

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

July 13, 2015

TO: SBCCOG Steering Committee

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

SUBJECT: South Bay Highway Program Complete Streets Policy Guidance

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. Strategy 5 – Actively pursue opportunities for infrastructure funding for member agencies.

BACKGROUND

Complete Streets As Defined By Caltrans

In October 2008, less than a month before L. A. County voters passed Measure R, Caltrans introduced a new “Complete Streets” policy to improve the integration of sustainability and mobility of the statewide transportation network. The policy marked a significant change in the types of transportation projects to be developed on state highways and freeways and the manner in which projects would be evaluated and delivered. L. A. Metro and Caltrans have been working to develop the policies and procedures to improve this integration in L. A. County since the initial state policy was issued in October 2008.

In October 2014, Caltrans released an updated policy that defines a “complete street” as follows:

“... a transportation facility that is planned, designed, operated, and maintained to provide safe mobility for all users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, transit vehicles, truckers, and motorists, appropriate to the function and context of the facility. Every complete street looks different, according to its context, community preferences, the types of road users, and their needs.”

Caltrans has listed the benefits of complete streets to include:

- **Increased Transportation Choices:** Streets that provide travel choices can give people the option to avoid traffic congestion, and increase the overall capacity of the transportation network by providing accessible and efficient connections between residences, schools, parks, public transportation, offices, and retail destinations.
- **Economic Revitalization:** Complete streets can reduce transportation costs and travel time

while increasing property values, supporting local businesses, and encouraging job growth in communities.

- **Improved Return on Infrastructure Investments:** Integrating sidewalks, bike lanes, transit amenities, and safe crossings into the initial design of a project spares the expense of retrofits later.
- **Livable Communities:** Holistic consideration of how the transportation facility is contributing to multimodal travel options, local visual character, vibrant civic space, social interaction, public health, and the local economy is essential to fostering livable communities.
- **Improved Safety:** Design and accommodation for bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users reduces the incidence of crashes and/or severity of crashes.
- **More Walking and Bicycling:** Public health experts are encouraging walking and bicycling as a response to the obesity and chronic disease epidemics. Streets that provide room for bicycling and walking help children and adults get physical activity.
- **Greenhouse Gas Reduction and Improved Air Quality:** Greenhouse gas emissions link to global warming, and poor air quality links to increases in asthma and other illnesses. Complete streets help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants by encouraging vehicular trips to be replaced.

The updated complete streets policy directs Caltrans to provide for the needs of all travelers of all ages and ability in all planning, programming, design, construction, operations, and maintenance activities, and products on the State highway system. Caltrans views all transportation improvements (new, reconstruction, rehabilitation) as opportunities to improve safety, access, and mobility for all travelers recognizing bicycle, pedestrian, motorist, trucker, and transit modes as integral elements to the transportation system. Under current Caltrans policy, complete street concepts apply to all roadways in all contexts including local roads and state highways in rural, suburban, and urban areas.

Under the updated policy, Caltrans develops integrated multimodal projects in balance with community goals, plans, and values. Addressing the safety and mobility needs of bicyclists, pedestrians, motorists, and transit users in all projects, regardless of funding, is implicit in these objectives. Motorist, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit travel is facilitated by creating “complete streets” beginning early in system planning and continuing through project delivery, maintenance, and operations. Developing a network of complete streets requires collaboration among all Caltrans functional units and stakeholders.

Measure R, Active Transportation and Complete Streets

When Los Angeles County voters passed Measure R in 2008, the term “complete streets” was not yet in Metro's or the community's lexicon. Metro issued a policy clarification on October 6, 2009 that is still in effect today. The policy describes the types of projects that are eligible for Measure R sub-regional highway funding, as follows:

“Clarification on Project Eligibility for Highway Operational Improvement and Ramp/Interchange Improvements

The intent of a Measure R Highway Operational Improvement Program (HOIP) is to improve traffic flow in an existing State Highway corridor by reducing congestion and operational deficiencies at spot locations that do not significantly expand the design capacity of the system and are intended to address recurrent congestion. In addition to those eligible projects on the State Highway System, for Measure R, projects located on primary roadways located generally within a one mile corridor of any State Highway, including principal arterials, minor arterials, and key collector roadways, will be considered eligible for Operational Improvements and for ramp and interchange improvements. Examples of eligible improvement projects include:

- interchange modifications (but not to accommodate traffic volumes that are significantly larger than the existing facilities were designed for);
- ramp modifications (acceleration - deceleration/weaving);
- auxiliary lanes for merging or weaving between adjacent interchanges;
- curve corrections/improve alignment;
- signals and/or intersection improvements;
- two-way left-turn lanes;
- intersection and street widening;
- traffic signal upgrade/ timing/synchronization;
- traffic surveillance;
- channelization;
- Park and Ride facilities (transit centers also were made eligible later);
- turnouts;
- shoulder widening/improvement;
- safety improvements that reduce incident delay.

Up to 20% of the Arroyo Verdugo and Las Virgenes/Malibu Subregions’ Operational Improvement dollars may be used for soundwalls and bike lanes. (This policy provision was later amended to include South Bay projects.)

Other projects could be considered on a case-by-case basis as long as a nexus to State Highway Operational Improvements can be shown.”

In parallel with the emergence of the complete streets policy has been the emergence of the statewide Active Transportation Program (ATP). In 2012, Caltrans created the ATP by consolidating several federal and state programs including the Bicycle Transportation Account and Safe Routes to School into a single program with a focus to make California a national leader in active transportation. The ATP’s purpose is to fund infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects that encourage increased use of active modes of transportation. The program goal is to help increase biking and walking trips, increase safety and mobility for non-

motorized users, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, enhance public health, and ensure disadvantaged communities fully share the benefits.

This shift in statewide policy emphasis encouraged regional transportation agencies to enact programs and regulations that prioritize transportation projects based on their ability to reduce vehicle miles travelled rather than on traditional mobility measures of effectiveness such as reduced congestion and vehicular delay. As a result, over the past seven years, a new interpretation of “operational improvements” has emerged within Caltrans, SCAG, some (but not all) planning sections of L. A. Metro, and within some local jurisdictions. The definition of an “operational improvement” has been broadened by public and private sector advocates to include projects that address access to, and the quality of, mobility in neighborhoods, whether in the urban context of transit-oriented development or the suburban context of neighborhood-oriented development.

The Metro Board policy for its Measure R Subregional Highway Operational Improvement Program (SHOIP) has not been updated to reflect the new interest in developing and funding Complete Street projects using SHOIP funds. In the South Bay, SHOIP funds are the same as South Bay Highway Program (SBHP) funds. Some Metro planning sections have been integrating Complete Streets elements into the Metro Call for Projects (CFP). Metro’s CFP staff has indicated it will recommend a separate Complete Streets category in future CFPs. However, it is unclear if, or how SBHP funds will be considered eligible as a local match in Complete Street project applications in the CFP.

Absent an explicit change in policy direction from the Metro Board of Directors, the Metro Highway Section of Metro continues to rely on the 2009 interpretation of SHOIP “operational improvements” for determining eligibility of Measure R expenditures within the SBHP. As a result, SBHP funding can only be used for narrowly-defined Complete Street project elements that meet the 2009 SHOIP eligibility guidelines.

For the past five years, Metro Highway Section staff has allowed preliminary SBHP project development planning to be paid for using SBHP funds in order to determine what project elements are eligible SHOIP expenditures. SBHP funding has been used to prepare Project Study Reports (PSRs) that are required to be included in Metro Call for Projects applications and Project Approval/ Environmental Documents (PAEDs) that are required by Caltrans to define projects on State Highways prior to the initiation of final design.

Recently the Metro Highway Section staff has advocated a change in its administrative policy to require local jurisdictions to complete PSRs and PAEDs using local (or other non-SBHP) funds in order to justify expenditure of SBHP funding. The Metro Highway Section also continues to adhere to the Board’s traditional definition of operational improvement as only applying to the elimination of vehicle delay and safety for the SHOIPs like the SBHP. Recently, the staff position has hardened to the point of requiring lead agencies to use non-SBHP funds to pay for studies that prove a reduction in vehicular delay or an improvement in roadway safety before SBHP funds can be used. Metro Highway staff is recommending interested lead agencies (local jurisdictions) pursue other grant sources such as State Cap and Trade, Proposition C

Discretionary, and other active transportation grant programs, or use their Proposition A, C and Measure R Local Return funds.

Unfortunately, Complete Streets elements by their nature do not lend themselves to state and federal grants as stand-alone projects. In fact, the Caltrans policy clearly indicates they are best implemented as an integrated program that improves the total public right-of-way including streets, bikeways, safety medians, widened sidewalks, street and pedestrian lighting, crosswalks and curb cuts, transit stops and street furniture. These integrated project elements are intended to put neighborhoods first and to create an environment that encourages local uses and reduction of vehicles miles travelled.

The lack of an explicit Metro Board policy that makes Measure R SHOIP funding available for elements of Complete Streets projects may be a deterrent to innovative SBHP project planning and development.

Further Considerations

Since the projects that have been presented to the SBCCOG for possible Measure R funding greatly exceed the amount of funding that has been allocated, it is important that the SBCCOG make choices and establish priorities for what they want the SBHP to fund. Because Caltrans and Metro have opened up their criteria does not mean that the SBCCOG needs to do so as well. As long as we stay within the parameters of what is allowed, the SBCCOG, in conjunction with our cities, should establish our own criteria and then determine if we need to ask for further changes to the guidelines. For example, we might want to have a criterion that says that we want to only consider complete streets projects by corridor since so many of our corridors run through multiple cities.

RECOMMENDATION

SBCCOG staff recommends that the Steering Committee discuss the projects that have been funded, the projects that are being proposed and how a more inclusive policy would be applied to the South Bay. Once we know how we want to apply the existing policies and possibly more inclusive policies, the Steering Committee can recommend that the Board approve and transmit a policy recommendation to Metro.