



**STAFF REPORT**

**SUBJECT:** 2008 Regional Transportation Plan and Environmental Impact Report

**MEETING DATE:** September 18, 2008

**AGENDA ITEM:** 8

**STAFF CONTACT:** Aubrey Spilde, Michael Powers

**RECOMMENDATION:**

- A. Receive staff report and response to comments on the proposed Final 2008 Regional Transportation Plan and the Final Environmental Impact Report.
- B. Adopt a resolution certifying the Environmental Impact Report and approving CEQA findings and Mitigation Monitoring Program
- C. Adopt a resolution approving the Final 2008 Regional Transportation Plan

**SUMMARY:**

At the SBCAG meeting on July 17, 2008 your board approved the release of the Draft 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for public distribution and review. A 45-day public review period for both documents commenced July 18, 2008. Noticing and distribution of the documents were extensive.

SBCAG conducted public workshops held in Santa Maria and Santa Barbara on August 5 and 6. Staff also presented the drafts to TTAC and SBCTAC in August and September. In addition, the SBCAG Board held a public hearing on August 21.

The public review period closed Tuesday, September 2, 2008. Eighteen comments were received from government agencies, organizations and individuals. Staff evaluated and responded to every comment received and, as appropriate, incorporated the comments into the RTP or EIR. All comments, staff responses, and changes to the RTP and EIR are attached.

At this meeting the SBCAG Board considers certification of the Final EIR, and adoption of the Final 2008 RTP. Both TTAC and SBCTAC voted unanimously to recommend approval of the 2008 RTP. SBCTAC included an expression of concern about the future of transportation revenues as part of their recommendation for approval.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The SBCAG Board approved release of the Draft 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for public distribution and review at its meeting on July 17, 2008. A 45-day public review period for both documents commenced July 18, 2008.

### **Public Noticing**

SBCAG staff sent notices of release of the documents to local newspapers throughout the County and agencies such as local city and county public works/planning departments, transit agencies, airports, and partner agencies such as the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments and the Ventura County Transportation Commission. Other recipients included the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, Caltrans, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Transit Administration. SBCAG provided copies to the State Clearinghouse for distribution to state agencies. In total, SBCAG staff directly notified approximately 650 groups and individuals. SBCAG staff also made the draft documents available on our website and at main county libraries. Attachment 1 includes the public notice used for the workshops and the public hearing.

### **Public Workshops**

SBCAG staff held public workshops in Santa Maria and Santa Barbara on August 5 and 6, respectively. Six people attended the workshops.

Five persons attended the Santa Maria workshop. Comments received at the Santa Maria workshop are detailed in Attachment 2 and summarized below:

- A safe, continuous bikeway is needed for students riding to Santa Ynez Valley Union High School and SBCAG needs to provide the High School with information on TDM measures to reduce traffic congestion.
- The park and ride lot in Santa Ynez, adjacent to the SR 246/SR 154 intersection, needs improvements.
- The intersection of SR 246/SR 154 needs to be modified to accommodate heavy northbound left-turns (left turns from SR 154 onto SR 246).
- To properly address climate change, more funding should be allocated to public transportation.

One person attended the Santa Barbara workshop. Comments received at the Santa Barbara workshop are detailed in Attachment 2 and summarized below:

- What is the source of funding for the Coastal Express and does oil impact mitigation money provide financial support for this transit service?

Detailed staff responses to the comments from the public workshops, including proposed changes to the narrative of the RTP, are also included in Attachment 2.

### **Public Hearing**

The SBCAG Board held a public hearing on the Draft RTP and Draft EIR on August 21. One person, representing an organization, provided comments:

- Michael Chiacos of the Community Environmental Council (CEC) presented a comment letter from the CEC recommending the DEIR “consider a fourth project alternative – that of a high fuel and high construction price future and a carbon-constrained state.”

The comment is included in full, with staff response, in Attachment 2.

## Letters of Comment

By the end of the September 2 comment period SBCAG received additional written comments, included in Attachment 2, which are summarized below.

- California Department of Transportation Division of Aeronautics requested that if the new California Space Center, to be located on a 66-acre site outside the front gate of Vandenberg Air Force Base on Highway 1, is moving forward, the SBCAG RTP address the additional transportation needs of the facility, considering tourists, employees, and any emergency vehicle transportation that may be occasionally required. Coincidentally staff recently received a briefing on the California Space Center project by project sponsors. Staff will add reference to the California Space Center project and the potential transportation issues in the discussion of roadway system needs for the Lompoc Valley, p. 2-36. As the project moves forward, staff will work collaboratively in assessing traffic impacts to the Lompoc Valley.
- The County of Santa Barbara Public Works Department sent a comment letter requesting that SBCAG include a project to widen SR 192 through the Montecito area on the illustrative project list. The project would provide shoulders to increase safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, and the County estimates it would cost approximately \$75 million. SBCAG will accommodate the County's request and add this project to the illustrative, financially unconstrained project list.
- Sam Cohen and Neal Olinger, Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians, requested clarification of the source of traffic on SR246 and stated that the traffic on SR 246 is also due to interregional travel from the Lompoc Region through the Santa Ynez Valley to the south coast and other areas. This clarification will be added to the RTP.
- City of Goleta staff expressed concerns that the ongoing freeway construction on Highway 101 south may disrupt traffic and cause residents to locate or relocate to North County, impacting Highway 101 north. Staff responds that traffic management and TDM programs for this project will minimize these disruptions and the RGF forecasted significant future north county growth that would account for any trip diversions. Staff will add this issue in the RTP
- State of California Public Utilities Commission indicated that it should be consulted on any projects that might impact rail lines. Staff will add this point of contact to the RTP EIR list of agencies that need to be consulted.
- Santa Barbara Metropolitan Transit District, Comprehensive Planning Committee of the Citizens Planning Association, and, Eugene Wilson expressed concerns that the implications of fuel price increases and changes in energy supply and demand are creating a transportation paradigm shift not accounted for in the RTP. SBCAG agrees the increase in fuel cost may shift transportation patterns in the County. This issue is summarized in Chapter 2, "Regional Issues Affecting Transportation, Fuel Type and Cost." However, since the significant increase in fuel price is relatively recent and its demonstrated impact on travel is relatively minor, SBCAG plans to wait until the next RTP Update to identify significant trends and examine the issue quantitatively. Over the next few years, SBCAG will monitor the effect that the change in fuel prices is having on demand for transportation modes and make changes to the RTP, as necessary, when it is apparent that longer term and permanent trends in mode choice have occurred. In the medium term, California SB 375 on Global Warming and Land Use, if passed, will provide the impetus statewide for additional tools and guidance for such analysis. The bill requires Metropolitan Planning Organizations like SBCAG to develop a "Sustainable Communities Strategy" as part of the next RTP Update. Elements of the strategy will

examine land use and transportation relationships, travel patterns, impacts on climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and jobs-housing relationships, among other factors. SBCAG will develop the Strategy, with extensive public, stakeholder, and local agency participation, to meet targeted reductions in greenhouse gas emissions set by the Air Resources Board.

- Eugene Wilson also expressed concerns about impacts of overall energy demand, induced growth, and circulation impacts on the City of Santa Barbara. Energy issues are typically project-specific and induced growth issues have been evaluated by SBCAG in the past and there is no indication it is a significant issue. Impacts to the regional transportation system in Santa Barbara and all local agencies have been examined in the travel forecasts and circulation analysis.
- These same organizations were concerned that that RTP places too much emphasis on highway capacity expansion. The RTP allocates resources to all modes of transportation and State highway capacity increasing projects account for only 15.3% of project costs. Alternative mode projects—transit, bicycle/pedestrian, and rail—account for nearly a third, 30.4%, of RTP project costs. Other highway projects and streets/roads projects account for 53.4%—the largest portion—of costs. It is also important to note that many of the highway and streets/roads projects, despite their classification, include bicycle/pedestrian facilities. Also, the 101 widening project, an expensive highway project, will add a high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane, discouraging single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) traffic. ITS/TDM projects make up the remaining 0.9%.
- Tracey Singh requested improvements to Barker Pass for bikes. Staff replied that this project is not in city, county, or regional bikeway plans and will not be included in this RTP but will be considered in the next update. However, minor Safe Routes to Schools improvements could be completed by local agencies without including the project in the RTP.
- Santa Barbara Airport Advocates requested that the RTP address fuel cost at Santa Barbara Airport, lack of 24-access to general aviation facilities, the lack of adequate hangar space and limited transient aircraft parking. These concerns are primarily operational issues that will be transmitted to the Airport and summarized in the airport discussion in the RTP.
- The City of Carpinteria Park and Recreation Director requested modifications and additions to the project list. Staff was able to accommodate minor project changes but significant additions would compel recirculation of the EIR so the projects were added to the Illustrative List.
- Caltrans requested clarification of its program responsibilities in the RTP, particularly the SHOPP and intercity rail programs, clarification of the responsibilities of state, regional, and local agencies on bikeway planning, and expansion of the strategic environmental mitigation strategy required by SAFETEA-LU. Staff will provide these clarifications in the RTP. However, while SBCAG can serve as a coordinator or facilitator of strategic environmental mitigation, the project developer and local planning departments are the primary agencies involved in this topical area.
- Santa Barbara County Air Pollution Control District (APCD) comments requested inclusion of their updated mitigation measure recommendations, clarification of significance thresholds used to determine air quality impacts, and other minor editorial comments. The EIR has been amended accordingly.
- State of California Department of Fish and Game requested expansion of the list of projects that may result in biological impacts and recognition of impacts of projects on countywide water demand and consequent impacts to species. Particular attention was also paid to impacts on steelhead migration and sensitive and special status plant and wildlife species, and fully protected species. Staff has worked with our environmental

consultant, Rincon, to address these issues in the *Final EIR Comments, Responses and Revisions*

- State of California Department of Conservation requested further identification and clarification of the status of, and impacts to, farmland, particularly land in Williamson Act contracts. Staff has worked with our environmental consultant, Rincon, to address these issues in the *Final EIR Comments, Responses and Revisions*.
- Ms. Tanne Kiele Chang, tkcDesigns, requested inclusion of her solar power grid system plan; however, this plan requires considerable definition and acceptance by local agencies so it will be considered in the next RTP update.

## **Committee Review and Recommendations**

SBCAG staff initially briefed the Technical Transportation Advisory Committee (TTAC) on the Draft RTP at its meeting on August 7. One representative asked about the implications to the project list and financial analysis should Measure A fail to pass in November. Staff responded that of the new \$5 billion in total funding that is forecast to be available over the 20 year horizon of the RTP, one-fifth, or \$1 billion, is represented by Measure A. Loss of this local option sales tax revenue source would have severe consequences to the likelihood and timeliness of highway, roadway, transit, and bike project delivery.

Staff initially briefed the Santa Barbara County Advisory Committee (SBCTAC) at its meeting on August 12. SBCTAC members had many questions about the RTP and wanted assurance that there was ongoing communication with SLO County on the Santa Maria River Bridge project, confirmation that rail projects were included, and intercity transit was address. SBCTAC members were concerned that overall financial problems of state and federal budget deficits, credit card debt, and gasoline price increases were creating great financial uncertainties with transportation revenues and wanted to apprise the board of this issue. Members requested that this item be considered in September.

On September 4 staff presented the 2008 RTP to TTAC. The committee received a summary of all comments and staff responses, as well as changes proposed to the Draft 2008 RTP. Representatives from APCD, MTD, and Caltrans briefly spoke about their letters of comment, which are reviewed elsewhere in this staff report. Following some discussion, TTAC voted unanimously to recommend approval of the 2008 RTP.

On September 9 staff presented the 2008 RTP to SBCTAC. The committee received a summary of all comments and staff responses, as well as changes made to the Draft 2008 RTP. Following some discussion, SBCTAC voted unanimously to recommend approval of the 2008 RTP with the expression of concern about the future of transportation revenues:

SBCTAC wishes to state its concerns regarding the potential for overly optimistic revenue projections contained in the RTP. The national debt stands at over \$9 trillion and we continue to borrow at a rate of \$50 billion per month. There is overall uncertainty regarding the long-term health of both the Federal and State budgets. Legislators across party lines warn that future earmark funding for infrastructure projects will be severely limited or eliminated entirely.

American drivers are driving 4% less when compared with total miles traveled last year. This will cause a decline in gas tax revenues and experts warn this trend will continue in the foreseeable future due to increased fuel costs. Finally, the American consumer is stressed with some of the highest personal credit card debt in our country's history. This

will dramatically impact future sales tax proceeds associated with transportation funding sources such as Measure D, and Measure A, if passed by the voters in November 2008.

SBCTAC respectfully advises the SBCAG Board of Directors to consider these trends as it approves the RTP. Careful consideration of balance and priorities will be key as our region moves to implement the range of projects contained in the RTP in the future.

SBCTAC would like to thank staff for all the hard work it takes to prepare a thorough and effective RTP.

All changes to the RTP resulting from public comments are provided in Attachment 2.

## **Environmental Analysis**

A program EIR was prepared for the RTP which analyzes the effects of cumulative buildout of the RTP. The analysis of cumulative effects of all financially feasible circulation system improvements in the county in this "first tier" environmental review document will form the basis for the cumulative analysis contained in any subsequent environmental documentation for specific projects proposed under the 2008 RTP. The DEIR was circulated concurrently with the Draft RTP.

The following impacts were determined to be significant and unavoidable and therefore require findings of overriding consideration:

Impact LU-4. Some RTP projects could convert agricultural lands to transportation infrastructure. Although the actual level of impact from individual projects is not known at this time, the overall impact to agriculture is assumed to be Class I, significant and unavoidable.

Impact AES-2. Development of proposed roadway projects would contribute to the alteration of the county's character from a rural (or semi-rural) to a somewhat more suburban condition. This is considered Class I, significant and unavoidable.

Impact B-2. Some proposed transportation projects could permanently alter natural habitat areas and wildlife corridors. Impacts of many individual projects can likely be mitigated to a less than significant level. However, because the feasibility of mitigation cannot be determined at this time, the cumulative effect of RTP implementation is considered Class I, significant and unavoidable.

The attached Comments and Responses document (Attachment 3) identifies each comment SBCAG received. Responses to comments have been prepared to address the environmental concerns raised by the commentors and to indicate where and how the EIR addresses pertinent environmental issues.

The Draft EIR and this Comments and Responses document collectively comprise the Final EIR for the 2008 RTP Update. Any changes made to the text of the Draft EIR correcting information, data, or intent, other than minor typographical corrections or minor working changes, are noted in the *Final EIR Comments, Responses and Revisions* in ~~strikeout~~/**bold** format.

In addition staff has prepared CEQA Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations for the 2008 Santa Barbara County Regional Transportation Plan and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program as established by CEQA.

In conclusion, staff recommends the SBCAG Board certify the Final EIR and adopt the 2008

RTP.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment 1: Public workshop and public hearing notice on Draft RTP and DEIR

Attachment 2: Final Santa Barbara County 2008 Regional Transportation Plan Comments, Responses, and Revisions

Attachment 3: 2008 Santa Barbara County RTP Final Environmental Impact Report Comments, Responses and Revisions

Attachment 4: Resolution to Certify Final Environmental Impact Report and adopt Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program and amendments with response to comments

Attachment 5: CEQA Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations for the 2008 Santa Barbara County Regional Transportation Plan

Attachment 6: Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

Attachment 7: Resolution to Adopt 2008 Regional Transportation Plan



## **Public Notice of Availability of Draft Environmental Document**

### **2008 Draft Regional Transportation Plan**

As lead agency the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) has made available for public review and comment the 2008 Santa Barbara County Regional Transportation Plan. The RTP provides for a comprehensive transportation system of facilities and services that meets the public's need for the movement of people and goods that is consistent with the region's social, economic, environmental goals and policies.

The RTP covers state highways, county roads and local streets, airports, transit services, bikeways, rail and marine transportation within the cities of Santa Barbara, Carpinteria, Goleta, Lompoc, Buellton, Santa Maria, Solvang, and Guadalupe as well as the unincorporated communities of Santa Barbara County. The Draft RTP also contains all the projects from the Measure A 2008 Investment Plan.

A copy of the Draft 2008 RTP and Draft EIR is available for review at the SBCAG Offices and public libraries, or on the SBCAG website at [www.sbcag.org](http://www.sbcag.org).

#### **Public Workshops will be held to answer questions and take comments from the public on:**

**Tuesday, August 5<sup>th</sup>  
6:30 PM  
BOS Hearing Room  
511 East Lakeside Pkwy  
Santa Maria, CA**

**Wednesday, August 6<sup>th</sup>  
6:30 PM  
BOS Hearing Room  
105 East Anapamu St.  
Santa Barbara, CA**

The SBCAG Board will also hold a public hearing to receive public comments on August 21, 2008 in the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors Hearing Room at 105 East Anapamu Street in Santa Barbara.

Written comments must be received by September 2, 2008. Mail comments to SBCAG at 260 North San Antonio Road, Suite B, Santa Barbara, CA 93110 or e-mail comments to [comments@sbacg.org](mailto:comments@sbacg.org).

For more information, call SBCAG at 961-8900. Favor de llamar a SBCAG al 961-8918, para más información del reunión.

**Attachment 2: Final Santa Barbara County 2008 Regional Transportation Plan Comments, Responses, and Revisions**

**Attachment 3: 2008 Santa Barbara County RTP Final Environmental Impact Report  
Comments, Responses and Revisions**

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**Attachment 5: CEQA Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations for the 2008 Santa Barbara County Regional Transportation Plan**

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**Attachment 7: Resolution to Adopt 2008 Regional Transportation Plan**