

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL

DATE: January 12, 2004

FROM: CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: REVIEW OF DRAFT 2004 REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PLAN

RECOMMENDATION:

The following report is for information only.

BACKGROUND:

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the Federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for six counties in southern California (Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Ventura, and Imperial). SCAG has recently released the Draft 2004 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for public review and comment. Written comments are due by January 16, 2004.

The state and Federal governments require Metropolitan Planning Organizations to update their Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) on a three year cycle. Additionally, the update is needed for the air quality "conformity" finding, which states that the region's RTP "conforms" to the State Implementation Plan (SIP) to achieve National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQSs). The conformity determination is important because Federal funding for new projects may be blocked if a region's conformity status is allowed to lapse.

Both Federal and state laws and regulations describe a planning process that regions must follow in developing their regional plans. Federal law requires that metropolitan transportation plans:

- 1) Be developed through an open and inclusive process that ensures public input;
- 2) Be for a period not less than 20 years into the future;

- 3) Reflect the most recent assumptions for population, travel, land use, congestion, vehicle fleet mix, speeds, employment and economic activity;
- 4) Be financially constrained with revenues available during the time frame of the plan;
- 5) Conform to the applicable State Implementation Plans (SIPs) for air quality; and
- 6) Consider local planning factors and strategies.

State law requirements include compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act; consistency with the four-year State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP); providing program-level performance measures; and having three plan components. The components are a policy element, an action plan, and a financial element.

The RTP is not a “plan” *per se*, inasmuch as it does not constitute a series of specific agreed-upon steps or actions that cities, transportation agencies and others must follow to reach an agreed-upon goal. It is a compilation of policies, program and projects that represents a *vision* of how the region can address issues of mobility, growth and future development patterns.

There are no specific Federal or state requirements as to what the RTP must achieve with respect to mobility, system reliability, accessibility or other transportation-related goals. The question of whether the RTP “works” or is successful is basically academic, other than achieving the air quality conformity finding. It’s really a matter of whether the RTP seems to provide a reasonable starting point for the region in the ever-evolving process of confronting the future.

For the City of Pasadena, the importance of the RTP divides between policies and programs on the one hand and specific projects on the other.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS:

With respect to policies and programs, much of what is proposed in the RTP requires Federal and/or state legislation. Further, in most cases, adoption or implementation is left to local governments, transportation operating and funding agencies, or the private sector. Much of what is being proposed is far from the consensus needed to make the step from idea to reality. Hence, the key question to be asked is: are there specific policy or program elements of the RTP: (1) with which the City strongly disagrees and wishes to vigorously oppose early on so as to remove it from the political radar screen; or (2) conversely, the City wishes to support because it is consistent with the city's own view of how best to evolve over time.

As has been the case in previous RTPs, most of the policies and programs depend on the actions of agencies other than SCAG for adoption or implementation. As has also been the case in the past, it is probable that some will move forward while others will not, based on political, institutional and other considerations.

• The Region's Investment in Transit

Public transportation services comprise a major portion of the Regional Mobility Strategy. The goals of public transportation services are to ensure mobility for people without access to automobiles and to provide attractive alternatives for drive-alone motorists or discretionary riders. The region's investment in public transit is 58.3 percent of the available public funding over the life of the Plan.

There are those that express concern that this investment is disproportional to the use; transit accounts for a small share of the travel market (in 1997, 2 percent of all trips and 3.5 percent of work trips were by transit). There is additional concern that costs to provide transit service continues to grow, while per capita ridership does not. Regionally, transit ridership is only slightly above 1985 levels, and per capita transit ridership is roughly 17.5 percent below 1985 levels. However, recent trends are more promising with new programs such as Bus Rapid Transit attracting new ridership, notably discretionary riders.

While transit ridership levels are low and the single occupant automobile remains the primary choice of transportation for most residents of the region, there are many compelling reasons to continue to invest in public transit. The foremost is the continuing growth in the region and congestion on our roadways. The alternative to trying to build our way out of this problem is to change our travel mode split, with more emphasis on public transit, including light rail and rapid bus operations which demonstrate a broader appeal. The intense amount of investment currently programmed is necessary to develop the infrastructure to support these programs. For the past 30 years the region has heavily invested in building the highway system, with a comparatively small investment in transit.

- **System Investment Philosophy**

The RTP adopts an approach to investment that in essence seeks to maintain, preserve and manage the existing system before making high cost investments in system expansion. That approach is depicted in Figure 4.2 of the RTP (reproduced below).

This approach does not seem unreasonable given current fiscal constraints facing the region and the understanding that the funding decision makers are Caltrans and the MTA. However, it is not clear whether the financial investments as presented in the RTP really follow this philosophy, inasmuch as there is no discussion of the “right” level of operational improvements and other non-system expansion investments.

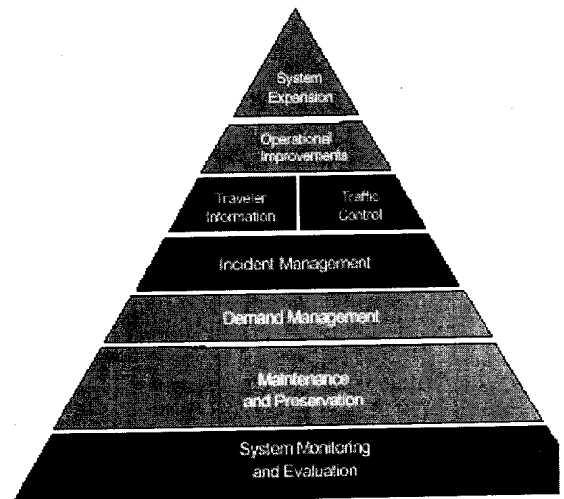
For example, “Operational Improvements” include:

- 1) Flow-improving infrastructure modifications;
- 2) Freeway service patrol to facilitate removal of stalled vehicles; and
- 3) Transportation management systems designed to improve traffic flow (e.g., incident management systems, traveler information systems, ramp metering systems arterial signal management systems).

The RTP assigns \$1.3 billion to such strategies, less than 1% of total funding in the RTP. Presumably, the number results from the accumulated input from the MTA and its counterpart agencies in the other counties. But might the RTP not suggest another level of investment? For example, since accidents account for roughly 50% of the congestion experienced on the freeway system, one might reasonably conclude that a higher level of investment in incident management and freeway service patrol strategies is warranted.

Figure 4. 2

System Management Philosophy



- **Public Funding Strategy**

The RTP has a good discussion of the funding shortfall for transportation facing the region. On-going fiscal challenges include:

- 1) Decline of gas tax revenues due to inflation;
- 2) Sunset of existing local transportation sales taxes (Orange, San Bernardino, Imperial counties)

- 3) Loss of revenues from reduced gasoline consumption to meet air quality mandates
- 4) An aging society that could consume fewer taxable items
- 5) Escalation of operations and maintenance needs; and
- 6) The State budget crisis & the state highway account shortfall.

The RTP proposes about \$31.2 billion in new public funding through 2030, broken down as follows:

2004 RTP Public Funding Strategies
(billions of dollars)

Sales Tax Extension (San Bernardino, Imperial) \$	4.30
Temporary Sales Tax Increase (L.A. - SB 314) \$	3.70
Gas Tax Increases (\$0.15 per gallon in 2010 and 1 cent annually 2011-2015) \$	21.70
Development Mitigation Fee (San Bernardino) \$	1.50
Total	\$ 31.20

Whether all or even any of these will eventuate is, of course, a matter of speculation. Under the State Constitution, the sales tax measures would require a two-thirds voter approval, although there are legislative initiatives underway to ease this requirement. An increase in the gas tax requires a two-thirds vote of the Legislature.

• **Future Growth and Development Patterns**

The RTP recommends a “hybrid” growth scenario that incorporates elements of both intensification of land use in urbanized parts of the region, as well as encouraging the movement of people and jobs to outlying areas such as North Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties, and Eastern Riverside County. The RTP states that the proposed growth “vision”:

- 1) Utilizes in-fill “where appropriate” to re-vitalize underutilized development sites;
- 2) Focuses growth along transit corridors and nodes;
- 3) Provides housing opportunities near major job centers;
- 4) Provides housing opportunities to match changing demographics;
- 5) Preserves natural open space;
- 6) Incorporates a decentralized aviation strategy; and

7) Densifies new transportation corridors proposed in the RTP.

The RTP states that, "SCAG is prepared to conclude that Southern Californians will accept future development that features higher densities, in-fill development, mixed-use land, and increased transit usage." (Draft 2004 RTP, p. 22). These measures seem generally consistent with the philosophy and policies set forth in Pasadena's General Plan but must also be balanced with the City's goals to direct growth away from neighborhoods and harmonize growth with historic building patterns.

PROJECTS:

With respect to projects, however, the question is a bit different. The reason is that projects of regional significance¹ must be included in the RTP in order to receive Federal funding.² And smaller projects, even if they are not of regional significance, must be included in the financially constrained project list upon which the RTP air quality conformity determination has been made.³ Hence, if a city strongly supports a particular project, it is important that some funding for it be included in the RTP (although the precise level of funding specified is, to

¹ 40 CFR §93.101, as amended by 62 FR 43780, 43803, August 15, 1997, states that "regionally significant project" means a transportation project (other than an exempt project) that is on a facility which serves regional transportation needs (such as access to and from the area outside of the region, major activity centers in the region, major planned developments such as new retail malls, sports complexes, etc., or transportation terminals as well as most terminals themselves) and would normally be included in the modeling of a metropolitan area's transportation network, including, at a minimum, all principal arterial highways and all fixed guideway transit facilities that offer an alternative to regional highway travel.

It should be noted that determining which minor arterials and/or other projects should be considered "regionally significant" for the purpose of regional analysis for each nonattainment area is determined through the interagency consultation process (40 CFR §93.105(c)(1)(ii), as amended by 62 FR 43805, Aug. 15, 1997). Under this process, it is possible that regional significance can vary from State to State or area to area. Once a project is identified as regionally significant, it must be included in the air quality conformity analysis regardless of funding source.

² As well as in the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP), which also must conform to the SIP. The 2002 RTIP is a capital listing of all transportation projects proposed over a six-year period for the SCAG region (fiscal years 2002/03 – 2007/08). The projects include highway improvements, transit, rail and bus facilities, high occupancy vehicle lanes, signal synchronization, intersection improvements, freeway ramps, etc. All projects incorporated into the RTIP must be "consistent" with the current RTP policies, programs, and projects. Funding shown for a project in the first two years of the RTIP must be firmly committed; funding in the last four years of the RTIP must be "reasonably expected" to be available.

³ However, this does not mean that if a project is not so included that it must wait three years for the next RTP update. SCAG generally updates the conformity analysis yearly, and projects can be and are regularly added to the RTIP administratively each year. In addition, some projects need not be modeled: these include safety projects, mass transit and other and projects considered to be (air quality) Transportation Control Measures pursuant to §108(f)(1)(A) of the Clean Air Act, and certain other projects pursuant to 40 CFR §93.126 (Final Transportation Conformity Rule) such as intersection channelization and signalization projects and interchange reconfiguration projects.

some degree, less important, since it is the MTA and Caltrans [not SCAG] that actually make project funding decisions).

The structure of proposed projects and strategies that constitute RTP is depicted in Figure 4.1 of the RTP (reproduced below). There are tiers of projects (also called "strategies") beginning first with the existing transportation system and ending with new projects being proposed. These tiers are described as follows:

- **Baseline Tier**

This represents a future scenario in which only projects in the 2002 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) that have state and Federal environmental clearance by December 2002 are assumed to be completed. The Baseline also assumes a future in which there are no changes in land use from established general plans. The Baseline functions as the "No Project" alternative used in the RTP Program Environmental Impact Report and represents a future without the RTP.

- **Tier 2**

This describes the remaining projects in the 2002 RTIP that are not included in the Baseline scenario. These are recognized as committed projects, and the RTP gives them first funding priority after the Baseline.

- **Plan Tier**

This represents the final layer of transportation improvements, above and beyond Tier 2.

Tables 3, 4 and 5 (see Attachments 1, 2, and 3) list Baseline, Tier 2 and Plan projects respectively, which are City projects and projects of regional significance that are important to Pasadena. The Gold Line extension to Claremont is included in Table 5.

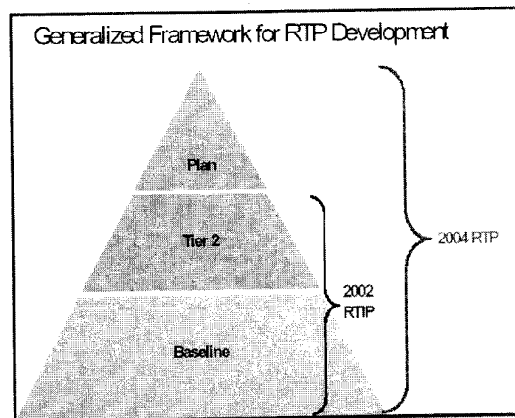


Figure 4.1

CONCERNS:

Staff has reviewed the RTP and comments are attached (Attachment 4). Primary concerns are categorized as follows:

- 1) Lack of inclusion of local return transit operators in the decision making process for ridership projections and service coordination;

- 2) Opposed to the inclusion of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in the approval process of new development projects;
- 3) Need to give higher prioritization to funding of soundwalls;
- 4) Reliance on private funding strategies for air quality conformity compliance; and
- 5) Need to provide a more even distribution of funds between state highways and arterials/local streets for system preservation and maintenance.

With the recent decision by the Federal Highway Administration that the Final Environmental Impact Statement that supported the Record of Decision for State Route 710 must be supplemented before moving forward, there has been discussion by the Arroyo Verdugo sub region regarding each city's position on the 710 project. Discussion has centered on having the sub region take a position against the inclusion of the 710 in the RTP. Consistent with Measure A, the voter approved initiative that the policy of the City of Pasadena support completion of the 710 freeway between I-210 and I-10, no comments are included that request that the project be removed from the RTP.

The comments will be transmitted to SCAG for their consideration.

FISCAL IMPACT:

This is an informational item only.


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