

MENDOCINO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

APPROVED MINUTES Monday, February 2, 2026

Primary Location:

County Administration Center, Board of Supervisors Chambers
Room 1070, 501 Low Gap Road, Ukiah

Teleconference Locations:

Fort Bragg City Hall, 416 N. Franklin St., Fort Bragg
Point Arena City Hall, 451 School St., Point Arena
Caltrans District 1, 1656 Union St., Eureka

General Public Teleconference by Zoom

1. Call to Order and Roll Call. The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. with Directors present: John Haschak, Maureen Mulheren, Heather Criss, and Matthew Alaniz in Ukiah; Marcia Rafanan in Fort Bragg, Jeff Hansen in Point Arena; and Tatiana Ahlstrand for Caltrans/PAC in Eureka. Chair Haschak presiding.

Staff present in Ukiah: Nephele Barrett, Executive Director; James Sookne, Program Manager; Michael Villa, Project Coordinator; Orion Walker, Energy Program Manager.

Staff present by Zoom: Alexis Pedrotti, Project Manager; Lisa Davey-Bates, Transportation Planning Principal; and Hector Ortega, Regional Project Analyst.

Guests present by Zoom: Jacob King, MTA Executive Director

2. Assembly Bill 2449 Notifications and Considerations. This item is to receive and address requests from Board members to participate in the meeting from a non-posted location, subject to conditions set forth in AB 2449. There were no such requests.

3. Election of Officers – Chair and Vice Chair. Director Haschak called for nominations and was nominated for Chair. With no further nominations, nominations were closed for the office of Chair. Upon motion by Director Mulheren second by Director Criss and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*7 Ayes – Rafanan, Mulheren, Alaniz, Hansen, Criss, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Haschak; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining*): IT IS ORDERED that Chair Haschak is re-elected as Chair.

Nominations were opened for the office of Vice Chair, Director Criss was nominated. With no further nominations, nominations were closed for the office of Vice Chair. Upon motion by Chair Haschak, second by Director Mulheren and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*7 Ayes – Rafanan, Mulheren, Alaniz, Hansen, Criss, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Haschak; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining*): IT IS ORDERED that Director Criss is elected as Vice Chair.

4. Public Hearing at 1:30 p.m. or as soon thereafter as possible: Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) Draft Methodology. James Sookne, Program Manager, summarized the RHNA process thus far. He reported that both the first and second draft of the methodology were not approved by the State Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD). He will work with the jurisdictions to revise a third draft. Although a public hearing was previously held, staff felt that it was appropriate to offer a second public hearing as a result of the revisions. Nephele Barrett, Executive Director, provided additional information on the approval process with HCD.

The Chair opened the hearing at 1:37 p.m. With no comments submitted by the public or the Board members, the hearing was closed at 1:38 p.m. No action was taken.

5. Convene as RTPA.**6. Recess as RTPA – Reconvene as Policy Advisory Committee.**

7 - 8. Consent Calendar. Upon motion by Criss, second by Alaniz, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (7 Ayes – Rafanan, Mulheren, Alaniz, Hansen, Criss, Ahlstrand/PAC and Haschak; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining): IT IS ORDERED that consent items are approved.

7. Approval of December 1, 2025 Minutes – as written**8. Authorization to Release Fiscal Year 2026/27 Draft Transportation Planning Overall Work Program (OWP) for Review, Comment & Circulation.**

9. Public Expression. Steve Henderson (a.k.a. Gizmo) expressed gratitude to Caltrans for the continued safety efforts on the North State Street 101 on-ramp. He offered a suggestion to switch the off-ramp and on-ramp, rather than enlarging the bridge. Additionally, he noted safety concerns regarding the speed limit on the north-bound Highway 20 new bridge.

John Bower, a property owner in the Gualala Downtown Streetscape Project area, discussed concerns regarding parking availability as Caltrans moves forward with the Streetscape Project. He emphasized that lack of parking would affect local residents and businesses. He suggested a plan be put in place to ensure that local community members have access to parking and greater information about the project.

10 - 12. Regular Calendar.

10. Adoption of 2026 Mendocino County Transportation Plan (RTP) & Active Transportation Plan (ATP) – Continued from December 1, 2025 – To be continued to March 2, 2026. Mr. Sookne summarized the reasoning for continuation of the item. One of the Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) statutes states that the draft methodology must be adopted prior to the adoption of the RTP. The HCD did not approve of the draft methodology, causing a delay in the adoption of the RTP and ATP. Mr. Sookne summarized the changes that have been made to amend the previous draft, including moving the Garcia River Flooding Project from the long-term to short-term list, removing projects located outside of Mendocino County, listing additional funding sources, updating Active Transportation project details, and adding or enhancing language in several sections.

Ms. Barrett provided clarity on the inclusion of the Skunk Train in the RTP, explaining it is included for informational purposes. The RTP recognizes that it is an excursion service, and does not include a current action plan or associated funding. The Chair invited public comment.

In the chambers: Mr. Bower shared concerns about Gualala's lack of inclusion in much of Caltran's work down the south coast and in the plan, as well as insufficient representation within the community. He repeated his concerns from before regarding parking, and coastal development policies not being followed.

Steve Henderson (a.k.a. Gizmo) shared that a passenger rail could be considered as a potential evacuation plan.

Jared Soynila gave a testimony which was meant for the Unmet Needs Hearing, but mistakenly provided during the public expression. See full summary of testimony in Agenda #11.

On the teleconference: Peter McNamee referenced his Letter to the Editor published in Mendocino Voice which summarized his objections to the railway's inclusion in the Transportation Plan. He shared community members' reactions to his letter, which outlined concerns about taxpayer funding being utilized for the Skunk Train.

Ms. Barrett then summarized public comments sent to the board. Kirk Vadepals asks that the board remove the Skunk Train from the Transportation Plan, and support the Attorney General's

filing to rescind the Skunk Train's assertion that it is a freight and passenger rail system. Christine Franks mentioned that the Skunk Train was determined to be a tourist attraction by the Public Utilities Commission. Because it is not public transport, it should not receive public funds. Jenny Sandberg mentioned that the service should not be included in the Transportation Plan because it provides entertainment, not transport. Sakina Bush expressed concerns with the inclusion of Mendocino Railway in the Transportation Plan because they are not providing public transportation, but rather entertainment, and therefore does not serve the needs of citizens. Jonathan Picol stated that the Skunk Train should not be considered anything other than an excursion train, and using eminent domain to take property and develop the headlands is a travesty. Tom McFadden urges MCOG to stop including Mendocino Railway and the Skunk Train in the RTP. Martin Sexton claimed that the Skunk Train is not a legitimate railroad and should not enjoy the luxury benefits that are granted to them, such as public funds to support private business. Evan Mills mentioned that Mendocino Railway is inappropriately capturing political and economic benefits as an ostensible provider of public transportation. Even if it could be justified as transportation, it is a highly cost-inefficient way to provide transportation. He urges MCOG to exclude it from the Transportation Plan, as doing so would divert taxpayer money. Carl Young asks MCOG to refrain from supporting the activities of Mendocino Railway and their attempts to get federal funds and land through eminent domain, and their efforts to stop the development of the Great Redwood Trail by posing as a legitimate railroad. Arif Thunan states that the Skunk Train is not public transportation and therefore should not receive public funds which could go towards fixing roads and other means of public transport. Laurel Krause mentions that the Skunk Train provides entertainment for tourists and does not serve the Fort Bragg community, thus should not be considered a public utility. Mendocino Railways has misled the courts, is a well-funded corporation that has received over \$21 million in tax dollars. She encourages MCOG to not condone the behaviors. Melissa Parks believes the Skunk Train should not be included in the transportation plan because it is a tourist attraction not a means of public transport. She has concerns about an abuse of federal funding, and the cost to other residents and businesses that are adjacent to the numerous railroad crossings, in time and money. She hopes Fort Bragg can regain some control over how the city develops and influence how federal funds are spent. Robert Ballard asks to remove the Skunk Train from the Transportation Plan. It is a tourist attraction and should not receive tax payer dollars. Liz Helenchild is in agreement with Peter McNamee's letter to the editor, and states that the skunk train is a tourist amusement. She notes the California Attorney General's appeal in the courts to overturn the Service Transportation Board's ruling that the Skunk Train is a federally authorized railroad. She asks that it be removed from the Transportation Plan. Nick Luko has concerns about the mill site and train issues, and the lack of transparency regarding the purchase of the mill site and cleanup of toxins. He mentioned concerns about the trains running past 10 pm on weekends, and the interruption in traffic on days the train doesn't run or runs with few riders. He believes that Mendocino Railway's benefit to the area is overstated. Leslie Luko asks that the Mendocino Railway not be included in the Transportation Plan. They do not provide public transportation, but rather are an excursion train for purposes of amusement. Sam Gitchell believes Mendocino Railway should not be considered a real railroad because they function only as an amusement ride, rather than move cargo. Carolyn James mentioned that Mendocino Railway is not a good steward for the local community and should not be included in the RTP. Annie Lee explained that the Skunk Train is not transportation but rather a tourist activity. She has concerns about the misappropriation of public funds for private property.

Director Mulheren mentioned that the Board of Supervisors received emails detailing public comments as well, and asked for clarity on the inclusion of the Skunk Train in the RTP.

Director Alaniz responded, mentioning the appellate court overturned a court case which stated that Mendocino Railway was not a public utility. Because of the ongoing legal action, he believes it should remain in the plan until there is greater clarity on its legal status. Additionally, he

mentioned there was language within the RTP which indicates there is no financial support offered to Mendocino Railway.

Ms. Barrett clarified that language has been added to the RTP which acknowledges the ongoing legal proceedings which could change Mendocino Railway's status as a federally recognized railroad and public utility.

Dave Shpak then provided additional public comment on the teleconference, and mentioned inconsistencies, a lack of Appendix J and inadequate solutions to addressed problems.

Ms. Barrett responded, and informed the group that Appendix J is available online, and was not included in the Board packet since it went unchanged. Additionally, the inconsistencies presented by Mr. Shpak have been revised in the most recent draft.

Mr. McNamee left a comment in the teleconference chat which further addresses Mendocino Railway during Agenda #11 and was read aloud then. He mentioned that inclusion of Mendocino Railway in the RTP could demonstrate to federal officials a support of the train, even though there is no direct funding associated in the mention.

Ms. Barrett mentioned the item will return in March for adoption, pending HCD approval of the RHNA methodology.

11. Public Hearing: *Unmet Transit Needs for Fiscal Year 2026/27 – Including Social Services Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC) Recommendations of November 13, 2025.* Ms. Barrett explained the background of the Unmet Transit Needs process. Each year, a list of unmet transit needs is created which consists of needs identified by the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council and public testimony heard at MTA meetings. If the finding is made that there are unmet transportation needs by the Board, the list is forwarded to MTA and the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council for further analysis. Ms. Barrett reported proper legal notice in Ukiah's newspaper of general circulation; proof of publication was included in the agenda packet.

The Chair opened the hearing at 2:30 p.m.

Jared Soinila, an employee at Lucky Deuce DUI/DDP, expressed concerns about the lack of viable, late-night transportation between Ukiah, Willits, Redwood Valley and Hopland. He suggested revenue collected from misdemeanor DUIs could be reinvested into a late-night bus service to prevent drunk driving and life-threatening car crashes. As previously stated, Mr. Soinila gave his testimony during Agenda #10, but reaffirmed his testimony during the public hearing.

Mr. Henderson (a.k.a. Gizmo) suggested a public transit mall, as well as pull-out lanes for the bus stops, particularly mentioning the traffic caused by the Gobbi Street bus stop's lack of pull-out.

Eric Barker sent in a written public comment prior to the meeting, which was read by Ms. Barrett. He mentioned that there is only one trip Northbound on weekends from Santa Rosa to Ukiah, which creates a challenge meeting other transit times. He suggests that a bus trip be offered at night from Santa Rosa to Ukiah, following the expansion of Smart Train's nighttime services between Windsor and Larkspur.

As aforementioned, Mr. McNamee's digital comment, meant for Agenda #10, was read at this time.

Ms. Barrett provided definitions of the phrases "unmet transit needs" and "reasonable to meet" for the Board's consideration.

With no further testimony, the Chair closed the hearing at 2:40 p.m. Written comments received in accordance with the agenda notice will be posted online with the meeting attachments.

Upon motion by Criss, second by Mulheren, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (7 Ayes – Rafanan, Mulheren, Alaniz, Hansen, Criss, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Haschak; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining): IT IS ORDERED that MCOG finds the testimony to include unmet needs, which will be added to the list and moved forward to Mendocino Transit Authority for analysis and for further

review and recommendations by the Transit Productivity Committee and the Social Services Transportation Advisory Council.

12. Annual Committee Appointments. The staff report outlined procedures for making appointments. The following nominees were put forward by the Board.

- a. Executive Committee.
 - i. Chair Haschak
 - ii. Vice Chair Criss
 - iii. Director Rafanan
- b. Transit Productivity Committee.
 - i. Chair Haschak
 - ii. Vice Chair Criss
- c. California Association of Councils of Governments (CALCOG)
 - i. Vice Chair Criss
 - ii. Chair Haschak
- d. Ad Hoc Committee – Covelo SR 162 Corridor Multi-Purpose Trail Project
 - i. Staff recommends dissolving the ad hoc.

Upon motion by Alaniz, second by Criss, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (7 Ayes – Rafanan, Mulheren, Alaniz, Hansen, Criss, Ahlstrand/PAC and Haschak; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining): IT IS ORDERED that committee appointments are approved, and the ad hoc is dissolved.

13. Recess as Policy Advisory Committee – Reconvene as RTPA – Ratify Action of Policy Advisory Committee. Upon motion by Criss, second by Rafanan, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (6 Ayes – Rafanan, Mulheren, Alaniz, Hansen, Criss, and Haschak; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining): IT IS ORDERED that the actions taken by the Policy Advisory Committee are ratified by the MCOG Board of Directors.

14. Reports - Information

- a. Caltrans District 1 – Projects Update and Information. Director Ahlstrand reported on several funding opportunities, including the BUILD program and the Prop 4 Urban Greening Program. She provided updates on the District Transit Plans, the Corridor Management Plan for US 101, and a Draft Vulnerability and Risk Assessment Statewide Summary Report in development. She referenced the Caltrans Milestone Report Package included in the agenda package, which includes a linked communication form for those who are interested in being more involved in Caltrans projects.
- b. Mendocino Transit Authority. Executive Director Jacob King reported that MTA will be receiving and taking delivery of six new buses: three 35-foot electric buses, and three 26-foot shuttle-style electric buses.
- c. Great Redwood Trail Agency. Director Haschak reported that a meeting was held last week in which the Draft Master Plan was discussed and will return in March. A special meeting will be held in February to address an appendix regarding environmental review.
- d. MCOG Staff - Summary of Meetings. Ms. Barrett referred to the written staff report.
- e. MCOG Administration Staff
 - i. Voter Opinion Polling & Assessment for Unincorporated Mendocino County. Michael Villa, Project Coordinator, summarized the results of a voter opinion polling effort conducted by FM3 for a transportation sales tax measure in the unincorporated areas of

- Mendocino County which were previously presented at the December MCOG meeting. Findings showed around 67% were either “yes” or “leaning towards yes” for the measure. The survey will be presented at a March County Board of Supervisors meeting, and a tracking survey may be conducted over the summer.
- ii. *Miscellaneous*. None.
 - iii. *Next Meeting Date*. Monday, March 2/April 6, 2026.
- f. MCOG Planning Staff
- i. *Work Element 5 – Mendocino County Sea Level Rise Roadway Impact Study*. Hector Ortega, Regional Project Analyst, reported that a survey has been distributed, which is providing early insights into community priorities. Workshops will follow the survey. The consultant team is aiming to compile engagement results by the end of the first quarter of 2026, and determine five priority sites that will be subject to further study.
 - ii. *Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant Application Submitted to Caltrans*. Mr. Sookne reported MCOG submitted an application for a corridor feasibility study in the Willits community; he described locations of certain areas due for safety and traffic improvements, and is expecting to have a funding update in May.
 - iii. *Miscellaneous*. None.
- g. Northern Rural Energy Network (NREN) Staff. Orion Walker, Energy Program Manager, reported that rebates have been updated, and the new amounts have been posted on the NREN website, ready for application. Workforce Education & Training Programs are progressing, including a contractor training on heat pumps in March. More information: <https://northernren.org/>
- h. MCOG Directors. Chair Haschak reported that he attended the Laytonville Area Municipal Advisory Committee meeting in which safety concerns were brought up regarding the lack of light in a section of Branscomb Road which includes a pedestrian pathway.
- i. California Association of Councils of Governments (CALCOG) Delegates. Director Criss reported she attended the CALCOG Board Meeting in January. Their Work Program priorities include exploring becoming a 501c3 organization. She will attend the Regional Leadership Forum in March. Legislation is ongoing with AB 1421, a road usage study, and with SB 375, in attempts to modernize to reflect today’s housing, transportation and climate realities, and to improve alignment with local and regional priorities. Funding opportunities for RHNA are being investigated. New agreements on Federal reauthorization are ongoing, including an open comment period through the end of February.

The Chair then invited public comment.

Peter McNamee discussed the Mendocino County Sea Level Rise Roadway Impact Study. He cited feedback from several community members with concerns about the impact of sea level rise on coastal zone roads and highways, and referenced the highway closure due to flooding in January.

15. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 3:11 p.m.

Submitted: NEPHELE BARRETT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR