

THE COORDINATOR

October 2003 * 1150 Osos Street, Suite 202, SLO, CA 93401 * Phone 805-781-4219 * Fax 805-781-570

Cuesta Grade Project Completed

On October 15th, after more than ten years of planning, environmental review, and engineering and over four years of construction, the widening of the Cuesta Grade to six lanes was completed. To celebrate the occasion a ceremony dubbed "Back to The Future" was held on the top of the pass. It was attended by a full complement of representatives of the U.S. Congress, State government, and San Luis Obispo County, including: Congressman Bill Thomas' representative Mike Whiteford; Congresswoman Lois Capps' representative Greg Hass; State Assemblyman Abel Maldonado; State Senator Bruce McPherson's representative Teresa Martinez; Assistant Chief Dwight Goggins of the California Highway Patrol; Chairman Mike Ryan of the County Board of Supervisors; SLOCOG President, Supervisor Peg Pinard; County Supervisors Harry Ovitt, Shirley Bianchi, and Katcho Achadjian; San Luis Obispo City Mayor Dave Romero; and SLOCOG Executive Director Ron De Carli. Caltrans District 5 Director Gregg Albright hosted the event. He said, "We are passing on to another generation a facility we can be proud of by adding two additional lanes over the steep pass. By widening it to six lanes from four, safety has been greatly enhanced."

The need for the project was put into focus in 1988 when a comprehensive study of the entire Route 101 corridor, completed by the Council of Governments, concluded that the highest priority should be given to improving the Cuesta Grade. This was due to concerns over the combination of a very steep 7% slope with slow moving trucks and a significantly increasing amount of commuter traffic between the South and North County. In 1990, the SLOCOG Board secured \$48 million in State funding for the project. Environmental studies were concluded in 1995. In early 1996, two public hearings and numerous informational meetings with city councils, other public officials, and interest groups culminated with the selection of the preferred alternative. Between 1999 and now, over \$38 million was expended for construction. Another \$4 million was used to implement a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program involving construction and promotion of additional Park-and-Ride Lots, expansion of public bus service, subsidized vanpools, and promotion of ridesharing. As a result, during this period the use of alternative transportation modes increased by over 50%.

Completion of the Cuesta Grade project is one of the most important transportation milestones in the history of San Luis Obispo County. It is the single most expensive highway project completed in the region since the completion of the highway system itself in the late 1950's. The project is also an excellent example of how engineering design and environmental sensitivity can be successfully integrated. The long lasting benefits of the project include smoother and safer traffic flow, a reduction in traffic delays and impacts caused by accidents or disabled vehicles, and the permanent stabilization of a section of the highway that had been a chronic slippage problem since the 1950's. Completion of this project should also be seen as the result of successful cooperation between the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments, Caltrans, and the State of California. Assemblyman Abel Maldonado praised the cooperative spirit shown by the various agencies involved by saying, "It is amazing what you can accomplish when you have every agency working together." SLOCOG President Peg Pinard said,



SLOCOG Executive Director, Ronald De Carli; CHP Assistant Chief, Dwight Goggins; Assemblyman Abel Maldonado; Supervisor and SLOCOG Board President, Peg Pinard; Congresswoman Capps' representative, Greg Haas; Senator Bruce McPherson's representative, Teresa Martinez; Congressman Bill Thomas' representative, Mike Whiteford; Supervisor Mike Ryan; and District 5 Caltrans Director, Gregg Albright

“The people of the County should feel proud of the dedication and cooperation of the Council of Governments and Caltrans in the completion of this project. We have worked together on this since 1998 – it’s been a long time coming – but it has been worth it.”

Status and Assessment of Programmed Projects

Continued monitoring of projects occurs to assure timely completion of each – a state, regional, and local priority. SLOCOG staff periodically report progress on SLOCOG programmed transportation projects. A number of projects are recommended for further discussion and review in December.

With the severe limitations on funding that exist at this point in time, this review is more critical than it has been in the past. Prior reviews have been very valuable in catalyzing action on project implementation and establishing a good record for project delivery.

A key policy issue is the review of funding commitments made to projects considered to be “at risk” or “stalled” due to lack of funding. In December, funding adjustments may be necessary to accelerate project completion for those projects that are near completion yet short of funding and projects that may not meet funding deadlines. Staff will be evaluating these projects in conjunction with the responsible agencies.

The funding categories evaluated include:

STIP – State Transportation Improvement Program

SHA/STP – State Highway Account, Surface Transportation Program

TE – Transportation Enhancement funds

EEM – Environmental Enhancement and Mitigation funding

Projects for December Review		
Sponsor	Project Name	Status
Arroyo Grande	US 101 - Brisco Rd. & Grand Ave Interchange	Funding shortfall
Arroyo Grande	Bridge St. Bridge Deck Rehab	Prelim. Engineering only
Arroyo Grande	Branch/SR 227 Pedestrian Improvements	Reserved funds, no agreement with Caltrans
Atascadero	SR 41/US 101 IC reconstruction	ROW funding delays, reserved funds, and funding shortfall
Caltrans	SR 46E Widening Phases I & II	Draft EIR/EIS released– construction in 2006; fund shortfall
Caltrans	US 101 Operational Improvements Phase I: Avila Road to Grand Ave.	Design begun, construction funds needed
Grover Beach	Widen N. Oak Park Blvd.	Construction award in Oct.
Morro Bay	Waterfront Boardwalk & Circulation Improvements	Funding lapsed for PAED; match funding uncertain
Paso Robles	46E/101 – 16 th St. operational improvements	PSR under Caltrans review
SLO County	Price Canyon Road bikelanes	Reserved funds – significantly under-funded
SLO County	Harmony Channelization and Climbing lane	Environmental document release 11/03; funding shortfall
SLO County	Halcyon/Rt. 1 Phase I – the bridge	Reserve funds, funding shortage, concern re scope
SLO County	Rt. 101 Willow Rd. Interchange	Reserved funds
SLOCOG	Rt. 46 E. Corridor Study	Status unclear
Caltrans	Price St. Extension (Pismo Beach)	Under-funded
Caltrans	Santa Maria River Bridge	Under-funded
Caltrans	Rt. 101 Operational Improvements Phase II	Under-funded, staffing shortfall
Caltrans	Grover Beach Rail Siding Extension	Reserved funds
SLORTA	RTA Bus	Reserved funds
SLORTA	SCAT Bus	Reserved funds

Transportation Funding and Programming Update

The Board is moving forward with a programming schedule to meet the California Transportation Commission’s (CTC) April, 2004 deadline for the submittal of a Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). At this time both State and Federal sources indicate new funding capacity will be well below previous estimates and targets, funds will be very limited, and under the worst-case, some projects may be “de-programmed.”

In August, the SLOCOG Board reviewed major issues relating to the upcoming programming cycle, adopted preliminary programming policies, and directed staff to further refine a regional programming strategy considering the current state and federal transportation-funding climate.

The intent is to identify programming policies that will assist in delivering a regional transportation program that:

- Keeps high priority projects on track, and
- Under-funded projects moving expeditiously toward construction.

The three major fund sources to be considered in this program cycle include:

- RTIP - Funding that is biennially programmed by the region and approved by the CTC through the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP);

- Surface Transportation Program/State Highway Account (STP/SHA) – Federal funding provided annually on a formula basis to the state and region authorized by the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA 21);
- Transportation Enhancement (TE) Program – Federal funding also authorized by TEA 21 consisting of 10% of Federal Surface Transportation Program funds for environmental enhancements.

Due to the state budget crisis, over \$3 billion of transportation funds were borrowed from the State Highway Account for the State Budget and may not be repaid until 2008. Concurrently, there are a significant number of projects statewide moving towards construction that were approved in prior funding cycles resulting in a significant state cash flow problem.

Federal funding will likely continue under several short-term continuing fund resolutions. This will provide only short-term funding until a new federal reauthorization bill is enacted (expected in 2005).

The state's budget crisis, and a delay in reauthorizing TEA 21 have impacted the flow of funds in the upcoming fund cycle requiring a cautious programming strategy. The SLOCOG Board will revisit these issues when they look at the status of projects in December and evaluate funding requests for the 2004 RTIP in February.

SLOCOG Region Gets Its First Soundwall

In mid September, Caltrans completed the Brizzolara Soundwall project along Highway 101 in the City of San Luis Obispo at a cost of \$1.1 million. Initially a highly contentious project, the end result was a fabulously designed wall that fit into the natural landscape and was put in place with a maximum preservation of existing mature vegetation. With its relatively quick and non disruptive construction, a high level of landscape preservation and replanting, adequate noise level abatement, and minimal visual impact to the traveling public, the Brizzolara Street Soundwall stands as a successfully partnered project between State and local agencies which benefits residents of San Luis Obispo.

Unmet Transit Needs Public Hearing Announced for February 4, 2004

The annual unmet transit needs public hearing is scheduled for the SLOCOG Board meeting of February 4, 2004, at 8:30 a.m. in the SLO County Board of Supervisors' Chambers in San Luis Obispo. As part of its responsibility in administering State Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds, SLOCOG is conducting the unmet needs hearing to solicit public input on transit services and bicycle facilities. The SLOCOG Board will not act directly on bicycle related requests, but will be considering them in planning for bicycle facilities.

All comments are welcome and will be evaluated by the SLOCOG Board and staff based on the following requirements:

- 1) if it fills a gap in transit service or is identified as a deficiency in the Regional Transportation Plan and other transit plans;
- 2) if there are 15 or more requests for regular transit services or 10 or more for specialized transit services (such as senior or disabled transportation);
- 3) if it is a current rather than a future need; and
- 4) if it is non-operational (such as increased hours, frequency, new routes).

Once the Unmet Transit Needs are determined, additional criteria are used to determine if they are "reasonable to meet" or "not reasonable to meet." If any transit request is found to be an "unmet transit need" that is "reasonable to meet," SLOCOG will direct the operator(s) to implement the new or expanded service

before any remaining TDA funds are released for streets and roads improvements. SLOCOG has the authority to withhold TDA funding until the operator complies.

SLOCOG is now accepting public comments by mail, telephone, fax, and e-mail. Send written comments to 1150 Osos St., Suite 202, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. Call Philip Chu at 805-781-4223. Fax requests to 805-781-5703; e-mail requests to

Unmet_needs@slocog.org, or visit our website at www.slocog.org.

SOUTH BAY DIAL-A-RIDE

In June, the Board took the following actions regarding the South Bay Dial-A-Ride (SBDAR) service:

- Notified the County that Local Transportation Funds (LTF) would not be available to the County for the existing SBDAR services starting July 1, 2004;
- Directed SLOCOG, San Luis Obispo Regional Transit Authority (SLORTA), and the County Public Works Department to work together in the next year to implement an economical and efficient public transit system for the community of Los Osos (one that

- does not eliminate a fixed route or a DAR system); and
- Authorized the use of \$15k in State Transit Assistance funds for promotion and community outreach with a quarterly report to the Board.

At the October meeting, the Board received the following progress report::

- Discussions with the County Employees' Union are underway;
- Administrative and operational issues are being studied;
- Possible fare increase is being considered; and
- Socio-demographic data is being analyzed.

Transit Needs Deficiency Report

The Board approved the Transit Needs Deficiency Report, which found the amount of current public transportation service with the broad geographical coverage appears to be adequate for a county of this size. There is room for improvement.

- There is a lack of uniform fares, a lack of compatible hours, and a lack of similar hours between regional and local buses;
- There is limited evening service, except for the upcoming implementation of four evenings a week service in SLO City;
- There is a lack of Sunday service outside of SLO City and the Five Cities; and
- There are still limited passenger information and amenities at bus stops.

The study noted there have been improvements in several areas of deficiencies identified in the 2002 Needs Assessment Report. Total ridership decreased by 12% from two years ago; however, total ridership excluding SLO Transit increased by 7.2%.

If you have any questions or would like to receive a copy of the report, please call Eliane Guillot at 805-781-5711.

RURAL TRANSIT GRANTS DUE DECEMBER 1st

SLOCOG is accepting grant applications for rural transit projects until December 1st 2003. Approximately \$400,000 is available for the non-urbanized areas in the county through a new program designed primarily for the acquisition of small transit buses and other minor transit capital improvements.

Beginning in December 2002, SLOCOG and transit operators in the region created a special transit fund by exchanging federal funds (FTA 5311) for local transportation funds (TDA) to streamline the cumbersome federal procurement process. The result is projects can be delivered faster and more economically. Examples of eligible projects include: buses, vans, radios, passenger shelters, bus stop signs, and other passenger amenities such as bicycle racks or lockers. Eligible applicants include ONLY public transit providers and existing recipients of Transportation Development Act funds for non-urban areas (SLO County, Regional Transit Authority, SCAT, Ride-On, and the non-urbanized cities in the county). For further information, contact Peter Rodgers at 805-781-5712.

Community Profiles Complete -

<http://www.slocog.org/maps/census.html>

As part of the effort to provide well-organized, concise data on demographics, socioeconomics, housing and transportation behavior of local

residents by community, SLOCOG staff have assembled "Community Profiles." These profiles are available on our website (www.slocog.org) for the seven cities, all of the Census Designated Places (CDP's) of the unincorporated communities, and the entire county using 2000 US Census data.

Community Profiles

were initially developed using 1990 census data and disseminated by SLOCOG in 1993. SLOCOG has worked to update the coding and interface of the database in order to compile similar profile reports for each of the member agencies and general public using the most recent census data. The last edition of the Regional Profile simply provided work trip transportation information for each jurisdiction. The community profiles contained here have been expanded to provide information on: 1) population and age characteristics, 2) income and poverty status, 3) employment, 4) housing, and 5) transportation characteristics.

Community profiles can be downloaded from the SLOCOG web site at <http://www.slocog.org/maps/census.html>.

The next page is an example of the Community Profile for the 2000 county transportation characteristics.

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS MEMBERSHIP (1/8/2003)

Down the Road...The next scheduled meeting of the SLOCOG Board will be held in the San Luis Obispo Board of Supervisors' Chambers Wednesday, December 3, 2003. The Board will conduct a public hearing to program Federal Transit Administration Sections 5307, 5310, and 5311 funding, review projects identified at the October meeting as "at risk," receive an analysis of cost increases for bridge replacement projects, and conceptually approve 2004/2005 preliminary Overall Work Program assumptions. If you would like to see the Board meetings, they are broadcast live and replayed on Channel 21 (Charter Communications Cable TV).

The San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) is an area wide planning and programming agency for issues of area wide concern. SLOCOG is also the state-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the state-designated Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA), the Service Authority for Freeways and Expressways (SAFE), and the Census Data Affiliate (CDA) for the San Luis Obispo region. Member Agencies are listed below with designated representatives.

President – Peg Pinard, Supervisor District 3

Vice President – Frank Mecham, Mayor, Paso Robles

Arroyo Grande – Tony Ferrara, Mayor

Atascadero – Wendy Scalise, Council member

Morro Bay – Dave Elliott, Council member

Grover Beach – Dave Ekbohm, Council member

Pismo Beach – Rudy Natoli, Council member

San Luis Obispo – Ken Schwartz, Council member

District 1 Supervisor – Harry Ovitt

District 2 Supervisor – Shirley Bianchi

District 4 Supervisor – Katcho Achadjian

District 5 Supervisor – Mike Ryan

Ex-Officio, Gregg Albright –Director, Caltrans District 5

Ronald De Carli, Executive Director

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<http://www.slocog.org/>