

Memorandum

To: Chairman and Commissioners

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From: Robert I. Remen

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Ref: **RURAL COUNTIES TASK FORCE - BIENNIAL REPORT**

During the Rural Counties Task Force Annual Report at the December Commission meeting, the consensus of the Commission was to have the Task Force report twice a year instead of annually. As a result, the first biennial report of the Rural Counties Task Force will be presented at the June meeting by Task Force Chairman Charles Field. A summary of his report is attached.

Attachment

trosnow/BK4-7-Jun2000.DOC/06/07/2000

Semi-Annual Report – Rural Counties Task Force

June 1, 2000

The Rural Counties Task Force (RCTF) is made up of the State's 28 smallest county Regional Transportation Planning Agencies or Local Transportation Commissions. These 28 agencies generally represent those counties with populations less than 250,000. The Task Force was formed in 1988 as a joint effort between the California Transportation Commission and the rural counties. The role of the Task Force is to provide a direct opportunity for the small counties to remain informed and become involved with changing statewide transportation policies and programs.

The following is a list of the recent efforts and accomplishments that have involved the Task Force membership during the first six months of year 2000.

Local Road Rehabilitation and Maintenance Funding

The California Transportation Commission's (CTC's) 1999 Annual Report to the Legislature highlights the need for the Legislature to recognize the problem with under-funding of local road rehabilitation and maintenance to rural areas, and to cities and counties in urban areas as well. The CTC report recommends that the Legislature provide funds for rural road rehabilitation and maintenance and to enable the State Transportation Improvement Program's (STIP's) focus to return to road and transit improvements.

The Rural Counties Task Force has recently met with organizations representing Metropolitan Transportation Planning Agencies (MPOs) and Councils of Governments (COGs) as well as cities and counties in an effort to use the opportunity being provided by the Governor's Initiative and the current legislative session to try and have direct subventions to cities and counties for local street and road rehabilitation and maintenance increased. **The Task Force, along with this coalition of representative organizations, has submitted input to the Governor and Legislature encouraging that \$500 million per year be provided directly to cities and counties as a reliable annual subvention specifically for local road rehabilitation and maintenance purposes.**

Preserve A Portion of Interregional Improvement Program (IIP) Funds to Help Fund Projects That Serve Interconnectivity "To and Through" Rural Areas

SB 45 established into State law a provision whereby sixty percent of Caltrans' share of STIP funds (the Interregional Improvement Program [IIP] or Interregional Transportation Improvement Program [ITIP]) is to be spent "outside the boundaries of an urban area with a population of more than 50,000...". The Governor's Transportation Initiative includes "trailer legislation" that proposes to remove this provision from law in order to find matching funds necessary for urban projects identified in the Governor's initiative. The CTC's 1999 Annual Report to the Legislature states that "rural counties need

investment in state highways to provide basic connections to the rest of the State but they are dependent upon joint ventures with Caltrans.”

A number of rural counties have established partnerships for funding state highway projects which are predicated upon combinations of regional choice (RIP) and State choice (IIP) STIP funds. **The Rural Counties Task Force has provided input to the Legislature and Governor requesting that the urban/rural formula affecting the IIP remain in law. This is necessary in order to protect and encourage important state/local funding partnerships, to maintain the funding necessary to ensure the interconnectivity of the statewide highway system, and to serve the State’s recreation, tourism, agriculture and forestry industries as well as other new industries moving to or developing in rural areas of the State.** The Task Force has observed that the representatives of urban cities, counties and regional transportation organizations have also advised the Legislature not to remove this rural/urban formula from the law.

Allocation Formulas For Highways, Street and Road Funding

The CTC’s 1999 Annual Report to the Legislature states that “some rural counties have suffered a real dollar decline in maintenance funding since 1990 even after the transportation blueprint’s gasoline tax increases of the early 1990 due to reduced federal timber receipts...”(and other factors). The Commission recommends the Legislature, in dealing with the funding shortfall for road maintenance statewide, “consider the funding situation for rural road programs, giving rural counties a larger share in keeping with their maintained road mileage, higher unit costs, and lack of access to alternative funding.” **The Rural Counties Task Force did not take the opportunity provided by the Governor’s Initiative to stress this need, preferring, instead, to focus attention on the fact that all cities and counties simply need more direct and reliable funding for local road rehabilitation and maintenance.**

SCA 3 or Local Sales Taxes For Transportation

Nearly all rural counties have inadequate funding to meet all of their long-range transportation needs. Rural county populations tend to have lower incomes than the statewide average and they are fiscally conservative. Only two rural counties in the State have thus far been able to pass local option sales tax measures (Madera and San Benito). It is an uphill battle at best in most rural counties to attempt to pass a sales tax for transportation given a majority vote requirement, much less the current two-thirds majority vote that is generally required.

The Rural Counties Task Force held a workshop concerning Senate Constitutional Amendment (SCA) 3 on September 17, 1999. The purpose was to have rural counties prepare for SCA 3 in case this constitutional amendment came before the statewide voters in November 2000. Some rural counties have been expending their limited planning funds to prepare for SCA 3; a majority of rural counties have not. One reason

for this is that the State has not given clear signals regarding whether or not SCA 3 will be on the ballot in November and rural planning funds are too scarce to prepare for a ballot measure that may never materialize. **The RCTF has adopted a position that if SCA 3 or a similar local option sales tax measure is put before California voters in November 2000, then it must not preclude counties who are not prepared to support sales tax measures at the present time from being able to pass sales tax measures by a simple majority vote in future years.**

Rural County Representative on the CTC

The CTC is well aware that Ed Sylvester (Nevada County) provided a valuable statewide urban/rural perspective during his recent term. Government Code Section 14504 states that, in making his appointments to the Commission, the Governor should “make every effort to assure that there is a geographic balance of representation on the Commission as a whole, with members from the northern and southern areas and from the urban and rural areas of the state.” **The RCTF and many individual rural counties have written to the Governor urging that he maintain a rural county representative on the CTC. Rural counties have submitted at least two candidates to the Governor for his consideration.**

Rural Planning Funds

In its 1999 Annual Report to the Legislature the CTC asked Caltrans to increase Rural Planning Assistance (RPA) funds and it suggested the Legislature should also consider raising the STIP Project Planning, Programming and Monitoring (PPM) funding limit for small counties from 2% to 5%. In January 2000, the RCTF conducted a survey of its membership which documents the need for additional RPA funds. **The RCTF has worked with Caltrans to secure a doubling of RPA funds within the Caltrans budget. A finance letter containing this change has become part of the Governor’s Revised Budget for next fiscal year (FY 00/01).** The RCTF is very appreciative of those legislators, commissioners, commission staff, Caltrans staff and members of the Governor’s administration who have helped the effort to proceed this far.

Most rural counties have indicated that they would also support increasing the amount of STIP funds that can be used for STIP Project Planning, Programming and Monitoring (PPM) from 2% to 5%. **RCTF staff has initiated attempts to try and raise the limit of PPM funds for small counties from 2% to 5% within AB 2931 or other legislation.**

Streamlining Federal Requirements and Improving Caltrans Local Assistance

On January 21, 2000, Commissioners Wolf and Sylvester participated in a Rural Counties Task Force workshop concerning the need for rural planning funds and other methods to improve project delivery in rural areas. The workshop was attended by 22 of the State’s 28 rural counties as well as representatives from Caltrans. In addition to the need for more rural planning funds, numerous problems and potential solutions were discussed

concerning the subjects of streamlining federal requirements and improving Caltrans local assistance to rural areas. (Separate minutes from this workshop and a follow-up action list are available.) One solution that is already provided by the CTC through its RSTP and TEA programs is to exchange federal funds for State funds in rural counties. Rural counties are familiar with managing California's environmental laws (California Environmental Quality Act [CEQA]) but they typically do not have the extra staff resources or experience necessary to deal with the more complex federal environmental laws (National Environmental Protection Act [NEPA]). **The Rural Counties Task Force encourages expanding opportunities to exchange federal funds for State funds in rural areas to the Highway Bridge Replacement and Rehabilitation (HBRR), Hazard Elimination and Safety (HES), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) and other programs wherever possible.**

Regional Transportation Plans

Under changes in law that were affected by Senate Bill (SB) 45, rural regions are to update their Regional Transportation Plans (RTP) every four years. Consistent with the spirit of SB 45, these Regional Transportation Plans are supposed to contain the information that support specific projects nominated for state funding through the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) during every even numbered year. **During 1999, representatives of the RCTF worked with representatives of Caltrans and the CTC staff to develop a new set of post SB 45 RTP Guidelines.** During the RCTF meeting of July 16, 1999, the Task Force agreed to set a goal of having all rural county RTPs up to date by December 2001 in anticipation of the 2002 STIP funding cycle. To help implement this goal, the RCTF held three workshops concerning the new RTP Guidelines. **The third workshop covered two full days, was attended by 22 of the 28 rural counties, included valuable instruction from Caltrans personnel and CTC staff, and should help improve the rural county RTPs for the 2002 STIP cycle.**

State Level Committees

In addition to those issues and objectives listed above, various RCTF members are also providing a rural counties' perspective to the following efforts. Many of these efforts involve participation on committees established by Caltrans.

- Clarify and Improve Overall Work Program Process
- Interregional Transportation Strategic Plan
- Senate Bill 45 Project Monitoring/Reporting Data Base
- Local Assistance "Enhanced Training and Outreach"
- Caltrans, City, County, Federal Highway Administration Coordinating Group
- Streamlining Caltrans Local Assistance Procedures and Guidelines Manuals
- Regional Surface Transportation Program/ Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement/Transportation Enhancement Activities Project Delivery
- Regional Transportation Plan/Regional Transportation Improvement Program Rural County Performance Measures

California Transportation Investment Strategy (CTIS)
Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) and Their Applicability in Rural Counties
Federal Transit Administration Program for Elderly and Disabled Individuals (FTA
5310) and Welfare to Work Advisory Committee
California Aviation System Plan Steering Committee
State's Role in Mass Transportation Advisory Committee