

AGENDA ITEM IV. D

MEETING: July 26, 2017

TO: RTP Roundtable Committee Members

FROM: Meg Prince, Assistant Regional Planner, Fresno COG
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SUBJECT: Comment Letter on the Draft Policy Element of the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan

PURPOSE

Fresno COG received a comment letter on the Draft Policy Element on June 26, 2017 from a group of five community based organizations (Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, Cultiva La Salud, Safe Routes to School Partnership, ClimatePlan, and Sequoia Riverland Trust). Fresno COG is asking the RTP Roundtable to provide direction on some of the comments received. The purpose of this staff report is to provide the RTP Roundtable Fresno COG's recommendations on the comments received and to facilitate the discussion of the RTP Roundtable during the July 26, 2017 meeting.

BACKGROUND

In the development of the Draft Policy Element for the 2018 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS), Fresno COG began soliciting feedback on the Draft Policy Element in April 2017. Fresno COG received comments from members of the RTP Roundtable during past meetings, and this letter is the first official letter received on the Draft Policy Element.

Pending direction from the RTP Roundtable, Fresno COG will incorporate some of the requests into the updated Draft Policy Element. During the July 26, 2017 RTP Roundtable meeting, Fresno COG will ask for willing volunteers to convene in early August as a Policy Element Subcommittee to work through the remaining changes to the Draft Policy Element. The updated draft will be brought back to the RTP Roundtable in August, and will go to the Transportation Technical Committee (TCC), Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), and Policy Board in September.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The comment letter identifies 11 issues or suggested policies related to the Draft Policy Element. Below are some of the overarching themes of the comments received that Fresno COG would like to receive direction on from the RTP Roundtable. Fresno COG, with the help of the Policy Element Subcommittee, will then incorporate the updates into the Policy Element where appropriate.

Transportation Equity

Comments #1, 2, and 3 in the letter include suggested policies specific to transportation equity.

Transportation Equity in the letter is defined as *"Ensuring access to frequent, reliable, affordable and effective transportation options, regardless of race, income, age, location, nationality, primary language, sex, gender, culture, religion, or any other factor, so that all residents have access to opportunities, resources and services."*

It is an essential priority of Fresno COG to improve mobility and accessibility for all Fresno County residents and to seek to ensure fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of transportation projects. However, to provide frequent, affordable, and effective transportation to all Fresno County residents regardless of location is a difficult and expensive task to commit to in the Policy Element. Transportation investment needs to be cost effective and sustainable due to limited funding. Providing all residents

with equal access to transportation service is a noble concept, but is cost-prohibitive and hard to be a guaranteed right to everyone.

Public Health

Comments #1 & #3 in the letter request that public health be identified as an explicit priority and primary goal for the regional transportation network in the RTP/SCS.

Fresno COG recommends incorporating public health into the Vision, but not to identify it as a “primary goal” for the transportation system. Fresno COG understands the connection between the built environment and public health, but its explicit priority as a transportation agency is to move people and goods. The transportation system plays an important role in air quality and safety, as well as encouraging physical activity. Increasing investments in active transportation projects can lead to increased physical activity, which can help communities lower rates of obesity, hypertension, and other chronic diseases. Fresno COG understands the connection between transportation and public health and will incorporate this into the Mission and Vision as such.

Land Use and Affordable Housing

Comments #1, 2, 3, 5, and 6 in the letter include suggested policies specific to land use and affordable housing.

Fresno COG’s role in providing access to affordable housing is limited due to the lack of land use authority, which the comment letter acknowledges. Fresno COG supports local control for land use decisions, but understands that transportation and land use are inextricably connected. Therefore, some of the policies may be incorporated where appropriate at the direction of the RTP Roundtable.

Focus on Disadvantaged Communities

Comment #3 in the letter includes numerous suggested policies regarding serving the needs of disadvantaged communities.

Disadvantaged Communities in the letter are defined as *“Communities whose median household income is less than 80% of the statewide median household income, or are within the top 25% most vulnerable census tracts in the state as identified by CalEnviroScreen.”*

Some of the policies suggested in the letter are supported by Fresno COG and align with its policies, federal requirements, and the RTP guidelines. However, some of the suggested policies fall under the responsibility of the local governments or specific programs. Fresno COG, at the direction of the RTP Roundtable, will incorporate the policies identified as feasible to support planning efforts in disadvantaged communities. These policies include:

- Ensure planning for projects that benefit disadvantaged communities and vulnerable groups is transparent and actively engages affected communities.
- Identify transportation needs in disadvantaged communities through meaningful engagement about project design and project implementation
- Enhance all residents’ access to areas of opportunity (jobs, education, etc.), healthy food, clinics and hospitals, ~~regardless of national origin, age, location, physical ability, or any other factor~~
- **Support** health and safe routes for children to schools and between activity centers
- **Promote** accessible and effective transportation options for seniors and persons with physical disabilities
- Growth patterns **are encouraged** to take into account the availability and quality of water resources for human consumption
- Incorporate environmental justice goals into SCS development and land use decisions