

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

April 13, 2015

TO: SBCCOG Steering Committee

FROM: Steve Lantz, SBCCOG Transportation Director

RE: SBCCOG Transportation Update – April 2015

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.

FOLLOW THE MONEY...

FEDERAL

Creative Approaches Proposed To Fill Surface Transportation Funding Potholes

Long term transportation funding is again running on empty, forcing Congress to scramble to replace or extend the federal gas tax before the current federal surface transportation funding authorization act, known as MAP-21, expires on May 31st.

With less than 60 days until the deadline, the U.S. Department of Transportation on March 30th unveiled a revised \$478 billion proposal, known as the Grow America Act, to reauthorize the federal fuel tax to fund surface transportation over the next six years. The administration wants to hike highway spending by 29 percent over the period to \$317 billion and hike mass transit spending 76 percent to \$116 billion.

The ambitious proposal would address a wide variety of long-standing Obama Administration funding and administrative priorities. The bill would create a new competitive grant program called "Fixing and Accelerating Surface Transportation (FAST)." Modeled after the Education Department's Race to the Top program, it would award funding to "incentivize the adoption of bold, innovative strategies and best practices in transportation that would have long-term impact on all projects across the transportation programs.

The FAST Act also would: increase innovative financing by strengthening Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) and Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan programs; allow states to set variable tolls of federal highways (with USDOT's approval); make more Private Activity Bonds (PABS) available, establish an \$18 billion federal freight program; and nearly double funding for the federal TIGER grant program.

Some Grow America Act administrative proposals would: triple the budget of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's automobile defects office; require federal registration of tires to enhance recall effectiveness; create a transparent and clear permitting process to speed

up project delivery; phase out traditional cash toll collection that uses toll collection staff on federal-aid highways by October 1, 2016; and provide more funding to high-performing Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs).

The current federal tax on diesel is 39.4 cents a gallon; the federal tax on gasoline is 18.4 cents a gallon. The American Road and Transportation Builders Association (ARTBA) on March 12th proposed that Congress hike the federal diesel and gasoline tax 15 cents a gallon and offset the fuel cost increase for low- and middle-income people with tax rebates. The association estimates that the fuel-tax increase would generate enough new revenue to pay for a six-year, \$401 billion transportation reauthorization bill.

Under ARTBA's proposal, single tax filers with an adjusted gross income of \$100,000 or less would receive a \$90-per-year tax rebate, which ARTBA said would be the average annual cost to them of a 15-cent gas-tax increase. Joint filers with adjusted gross incomes of \$200,000 or less would receive a \$180 rebate. Under the proposal, rebates would only last for the (six-year) life of the new transportation funding bill.

Conservatives believe Congress should consider a considerably different approach. Rather than raise the federal gas tax, the Heritage Action group approach would be to repeal the federal tax and let states increase their state transportation taxes to pay for their road projects. The recommendation is based on the organization's theory that devolving transportation projects back to the states will ensure that gas tax money is used for the highest value-added projects. Opponents immediately decried the negative consequences that would result from abandonment of the federal-aid interstate system.

The Equipment Manufacturers and other transportation groups have come out in favor of an increase in the 18.4 cents per gallon federal gas tax.

The federal government typically spends approximately \$50 billion per year on transportation projects, but the gas tax only brings in about \$34 billion. Over the last six years, Congress has been unable to reach agreement on a long-term highway funding bill and instead has passed a series of 32 short-term extensions that cumulatively have increased the Highway Trust Fund by a cumulative \$70 billion. But the short term fixes have also resulted in postponement of many larger projects by states that have no assurance of on-going multi-year federal support. As in previous years, there is little consensus about how to pay for the annual shortfall or a new multi-year program of infrastructure spending.

It's not hard to imagine a 33rd extension of MAP-21 come May 31st.

Congressional Bill Would Create New TOD Financing Option Near Railroad Stations

A new bill introduced in Congress on March 25th, known as the Railroad Infrastructure Financing Improvement Act (RIFIA), would help make it easier to finance Transit Oriented Development (TOD) projects near railroad stations by expanding the scope of the little used Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) program. With the addition of TOD projects into RRIF and other streamlining provisions that would make RIFIA loans easier to execute, communities will have an additional tool to utilize existing infrastructure for economic revitalization.

In addition to providing financing for TOD, the new program would invest loan repayments back into rail infrastructure to help fund capital and operations expenses. This presents a unique opportunity for private-public partnerships between real estate developers, passenger rail agencies and, potentially, local jurisdictions.

STATE

An Avalanche of State Bills Introduced Before Deadline

February 27th was the deadline for state lawmakers to introduce bills for the 2015-2016 legislative session. The state legislature began work on the hundreds of proposals during March. Bills approved by both the Assembly and Senate will need to be sent to the Governor by September 11th. A few transportation related bills received media coverage right out of the gate.

SB 350 would codify Governor Brown's vision to reduce California's petroleum use by 50 percent, and have 50 percent of electricity generated by renewable sources. As an added bonus, the bill would also mandate a 50 percent increase in energy efficiency for all existing buildings by 2030.

SB 564, sponsored by the Safe Routes to School National Partnership (SRTC), is a second try at instituting an additional \$35 fine on driving violations committed in school zones and directing the revenue to the Active Transportation Program for Safe Routes to School projects and programs. Advocates believe the additional school zone fine is warranted similar to construction zones where fines are doubled. The Governor previously vetoed a similar proposal.

The SRTC also supports SB 632 that would allow local jurisdictions, based on a traffic analysis, to expand the size of a school zone up to a quarter mile from the edge of a school building or school grounds. Existing law limits a school zone to be set 500 to 1000 feet from the edge of the school property.

REGIONAL

TRANSFORMATIVE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING ...

San Pedro and RPV Share Vision For A Western Avenue Complete Street

A segment of Western Avenue borders on both San Pedro and Rancho Palos Verdes. Planners in both cities are working together to create a 2.5-mile complete street design on Western Avenue between Summerland Avenue and Palos Verdes North. In addition to sidewalk and bike lane improvements, the concept plan would also conform signage and landscaping to create a unified look. The complete street enhancements could be added by either narrowing the median or traffic lanes without eliminating lanes for car traffic or parking.

All of these proposed improvements would fit into what's being called the Western Avenue Corridor Vision Plan. It's hoped that both SP and RPV can agree on a final plan by the summer, at which point the process of finding the money begins.

Bicycle Sharing and Bike Corrals Initiatives Emerge, But May Not Be Needed

Metro last year began soliciting bids for a vendor to run a countywide bike sharing program funded from \$3.8 million in ExpressLane revenues. Metro is expected to award a bike share contract in June, with implementation of a two-year Downtown pilot program in the spring and summer of 2016. The pilot program would feature 65 stations spread throughout Downtown L. A., with a total of 1,000 bicycles. Initial plans call for stations in the Civic Center, at the Music Center, and at multiple locations in the Financial District, the Historic Core, Little Tokyo and the Arts District. Bike stations would also come to the Figueroa Corridor and around the University of Southern California.

If successful, the pilot program ultimately could be expanded to more than 250 stations and 3,800 bicycles. Although the pilot program is fully funded, the funding picture for a full regional bike share program remains unclear. Metro's full system plan requires that host cities split costs 50/50 with Metro.

In a separate, yet simultaneous process, the LADOT Bike Program has worked diligently since 2010 to introduce, formalize, and refine bicycle corrals for the City of Los Angeles. In April 2013, the City of Los Angeles approved a permitting process that would allow a company from Irvine to install and operate a citywide bike-sharing system, with up to 400 rental stations across Los Angeles and 125 in Downtown. The plan, however, soon fell apart.

Undeterred, LADOT included a goal of installing over 25 bike corrals throughout the city by 2017 in the department's strategic plan, Great Streets for Los Angeles. The city's third-generation design allows for bike corral equipment that will hold up to 24 bikes to be installed in two standard parking spaces. The City is currently seeking candidate sites to be evaluated for its third round of corrals installations.

Frustrated by the lack of progress on public bike sharing programs, a building owner in the Downtown Arts District has purchased 50 bikes that can be borrowed by tenants free for 24 hours. The bike comes with a lock and a helmet.

And the City of Santa Monica is considering proposals that might make bike corrals obsolete. One respondent to a city RFP introduced the concept of semi-dockless shared bike parking areas that could be less expensive, smaller and more ubiquitous than current corral designs. Users would locate available bikes using a smart phone reservation application. In one Santa Monica proposal, the contractor was able to offer many more bikes at the same price as competitors who weren't using a dockless system.

“Race, Ethnicity & Protected Bike Lanes” Report Explores Equitable Streets

To help improve understanding of diversity and ethnicity issues related to bikeway projects, the Green Lane Project has teamed up with the Alliance for Biking and Walking to produce a 36-page idea book based on their research.

Building Equity: Race, Ethnicity, Class and Protected Bike Lanes has three main ingredients:

- Profiles of 10 very different people of color from around the country who are, for diverse reasons, advocating for protected bike lanes in their communities.
- Data-rich explorations of the role protected bike lanes have played in advancing equity in Colombia, Denmark and China.

- A collection of statistics, new and old, about the intersections of race, ethnicity, income and bike infrastructure, including some from a major new statistically valid survey of U.S. biking habits.

For a free copy, contact info@greenlaneproject.org.