

May 30, 2026

Board of Directors
Mendocino Council of Governments
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<https://www.mendocinocog.org/contact-us>

Re: 2026 Mendocino County Regional Transportation Plan and Active Transportation Plan
June 1, 2026 MCOG Board of Directors Agenda Regular Calendar Item 11

Chair Haschak and Board Directors:

The purpose of this letter is to offer comments for consideration when adopting the proposed final 2026 Mendocino County Regional Transportation Plan and Active Transportation Plan (RTP/ATP).

The 164-page-long 2026 RTP/ATP is a complex document of many disparate parts. To resolve persistent failures resulting from divided authorities, incoherent priorities, and historic biases, this RTP/ATP must connect the causal chains from data to policy through delivery, across member agency silos, and between competing demands of constituencies.

State Route 1 (SR1) flooding at the Garcia River and Gasker Slough is a salient case in point. The realities of this threat are objectively known and documented, including credible evidence of increasing frequency and duration of closures. The persistent absence of action or commitment to provide an effective transportation lifeline is astonishing in the presence of compelling facts. This case illustrates what can happen when a big problem falls into the crack between agency jurisdictions and priorities, beyond the reach of disenfranchised stakeholders. The 2026 RTP/ATP is an opportunity to set a practical course toward fixing this problem. Here are some tangible ways that you can make that happen:

Page 1: Executive Summary; State Highway System Element

MCOG can demonstrate commitment using active language. Please replace the text of the third bullet under *Short-Range Improvements* with: "Projects to incrementally improve and ultimately resolve disruption of SR1 transportation caused by closure during flooding of the Garcia River."

Page 18: Introduction; Intelligent Transportation System

The RTP/ATP can identify the Garcia River problem as an illustrative example that is consistent with changeable message signs installed previously on US-101 and SR20. Please revise the paragraph beneath the bullet list to be: "At such time that the Mendocino Council of Governments considers proposing an ITS project such real-time on-highway changeable message signs (e.g., on SR1 at the Garcia River and Gasker Slough), the project will be in conformance with the common structure of the regional architecture as identified in the Upstate California Regional ITS plan."

Page 24: Goals, Objectives, and Policies; Transportation Safety, Security, and Emergency Response (TSSER)

The large travel area affected by the SR1 lifeline at the Garcia River means that closures impact long trips between local origins and destinations. Modern, cost-effective communications technology, such as automated email or social media notifications, can help overcome some time and proximity limitations of on-highway message signs. Please revise the text of Policy TSSER 2.2 to be: "Consider new technologies to improve security, such as on-board security equipment for transit, changeable message signs for roads and highways, and real-time multi-media communications."

Page 25: Goals, Objectives, and Policies; State Highway System (SH)

The crucial importance of resilient lifeline transportation routes must be a priority to attract and compete for investment. Please revise the text of Policy SH 1.2 to be: "Seek funding for priority improvements identified on major corridors, lifeline routes, and interregional routes, including the consideration of Regional Improvement Program (RIP) programming and pursuit of other State and Federal funding sources."

Page 26: Goals, Objectives, and Policies; State Highway System (SH)

Safety in the present and evolving circumstances of climate change is not only about highway collision rates or operational factors. Threats of inundation, structural failure, and closure are increasing with increasingly severe weather. Essential lifeline functions should be prioritized in alignment with efforts to ensure and improve community resilience. Sensible integration of climate change realities begins with 2026 RTP/ATP policies. Please revise Policy SH 3.1 to be: "Prioritize projects that resolve safety and reliability issues (particularly for lifeline facilities, locations with high collision rates, or other safety factors) for funding opportunities."

Page 32: Goals, Objectives, and Policies; Public Health and Equity (PHE)

The long history of SR1 flooding at the Garcia River and Gasker Slough, and physical division of the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians Rancheria are indicative of transportation disparities in the remote south coast. MCOG can demonstrate commitment to equity by revising Policy PHE 2.2 to be: "Prioritize and advance transportation projects and planning efforts in under-served, geographically remote communities, to achieve equity with more populated areas of the region."

Page 44: State Highway Element; Action Plan: Proposed Projects; Short-Range Projects (10 years)

The plainly stated need and purpose can help to advance a CA-012-26 Garcia River Flooding project. Yet, the absence of a summary project description or an illustrative programmable project alternative for the project is inconsistent with the other Short-Term projects proposed in the 2026 RTP/ATP and fails to acknowledge extensive, substantive work completed to date at taxpayer expense. The deletion of descriptive text published in an earlier draft of this RTP/ATP undermines implementation and public confidence in MCOG commitment to this priority. Please replace the first paragraph on page 44 with this text, which restores content deleted from the draft 2026 RTP/ATP:

"CA-012-26 –Garcia River Flooding The stretch of SR 1 between post mile 17.52 and 18.5 near Point Arena is subject to closure because of frequent flooding of the Garcia River. Flood closures cut the City of Point Arena from residences to the north, block access to medical services and schools, split tribal lands of the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians, and block emergency fire-life-safety services. Caltrans has explored resolutions to this problem including replacing the bridge at Gasker Slough to a higher grade to address drainage issues in the area near the south end of the floodplain. This part of the drainage retains the water for long periods of time, compared with the area immediately to the south of the bridge, which sees periodic flooding, but also clears out relatively quickly. This alternative could reduce the frequency and duration of full highway closures, yet would not maintain continuous access in the corridor despite anticipated high capital cost and environmental impact. Another potential alternative would be a bridge across the Garcia River on Windy Hollow Road. That potential alternative would provide an all-condition detour route at relatively lower cost and impact. However, Caltrans has yet to identify a project alternative or source of funding.

"While advancing a practical capital improvement to ensure continuous lifeline access in the SR1 corridor, Caltrans should consider relatively low-cost, low-impact improvements in the short term to help travelers cope with frequent flood closures, such as real-time watercourse and floodplain stage monitoring, real-time notice of imminent closure and re-opening by on-road changeable message signs and electronically distributed messages."

Page 50: State Highway Element; Performance Measures

Performance measures are crucial elements of project definition and delivery, and effectiveness. The first paragraph on page 49 makes the important observation that Caltrans is predominantly oriented toward metropolitan areas, while MCOG considers measures that are more relevant in our region. When considering corridor reliability, the impacts of closing a lifeline route (such as SR1 at the Garcia River or SR 128 at the Navarro River) are far greater than traffic flow delay. Adding ITS measures to the Corridor Management Performance Measure can help people deal with closures that last longer than twenty minutes. Please add this indicator below Traffic flow delay in the Corridor Reliability Indicator box:

“Travel management. Implement practical, feasible, and relatively low-impact ITS measures to help travelers cope with highway closures, including real-time watercourse and floodplain stage monitoring, and real-time notice of imminent closure and re-opening via real-time on-road changeable message signs and electronically distributed messages.”

Page 59: County Maintained Roads and City Streets Element; Needs Assessment: Issues, Problems, Challenges; Major Unfunded Needs

The explanation of SR 1/Garcia River/Windy Hollow Road is a thorough and useful summary of a persistent transportation lifeline problem, a long-term local community division problem, the stakeholders vulnerable to the problems, and the insight that solutions will require collaboration between Caltrans, Mendocino County, and the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians. Importantly, the paragraph describes the timeframe for action this way: “Further collaborative study by Caltrans and the County of this urgent and worsening problem can identify practical and effective infrastructure solutions and funding within the next five years. Caltrans should work collaboratively with Mendocino County to expedite practical, feasible, and relatively low-impact ITS measures to help travelers cope with lifeline highway closures, including real-time watercourse and floodplain stage monitoring, and real-time notice of imminent closure and re-opening via real-time on-road changeable message signs and electronically distributed messages.”

Pages 60, 61: County Maintained Roads and City Streets Element; Action Plan: Proposed Projects; Short-Range Improvement Program (10 years); County of Mendocino

The 2026 RTP/ATP puts SR1 flooding at the Garcia River and Gasker Slough in the Caltrans Short-Term Improvement list, but does not set any complementary priority for Mendocino County. Considering the well-informed and crucial linkage between SR1 and Windy Hollow Road, failure to match Caltrans and County priorities for advancing interdependent solutions is a fatal flaw in this RTP/ATP.

Please add “Windy Hollow Road Garcia River Bridge - new bridge and associated improvements to Windy Hollow Road” to the list of projects in Table 6 Mendocino County Short Range Projects.

Pages 136, 137, 138: Tribal Transportation System Element; Tribal Lands and Transportation Needs and Issues; Manchester-Point Arena Rancheria

The 2026 RTP/ATP contains a complete and meaningful summary of a local community disconnected by removal of the Windy Hollow Road Garcia Bridge “decades ago” and flooding of SR1 that happens “often”. The summary also discusses the functional advantages and feasibility of a bridge to reconnect Windy Hollow Road, including resolving vulnerability of the SR1 lifeline. However, there is no mention of this project in the Action Plan section on pages 143 and 144, which otherwise includes a detailed description of the SR162 Corridor Trail in Covelo and a description of alternative emergency access routes to serve the Redwood Valley Tribe Rancheria. The omission is a glaring disparity.

Page 143: Tribal Transportation System Element; Action Plan; Construction and Implementation Projects

Absent explicit intent to advance the reconnection of Windy Hollow Road or resolution of access disruption due to SR1 flooding at Gasker Slough and Garcia River, the 2026 RTP/ATP fails to demonstrate

MCOG commitment to resolve persistent unmet need - or partnership in a priority foisted upon Caltrans. Please add this text as the fourth paragraph on page 143: "The 2026 RTP/ATP establishes short-term priority actions for Caltrans and Mendocino County to incrementally improve and ultimately eliminate lifeline transportation disruption on SR1 by flooding at the Garcia River and Gasker Slough. A feasible capital improvement that may provide an all-conditions detour to flood closures of SR1 would also reconnect the north and south neighborhoods of the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians Rancheria: a Windy Hollow Road bridge across the Garcia River. MCOG will convene collaboration between Caltrans, Mendocino County, and the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians to identify practical and effective infrastructure solutions and funding within the next five years. Within the same timeframe, Caltrans should work collaboratively with Mendocino County and the Manchester-Point Arena Band of Pomo Indians to expedite practical, feasible, and relatively low-impact ITS measures to help Rancheria members cope with lifeline highway closures, including real-time watercourse and floodplain stage monitoring, and real-time notice of imminent closure and re-opening via real-time on-road changeable message signs and electronically distributed messages."

Before you adopt the 2026 RTP/ATP, please bear in mind the Mendocino Council of Governments duty to represent everyone in Mendocino County, including the people that are not your individual electorates. This RTP/ATP is the document of your policy positions and your opportunity to guide transportation investments that work for all of us.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Dave Shpak (Gualala)