

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

July 27, 2017

TO: SBCCOG Board of Directors

FROM: Jacki Bacharach, SBCCOG Executive Director
Steve Lantz, SBCCOG Transportation Director

RE: SBCCOG Transportation Update – July 2017

Adherence to Strategic Plan:

Goal A: Environment, Transportation and Economic Development. Facilitate, implement and/or educate members and others about environmental, transportation and economic development programs that benefit the South Bay.

FEDERAL

House Bill Aims For Dedicated Freight Infrastructure Revenue Source

Congressman Alan Lowenthal introduced bipartisan legislation, HR 3001, on June 22nd to create a Freight Transportation Infrastructure Trust Fund, funded through a national 1% “waybill fee” on the transportation cost of goods.

If enacted, the bill would raise roughly \$8 billion a year dedicated to freight-related infrastructure projects throughout the nation with a focus on multimodal projects and projects that rebuild aging infrastructure while relieving bottlenecks in the national freight transportation system, and addressing the negative impacts of goods movement on freight adjacent communities.

To invest the funds, the new bill would launch two freight-specific grant programs: A formula grant in which each state would receive funds each year based on the amount of existing infrastructure within the state, and a competitive grant program what would be open to all local, regional, and state governments.

White House Releases Some Details of Proposed Infrastructure Plan

The Trump Administration offered new details on June 8th about how it plans to divvy up some of the money in President Trump’s \$1 trillion infrastructure package. Officials have touted injecting \$200 billion into the country’s infrastructure to spur an additional \$800 billion in investment through public-private partnerships and regulatory reforms.

In a fact sheet posted online, the White House proposed allocating \$100 billion to let states and local entities prioritize their own infrastructure needs, \$25 billion to grants for rural infrastructure projects, and \$15 billion to incentivize “transformative” projects. Although there was no detail on the remaining \$60 billion, earlier fact sheets identified loans for regionally or nationally significant projects and a “skill-based” workforce education initiative, with the goal of training 1 million apprentices over two years.

House Lawmakers Push For Highway Trust Fund Fix

More than 250 House lawmakers want to see a fix for the ailing Highway Trust Fund (HTF) included in any tax reform package this year. In a bipartisan letter to the House Ways and Means Committee on June 16th, lawmakers — including 119 Republicans — urged the panel to come up

with a long-term funding solution for the Highway Trust Fund when they pursue a major overhaul of the tax code this year.

Federal fuel taxes haven't been raised in more than 20 years. They noted that all trust fund revenue enhancements in the past 30 years have come as part of a larger deficit reduction or tax reform package. Congress provided funding for the Highway Trust Fund in the last surface transportation bill using a series of budgetary gimmicks. But the fund will face another shortfall in 2020, when the highway bill's current funding expires. Some of the funding ideas that have been floated include charging fees based on the number of miles a vehicle travels, raising the federal gas tax and increasing existing sales and tire taxes.

USDOT Seeks Input on Unnecessary Rules and Policies Regarding Transportation Projects

The U. S. Department of Transportation on June 9th requested interested stakeholders to identify specific administrative and regulatory requirements that impede project development and approvals and to present ideas on how these impediments can be eliminated. The comment period is open until July 24, 2017.

The comments can address any DOT requirement that unjustifiably delays or prevents surface, maritime and aviation projects, whether issued by the Office of the Secretary of Transportation or any of the modal administrations. Although the USDOT is primarily seeking proposals for administrative changes, it also has invited commenters to submit recommendations for legislative changes "if non-statutory changes are insufficient to address a specific obstacle to transportation infrastructure projects." DOT is seeking the following information from commenters:

- Specific references to the policy statement, guidance document, regulation or statute that imposes the unnecessary burden
- A description of the burden and how the policy, guidance or rule imposes, including data and specific examples
- A description of less burdensome alternatives
- Examples of affected projects

Comments can be submitted to: <http://www.regulations.gov> referencing DOT Docket Number DOT-OST-2017-0057.

US DOT Revamps FASTLANE Grant Program With New Name And Goals

The Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a Federal Register notice on June 29th describing changes in the existing FASTLANE federal transportation grant program. FASTLANE was authorized in 2016 by Congress to provide \$4.5 billion over five years for freight and highway projects.

The program will now be known as the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) program. Consistent with the Administration's \$1 trillion infrastructure proposals, the retooled program will focus on projects that match federal funding with the private sector or other non-federal sources, as well as projects that address rural infrastructure needs.

Although the revamped program will still focus on projects that promote national or regional economic, mobility and safety, INFRA will now place an emphasis on projects that leverage non-federal funding — which could include money from the private sector, states or cities — and projects that use innovative approaches to permitting and project delivery to speed up project delivery and reduce construction costs.

To appeal to rural regions that might not attract public/private partnerships, INFRA will retain a statutory requirement to award at least 25 percent of funding for direct funding of projects in rural regions.

STATE

California Court Leaders Propose Decriminalizing Most Traffic Tickets

California's court leaders are proposing legislation to make traffic violations civil offenses, removing them from the criminal arena. The plan would protect drivers from possible arrest and massive fines for failing to show up on the date written on a ticket.

A person would have to pay the ticket if the evidence showed he or she "more likely than not" committed the traffic infraction. Current rules require the evidence to show guilt "beyond a reasonable doubt." The intention is to have minor traffic citations decided in civil court, so the penalties, the consequences, and maybe the emotions, won't run so high.

Several other states handle traffic infractions as civil matters. Examples of infractions include: running a stop sign, making an unsafe lane change, speeding up to 15 mph above the speed limit, and driving without a working tail light. Tickets for offenses that are misdemeanors would continue to be handled in the criminal system. These include citations for driving under the influence and knowingly driving with a suspended license for a DUI conviction.

Drivers also would be able to contest tickets in writing without having to appear in court. But if they lose, they would not get a second trial before a judge. They still would have the right to appeal. Judges would continue to have discretion to issue fines above the amount on an unpaid ticket and to take into consideration a person's ability to pay when deciding whether to reduce fines. But a person no longer would face the loss of a driver's license or a \$300 additional assessment for failing to appear on the date on the ticket.

New Caltrans Traffic Radar Aims To Stop Wrong-Way Drivers Before They Enter Ramps

Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol have partnered since last January in a pilot program in Sacramento and San Diego to stop wrong-way accidents. The agencies have installed giant "Do not enter" signs and red reflectors where the exit ramp intersects with the street. In addition, six off-ramps on Highway 50 in Sacramento are equipped with a solar-powered radar system that detects a car heading the wrong way then triggers a series of actions: the signs flash LED lights, cameras start to record video and pictures to capture the car's license plates, and an audible alarm alerts highway patrol on computers and cell phones at the Bay Area Traffic Management Center.

Since the two-year project started in January, it has detected two wrong-way drivers. One got into a minor crash and the driver was arrested on charges of driving under the influence. In the second case, a car appeared to catch the warnings, and turn around. A passing police car guided it off the ramp.

Aggressive Enforcement Needed To Keep Driver-Only Clean Vehicles In HOV Lanes

Carpool and toll lanes in California have gotten so popular that 58 percent of the Bay Area's carpool lanes have failed to achieve the minimum federal performance standard of 45 mph speeds at least 90 percent of the time. In Los Angeles, performance was even worse at 68 percent. If the slowing trend continues, something will need to be done to free up capacity and increase average speeds in the carpool lanes

Caltrans must report back to federal officials by Dec. 1 on what options it might consider, otherwise the state could lose federal highway funds. Continued failure to achieve the federal performance standard could mean ending the popular clean vehicle sticker program that allows driver-only clean vehicles to use the lanes. One option is to restrict the lanes to three or more people to qualify as a carpool.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) in the Bay Area is trying to address the scofflaws to keep the lanes open to clean vehicles. The agency found an average 24 percent violation rate in the afternoon commute. They believe the congestion in the “managed” lanes could be mitigated by more aggressive ticketing of scofflaws who are willing to risk a \$491 ticket because they don’t fear getting caught.

MTC is seeking to amend AB 544, a bill to extend the popular clean vehicle carpool lane sticker program from its current expiration date on January 1, 2019 to 2025, to address enforcement. The MTC amendment would earmark CHP patrols exclusively dedicated to carpool lane enforcement during the hours when carpool rules are in effect. The incremental costs would be partially offset by doubling the cost of carpool decals from \$22 to \$44 to raise nearly \$350,000 annually.

California Transportation Commission Seeks Shovel-ready Active Transportation Projects

California’s Active Transportation Program (ATP) is about to receive an infusion of more than \$100 million statewide each year from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) and SB 1. The GGRF funds are available now and the SB 1 funds may be available by November 2017.

As a result, the California Transportation Commission staff is looking for a few good bicycle and pedestrian projects that are ready for funding now. The Commission is first looking to fund projects that did not get funding in previous GGRF rounds. In addition, ATP staff is encouraging sponsors with projects that were awarded funding in CCRF Cycle 3 and are ready to begin work, to apply for the S.B. 1 funds since the S. B. 1 funding will be available by the end of 2017 and the CCRF Cycle 3 funds won’t be available until 2019-21. Detailed information on the GGRF funds can be found [here](#), and for the S.B. 1 funds [here](#).

Program staff also is proposing a change for future funding rounds to allow project managers a third year to complete their projects. Right now, ATP funding cycles force projects to be environmentally cleared, designed and constructed within two years of receiving their grant.

TRENDS

Meet IVO, The Robot That Could Turn Your Vehicle Into A Self-Driving Car

An intriguing future of autonomous vehicles may not be a car at all, but instead a portable robot that can fit inside a handheld suitcase before taking its place in the driver's seat. Developed by Oded Yechiel, a graduate student in robotic engineering at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, the new autonomous driving system, called IVO (short for intelligent vehicle operator), uses a handful of cameras, simple motion sensors and a few mechanical devices to depress the brakes and turn the steering wheel. The system compensates for its relatively simple sensors with highly sophisticated computer algorithms.

The current prototype, which looks a bit like a very stripped-down version of the robot Johnny 5 from the movie "Short Circuit," weighs less than 30 pounds and costs about \$1,600 to produce. By contrast, other high-profile autonomous vehicles (such as Google's or Uber's self-driving cars) can require converting the entire vehicle into an autonomous operator, and can add tens of

thousands of dollars to the final sticker price. The designers anticipate finishing beta by the end of this year.

Driverless, Trackless Train Unveiled In China

Chinese rail-maker CRRC Zhuzhou Locomotive on June 2nd unveiled a streetcar/train that doesn't run on physical tracks and that has no driver. The Autonomous Rail Transit (ART) combines bus and train transportation systems. The ART uses sensors to detect road dimensions and is guided by **autonomous driving technology** that enables the vehicle to follow routes without needing rails.

A three-carriage ART is more than 100 feet long and can carry up to 307 passengers. One significant limitation is the range of the electric train. Although the train can reach a top speed of 43 m.p.h., after 10 minutes of charging, it can only travel 15 miles (25 km).

The ART has been in development since 2013, and CRRC plans to deploy the system in 2018.

Helsinki launching self-driving bus into regular service

Helsinki, Finland announced on June 15th that it will launch its new RoboBus transit line in the fall operated with one self-driving bus. The regular service follows two years of testing using two driverless minibuses in real traffic conditions in Helsinki and other Finnish cities. With an operator on board in case of an emergency, the buses traveled at 7 mph, learning the route and accruing knowledge about autonomous bus operation. The ultimate goal is to increase public transit use and so to reduce cars and needs to drive in the city.

The vehicle for RoboBusLine will be an electric mini-bus. The planners envision a niche role for the autonomous electric mini-buses. Self-driving buses could offer a solution to the last mile of public transit in Helsinki — taking riders from a regular public transit stop to their homes. Automated, remote-controlled bus service could markedly reduce the costs of the last-mile service and improve access to public transit.

The project, known as Sohjoa, is being implemented by the six largest cities of Finland, Finnish universities, and transportation authorities to prepare for new public transit services and autonomous vehicles. The project is funded within the EU-financed mySMARTLife program, in which European cities develop smart, energy-efficient mobility and lifestyles. The mySMARTLife program goal is to reduce energy consumption in cities by 10% to 15%. mySMARTLife is part of the EU's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, which includes development of new urban solutions to mitigate climate change.

Metro Wants An All-electric Bus Fleet – Sets Goal For 2,200 Electric Buses By 2030

The nation's second largest public transit agency – the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority – is going electric. On June 22nd, Metro announced it plans to begin phasing out its 2,200 natural gas buses and replace them with electric battery engines by 2030.

Currently, Metro uses natural gas buses and does not have any electric buses in its fleet. The plan is to begin by electrifying the Orange Line, a bus line that runs from North Hollywood through the San Fernando Valley, and the Silver Line, which runs from downtown LA to San Pedro. The electric bus technology available today will work on these lines, which are flatter and less demanding on the bus than many of LA County's other bus routes. If that goes well, the Metro board will decide in 2019 whether to proceed with phase two: replacing the rest of the natural gas fleet. There's not currently an electric bus on the market that can meet Metro's needs for its rapid or local service, where buses run 250 miles a day. Metro expects those vehicles will become available around 2020 or 2022.

Electric buses have 30 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions and 20 percent fewer smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions than the cleanest natural gas bus, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists. (The natural gas industry disputes this.) And as the California power grid becomes more reliant on renewable energy and less on fossil fuels, the climate benefits will increase.

As expected, the natural gas suppliers are skeptical. Their lobbyists cautioned that the electric buses – which currently cost upwards of \$200,000 more than a comparable natural gas bus – may not come down in price. They asked the board to consider where the money would come from to pay for the \$3 billion they estimate is needed to switch over Metro's entire fleet and build the charging infrastructure.

Want To Be Green? Work At Home

In a June 20th Op Ed, piece Joel Kotkin suggested that suburbs should be expanding telecommuting as an alternative to transit. He noted that, outside the large metropolitan core areas, as many people are already working from home as are using transit.

Kotkin reported that, even among the 21 metropolitan areas that have opened substantially new urban-rail systems since 1970, mass transit's share of work trips has declined, on average, from 5.3% to 5%. Meantime, in the **greater Los Angeles area**, the number of people working at home has risen significantly in the last generation, from roughly 1.5% of people in 1980; to about 5% today.

Kotkin theorized that perhaps older, well-connected people are more inclined to avoid miserable commutes, given the chance to do so. He projected that, as the American population skews older, the economy will likely see more workers making such choices and home-based work could be the logical extension of a dispersal from the urban centers to the suburbs.

Kotkin's takeaway? Some see these developments as ominous, but greens and urbanists shouldn't: Telecommuting will, among other things, reduce pollution. It may be that the shift to home-based work will prove the ultimate in mixed use.