



Mendocino COGnizance

News from

Mendocino Council of Governments, the Regional Transportation Planning Agency
"A cog in the wheels of our transportation system"

Issue #10
Spring 2005

Major Milestone for Willits Bypass

A long-awaited important step in the environmental review process was reached on April 7 when Caltrans District 1 submitted their proposed Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA) for the Willits Bypass project. The federal permitting agencies have 30 working days, or up to 45 total days, to respond. Caltrans is seeking concurrence that the route alternative identified as the "modified J1T" meets LEDPA criteria.

Once this hurdle is cleared, the lengthy environmental process can be concluded and plans for the permitted route through the Little Lake Valley can move forward. While Caltrans will not solicit further comments on the Final EIR (Environmental Impact Report), District 1 does intend to hold another public meeting in Willits this summer to keep people informed.

All this may seem quite technical and complex, because it really is. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)--more acronyms!-- are laws put in place to assure that all impacts of a proposed project are considered. The larger the project, often the more exhaustive and thorough the process will be. MCOG staff is encouraged that progress is being made on this project, the highest regional transportation priority for capital improvements. Construction is still expected to begin by the end of 2007.

Meanwhile, funds to complete the project are still being sought. Much of the funds have been programmed, at over \$117 million. Reauthorization of the six-year transportation legislation that provides federal funding is pending now in the Congress, with House and Senate versions still to be reconciled. MCOG has submitted a request for \$23.5 million in funding from the new bill; however such requests are seldom met in full.

For more information, go to Caltrans' web site at www.dot.ca.gov/dist1, follow menus to Environmental Documents, then to Projects--Willits Bypass, or call John Bulinski, Project Manager, at (707) 441-5729.

More Call Boxes Approved

Soon another round of motorist aid call boxes will be installed along state highways in our county. The Mendocino Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies, otherwise known as SAFE, has received approvals for permit applications to install the boxes on Routes 1, 20 East, and 175 near Hopland.

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Access to Seaside Creek Beach on Route 1 north of Fort Bragg.

MCOG Highlights of 2004/05

Draft 2005 Regional Transportation Plan

This periodic update will be released for public comment before adoption by the Council later this year. - See story Page 2.

Transportation Funds Restored

Prop 42 funds were meant for transportation but have been diverted by the State. After intense lobbying statewide, the Governor has agreed to restore \$1.3 billion. - See story Page 3.

New Board Members Seated

With the retirement of Chair Patti Campbell and results of the November election, three new members have been appointed. A new Chair and Vice Chair were elected by the Council at their February 7 meeting. - See Back Page.

\$2 Million Awarded to TE Projects

MCOG has approved three projects for funding under the Transportation Enhancements Program. - See story Page 3.

Wine Country IRP Phase 2

The InterRegional Partnership formed by MCOG to address jobs-housing imbalances has been funded by Caltrans to conduct further transportation studies in Mendocino, Lake, Napa, and Sonoma Counties. - See story Back Page.

2005 Calendar

Board Meetings

1st Monday at 1:30 p.m., nine to ten months a year, at Ukiah Civic Center, 300 Seminary Avenue.

Planned highlights and recurring actions (subject to change):

- May 2** TPC Recommendations:
Unmet Transit Needs, Annual Transit Claim, Transit Standards, and Performance Review
- June 6** Adopt 2005/06 RTPA Budget
Adopt 2005/06 Planning Program
Make Annual Finding of Unmet Transit Needs
Presentation on Highway 101 Interchange Study

FY 2005/06:

- July 4** No Meeting in July
- Aug. 1** Regular Business
- Sept. 5** No Meeting in September unless called - TBA
- Oct. 3** Regular Business
- Nov. 7** Regular Business
- Dec. 5** SSTAC Recommendations:
2006/07 Unmet Transit Needs - Public Hearing

Business to be Agendized:

- Draft 2005 Regional Transportation Plan
Adoption of Final 2005 Regional Transportation Plan
Report from Smart Growth Task Force

MCOG's Purpose

MCOG was formed as a joint powers agency in 1972, as mandated by state law, the Transportation Development Act (TDA). The Council primarily serves as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for our countywide region. Two county supervisors, a county elected official, and one council member from each of the four incorporated cities make up Board membership. A representative of Caltrans serves on the Policy Advisory Committee with the seven directors.

MCOG serves as the Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE) of Mendocino County, administering the call box program. At times MCOG also is involved with housing and economic development. MCOG is a political subdivision of the State of California.

Acting as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency, MCOG programs or allocates various types of local, state and federal transportation funds to Caltrans, the County of Mendocino and the four incorporated Cities of Ukiah, Fort Bragg, Willits, and Point Arena. In addition to projects on state highways and within its five member jurisdictions, MCOG helps support transportation activities of the North Coast Rail Authority, California Western Railroad, Mendocino Transit Authority, local airports, and others. Projects involve planning, capital improvements, rehabilitation and maintenance, fleet replacement, and intermodal transit centers.

Standing Committees

Executive Committee

Feb. 18: Budget Recommendations for 2005/06

Transit Productivity Committee (TPC)

April 18: Unmet Transit Needs Recommendations,
Review of Annual Transit Claim, Transit Standards, and Annual Transit Performance

Fall TBA: Transit Standards Evaluation & Update

Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

3rd Wed. monthly unless cancelled/rescheduled (refer to web site)

Social Services Trans. Advisory Council (SSTAC)

Spring: FTA transit grant applications for programs serving elderly and persons with disabilities. Fall: Unmet Transit Needs Workshop.



Nephela Barrett, Assistant Planner, explaining parts of the RTP at a public workshop last year. She also leads the annual Spring meeting of the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council.

2005 Regional Transportation Plan Draft for Public Comment

One of the primary responsibilities of MCOG staff is preparation of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). According to State law, the plans are to be updated every four years.

The 2001 RTP was adopted after several delays in 2003 and was a major rewrite involving extensive public outreach. Because of its recent adoption and also lack of funding to program new projects, changes for 2005 will be minor and focused on new guidelines.

The 2005 Draft RTP will be released in June for public review and comment. Print copies will be distributed to City and County agencies, the public library main branch in Ukiah, and will be available for viewing at MCOG's office. Also it will be posted on our web site for easy downloading.

Members of the public may submit written comments by email or by mail to MCOG's office, to the attention of Nephela Barrett. Comments may also be given in person at MCOG Board meetings. For more information, contact our staff (see back page).

Saving Prop 42 Funds for Local Use

After immense pressure from the transportation community and with State revenues coming in higher than anticipated, the Governor has announced that his budget will return \$1.3 billion to transportation needs in the coming fiscal year, fully funding Proposition 42.

In 2002, voters overwhelmingly approved Prop 42 to amend the California Constitution such that funds from the sales tax on gasoline would be spent for transportation purposes. Since then, citing fiscal emergencies, the State Legislature has suspended allocation of these funds to their intended purpose, as allowed by a provision in the bill. Over the past three years, more than \$5.5 billion of Prop 42 and other transportation funding has been suspended and diverted to offset the State's general fund deficits. Public officials statewide have been fighting to uphold the voters' mandate and stop the diversion of these funds.

The situation is dire. In its 2005 Annual Report to the Legislature, the California Transportation Commission described our State's transportation system as "on the verge of collapse." The infrastructure is crumbling from lack of maintenance. The Mendocino countywide region alone has lost over \$2.5 million to date.

Transportation funds are crucial to keeping our streets and roads safe and to protecting the taxpayers' investment in our infrastructure. Repairs cost far more the longer they are put off. Keeping up with repairs and improvements also provides jobs and stimulates our economy.

Along with many other agencies, MCOG and its member jurisdictions all adopted resolutions opposing the diversion of Prop 42 and sent them to decision makers. We don't yet know how much will be returned to our region, and the Legislature has yet to approve and adopt the budget, so stay tuned.

101 Interchanges Evaluated

MCOG is evaluating the interchanges on Highway 101 in the Ukiah area to see how well and safely they are functioning and what improvements may be needed. These include Lake Mendocino Drive, North State Street, Perkins Street/Vichy Springs Road, Gobbi Street, Talmage Road, and Highway 253/Boonville Road.

TJKM Transportation Consultants, which has offices in Santa Rosa, Pleasanton and Sacramento, has been selected to work with staff members of MCOG, City of Ukiah, Mendocino County Department of Transportation, and Caltrans District 1. Analysis is currently in progress, and early indications are that safety upgrades will be within the reach of available funds. The consultant will report findings and recommendations to the MCOG Board on June 6.



MCOG Executive Director Phil Dow leads a public workshop on the Regional Transportation Plan.

TE Funds Awarded

At their December 6 meeting, MCOG awarded over \$2 million to projects of regional significance. Local agencies applying for Transportation Enhancements projects under the federal "TE" program received funds intended for enhancements to the surface transportation system, such as bicycle and pedestrian trails, scenic and historic preservation, landscaping and beautification.

The top-ranked project receiving funds was the City of Point Arena's Coastal Access Scenic Bikeway. MCOG awarded \$383,850 to

complete this project connecting the downtown area with the municipal pier at the cove for bicycle and pedestrian access. The project includes a bus shelter, public restrooms and "streetscaping." Previously MCOG has awarded \$426,000 to this project.

The County of Mendocino received \$371,000 for one of their applications, which ranked second. The project will provide pedestrian facilities around Grace Hudson School in Ukiah and near River Union School in Talmage. This project was also awarded \$339,000 by MCOG under an earlier funding program.

Ranking third, the City of Fort

Bragg received the largest award at \$1,245,000 for Phase 3 of their Downtown Streetscape Project. The project will provide improved pedestrian facilities and beautify the streetscape along five blocks of Fort Bragg's downtown. The first two phases of this project have been funded under a variety of other sources.

The TE program originated with the Congressional bill formerly known as ISTEA and reauthorized as TEA21, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century. Both bills have expired and an extension is in place until Congress enacts a new federal transportation bill.

Next Phase of InterRegional Partnership Started

Readers of this newsletter may have followed the progress of the statewide InterRegional Partnerships (IRP), a three-year program concluded on June 30, 2004. Planning grants were awarded by the California Department of Housing & Community Development to eight partnerships to study imbalances of jobs, housing, and transportation. MCOG joined with Lake County/City



Area Planning Council and the Association of Bay Area Governments to form the Wine Country IRP covering Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma and Napa Counties.

This year, Caltrans has awarded a \$135,000 grant to continue the Wine Country IRP, with MCOG as lead agency. The transportation planning agencies for the four counties are working together

to launch "origin and destination" studies along our shared transportation corridors.

The first phase of work extensively documented the job-housing problem. According to Executive Director Phil Dow, "Members of the Wine Country IRP agree that there are consequences of the jobs/housing imbalance that are impacting the entire area. But, as yet, the magnitude of the problem has yet to be identified. We are lacking information regarding trip purposes, trip frequency, trip end, and other basic travel behavior data."

This second phase is an important step in learning where and how to target efforts to alleviate the impacts of jobs-housing separation. A report will be issued by June 2006. For more information on the Wine Country IRP, visit our web page at www.mendocinocog.org/irp, or contact Janet Orth at (707) 463-1859.

More Call Boxes Approved- *continued from Page 1:*

The Highway 1 permits were subject to review by the California Coastal Commission, so the process took longer than for the other routes. We're pleased to be able to move forward to install as many as 16 new call boxes along the coast. The six installations on Routes 175 and 20 are being coordinated with Lake County SAFE, so boxes will be installed on both sides of the county line on these two intercounty routes.

Mendocino SAFE prioritizes call box installations so that they are placed in areas with a history of elevated accident experience and in isolated areas where reception for common cell phones is poor or unavailable. For more information, contact Lisa Davey-Bates at (707) 463-1859.



MCOG's new Board was seated on February 7, 2005. L-R: Directors Colfax, McCowen, Jorgensen, Wharff, Wagenet, Dahlhoff, and Gjerde.

Board of Directors

Marsha Wharff, Chair

County Clerk-Recorder/Assessor

Tami Jorgensen, Vice Chair

Willits Mayor

Dan Gjerde, Executive Committee

Fort Bragg City Councilmember

Leslie Dahlhoff

Point Arena Mayor

John McCowen

Ukiah City Councilmember

David Colfax

County Supervisor, 5th District

Hal Wagenet

County Supervisor, 3rd District

Cheryl Willis, MCOG Policy Advisory Committee

Caltrans District I Planning Chief

Alternates (by optional appointment)

Mari Rodin - Ukiah City Council

Dave Turner - Fort Bragg City Council

Holly Madrigal - Willits City Council



MCOG Staff

Administration and Planning services are under contract with Dow & Associates. Staff includes:

Phil Dow, P. E., Executive Director

Janet Orth, Deputy Dir.-Administration

Loretta Ellard, Deputy Dir.-Planning

Lisa Davey-Bates, Associate Planner/SAFE Call Box Coordinator

Nephele Barrett, Assistant Planner

Jessica Frykman, Office Assistant

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