economic Development & Financing Corporation (EDFC), Community Development Commission, Lake County Business Outreach & Response Team, County of Mendocino Air Quality Management District, and others.

"Governor Davis is committed to strengthening local communities, facilitating regional collaboration, and promoting sustainable economic growth for all Californians," according to the HCD Housing Policy Division's Deputy Director Cathy Creswell. "To this end, these grants provide funding to encourage multi-jurisdictional collaboration and develop strategies to mitigate the negative effects of imbalances between jobs and housing."

MCOG acts as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency for the Mendocino countywide region and, under its joint powers agreement, also has authority to work on issues of housing and economic development. For more information, call the MCOG office at 463-1859 or consult the agency's web site at www.mendocinocog.org.

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