

MENDOCINO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

Approved MINUTES
Monday, December 6, 2021

Teleconference Only
Pursuant to Brown Act and Assembly Bill 361

The Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG) meets as the Board of Directors of:
Mendocino Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) and
Mendocino County Service Authority for Freeway Emergencies (SAFE)

1. Call to Order / Roll Call. The meeting was called to order at 1:32 p.m. with Directors Jim Brown, Scott Ignacio, John Haschak, Tatiana Ahlstrand (Caltrans/PAC), and Dan Gjerde present by Zoom teleconference; Vice Chair Ignacio presiding until ceding the gavel to Chair Gjerde at Agenda #7. [Clerk's note: the Public Appointee seat was vacant.]

Staff present: Nephela Barrett, Executive Director; Janet Orth, Deputy Director & CFO; Loretta Ellard, Deputy Planner; Lisa Davey-Bates, Transportation Planner; James Sookne, Program Manager; Danielle Casey, Program Coordinator; and Alexis Pedrotti, Project Manager.

Note: Public comment was invited via email and online comment form; staff monitored for incoming comments throughout the meeting, reporting periodically.

2. Convene as RTPA

3. Recess as RTPA – Reconvene as Policy Advisory Committee

4 - 5. Consent Calendar. Upon motion by Haschak, second by Albin-Smith, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*7 Ayes – Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Gjerde; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 0 Absent*): IT IS ORDERED that consent items are approved.

4. Adoption of Resolution Making Continued Findings Pursuant to Assembly Bill 361 to Conduct Public Meetings Remotely for MCOG's Legislative and Advisory Bodies During the COVID-19 State of Emergency.

Resolution No. M2021-15

Making Continued Findings Pursuant to Assembly Bill 361
to Continue Public Meetings Remotely
for MCOG's Legislative and Advisory Bodies
During the COVID-19 State of Emergency
[Reso. #M2021-15 is incorporated herein by reference]

5. Approval of November 1, 2021 Minutes - as written

6. Public Expression. None.

7. Presentation: Gualala Downtown Streetscape Enhancement Project – Caltrans District 1. Executive Director Barrett summarized recent activity involving public engagement and proposed design modifications. She then introduced the Caltrans project team in attendance: Elias Karam, Design Senior; Frank Demling (retiring former project manager); Jeff Pimentel, Project Manager; Liza Walker, Senior Environmental Planner; and Katlin Meyer, design team member.

Mr. Karam gave a slide presentation, starting with a contact email for comments, then covering Purpose & Need, Project Schedule, and New Project Alternative 4C. Ms. Barrett discussed MCOG's grant funding efforts for the construction phase; staff will resubmit an application to the Active Transportation Program for approval by the California Transportation Commission (CTC). CTC staff will participate in a virtual site visit in February to assist with improving the proposal (refer to written staff report). Mr. Karam described the hybrid design proposed in response to community feedback. More information is available at <https://dot.ca.gov/gualaladowntown> and questions or comments may be emailed to gualaladowntown@dot.ca.gov.

Board discussion and public comment focused on an open area reserved for optional treatments such as landscape, off-street parking, community events, or a tourism gateway. The sidewalk is designed to skirt that segment, away from the street for safer pedestrian access to the community center, shopping and amenities. Objections were made to potential use for large truck parking, with no comments heard in favor. Director Kanne advised making an early decision for desired use of the segment, based on City of Willits' experience.

Public comments were heard from Tom Murphy, Gualala Municipal Advisory Council (GMAC); Dave Shpak of Gualala; Robert Juengling, GMAC; and Don Hess, GMAC. The Chair allowed Mr. Murphy to share an additional slide presentation on GMAC's design preferences.

Ms. Barrett summarized next steps, with return to MCOG for endorsement between May and October 2022. Construction is anticipated to begin in 2025. No action was taken.

8. Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Recommendations of November 17, 2021

- a. Public Hearing: Consideration and Finding of Negative Declaration of Environmental Impact, followed by Possible Adoption of Resolution Approving the 2022 Mendocino County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) & Active Transportation Plan (ATP). Ms. Ellard reported legal notices published, posted and circulated.

Upon motion by Ignacio, second by Haschak, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (7 Ayes – Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Gjerde; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 0 Absent): IT IS ORDERED that this hearing was properly noticed. The Chair opened the public hearing at 2:30 p.m.

Ms. Ellard summarized her written staff report covering outreach, postings of the draft and proposed final RTP versions as recommended by the TAC, comments received and responses made to date. She detailed how staff had addressed a comment letter received from Caltrans. Public comments were received from Mr. Shpak of Gualala. She and Ms. Barrett appreciated all comments made and explained their reasoning for how needs were treated in the RTP & ATP.

Board questions and discussion included:

- Assuming all impacts are less than significant for a program document, why is a “no impact” declaration proposed for some items and not others? Typically these should be one or the other, not both. (Albin-Smith) Mr. Sookne responded having worked on this with a more experienced planning colleague and took the comment under advisement.
- Extensive narrative in the Rail Element is noted (Page 104), both recent and historic; with references to the 2013 tunnel closure between Fort Bragg and Willits, as well as a petition by CWR/Mendocino Railway to the federal Surface Transportation Board proposing expanded operations from the current excursion service to freight activity south to the Bay Area, which appears highly speculative. More time and attention on this element is suggested to validate information, as significant questions remain. (Gjerde) Staff responded as to sources of the data.

The Chair invited public comments, summarized as follows:

- Dave Shpak spoke as an individual, with disclosure of his professional planning role with Redwood Coast Land Conservancy, and requested that his comments on safety and operational needs in the area of Old Stage Road at Gualala ridge be included in the County Roads & City Streets Element, previously submitted to MCOG staff. With more funding expected to become available, the opportunity should not be missed. He critiqued treatment of the Gualala Downtown Streetscape project in the document, and noted a methodology for screening recommendations is not evident in the draft RTP. He offered assistance with data to evaluate the identified needs, thanking staff for their hard work.
- Don Hess noted policies CCE 2.6 regarding expansion of electric vehicle charging networks and CCE 2.7 to continue updating MCOG's Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) Regional Readiness Plan, as needed. He emphasized that climate action to electrify transportation and reduce GHG emissions is not optional, with an estimated 40 percent generated from transportation sources. Currently there is no public charger available in Gualala. Concerning his and others' efforts to date, what is status of strategically installing a public electric vehicle charger in the community? Ms. Barrett noted that while the RTP does not identify locations, the policies can support funding of such infrastructure. Ms. Orth discussed the Gualala site identified in MCOG's ZEV Plan within Caltrans right-of-way, pending policy changes ongoing at the state level or a potential relinquishment of property to the County. Ms. Orth also noted extensive grant rebates already reserved for local charging station applicants, as well as further funding becoming available soon through a recently adopted state program (refer to Information Packet). Director Gjerde also noted new federal funds to come from the infrastructure bill for electric car chargers.

In final board discussion, Chair Gjerde suggested certain text edits in the Rail Transportation Element concerning the tunnel closure (p. 104). Director Haschak assisted with refining text relative to demand for freight service. Ms. Barrett responded further to Mr. Shpak's comments and offered to address them more specifically in the document. She confirmed there was still time to adopt another version of the RTP at the next meeting.

The hearing was continued at 3:20 p.m. **Upon motion** by Albin-Smith, second by Haschak, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (7 Ayes – *Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Gjerde*; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 0 Absent): IT IS ORDERED that this public hearing is continued to February 7, 2022.

- b. Public Hearing: Approval of Resolution Adopting the 2022 Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). Mr. Sookne reported legal notice in Ukiah's newspaper of general circulation; proof of publication was included in the agenda packet materials.

[Director Albin-Smith briefly absent for this item.]

Upon motion by Ignacio, second by Haschak, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (6 Ayes – *Brown, Kanne, Ignacio, Haschak, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Gjerde*; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 1 Absent – *Albin-Smith*): IT IS ORDERED that proper notice was made for this hearing. The Chair opened the public hearing at 3:23 p.m.

Mr. Sookne summarized his written staff report, noting highlights and status of the process. Following a call for projects with \$5 million in new funds available, the sole request was from County Department of Transportation to rearrange a previous future funding commitment for North State Street, as to phases of work. Additionally, projects were identified for COVID Relief STIP funds in each MCOG member jurisdiction. He then invited questions, responding with details of the County's North State Street Intersection & Interchange Improvements project.

The Chair invited public comment (summarized):

- Dave Shpak asked for clarification of funding sources and commitments for the Gualala Downtown Streetscape project. Staff is working on grant funding from the state's Active Transportation Program, so funds set aside in the RTIP are meant for non-eligible uses.

The hearing was closed at 3:31 p.m. **Upon motion** by Brown, second by Ignacio, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*6 Ayes – Brown, Kanne, Ignacio, Haschak, Ahlstrand/PAC, and Gjerde; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 1 Absent – Albin-Smith*): IT IS ORDERED that the following resolution is adopted, and staff is authorized to submit the adopted RTIP to Caltrans and the California Transportation Commission by the December 15, 2021 due date.

Resolution No. M2021-16
Adopting the 2022 Regional
Transportation Improvement Program
[Reso. #M2021-16 is incorporated herein by reference]

Director Ahlstrand left the meeting at 3:40 p.m.

9. Consideration of Participation in New RuralREN (Regional Energy Network) Program.

Ms. Barrett reported on activities since the last two Council meetings as directed, for a regional role in reducing the region's carbon footprint and enhancing energy efficiency. The climate ad hoc committee and staff conducted research into joining or creating a Regional Energy Network (REN). Meetings were held with BayREN, which proved infeasible to join, then with Redwood Coast Energy Authority (RCEA) and Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG). The latter are in process of forming the RuralREN with a number of other counties. There is an opportunity to join, although not as a full member initially due to timing, as the proposal is due to California Public Utilities Commission in February. MCOG could start as a contractor to RCEA. Ratepayers funds are intended for serving hard-to-reach populations from existing Public Goods utility fees. Ms. Barrett described a range of programs available for REN services. Staff recommends action today to approve sending a letter of support for participation in the RuralREN via subcontract with intent to become a full partner in 2025, and to request letters from each MCOG member local government.

Board discussion included:

- A recent conversation with a Humboldt County supervisor reports REN is an effective program; rural issues bind us together; supports this approach and not to wait until 2025. (Haschak)
- Concurs with Director Haschak. Why would some of the listed partners be in a rural REN; are urban areas already served and now need to reach into their rural neighborhoods? (Kanne) Unsure; the more urbanized agencies were part of a larger working group.
- There is a multi-county requirement for RENs; also it may strengthen proposal. (Gjerde)

The Chair invited public comments, with no one wishing to speak.

Upon motion by Haschak, second by Brown, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (*6 Ayes – Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, and Gjerde; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 1 Absent – Ahlstrand/PAC*): IT IS ORDERED that staff is directed to: 1) prepare and send a letter of support to the Rural REN administrators expressing MCOG's desire to participate via subcontract in the resource programs that will be offered through the REN with the intent of becoming full REN partners at the time of the Budget Filings for 2025; and 2) request similar letters of support from member agencies, as appropriate, to participate in the Rural REN; and 3) continue working with MCOG's climate ad hoc committee.

10. Discussion/Direction: Draft 2022 MCOG Board Calendar. Upon motion by Brown, second by Kanne, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (6 Ayes – *Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, and Gjerde*; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 1 Absent – *Ahlstrand/PAC*): IT IS ORDERED that the 2022 MCOG Board Calendar is adopted as presented by staff.

11. Recess as Policy Advisory Committee – Reconvene as RTPA – Ratify Action of Policy Advisory Committee. Upon motion by Haschak, second by Brown, and carried unanimously on roll call vote (6 Ayes – *Brown, Kanne, Albin-Smith, Ignacio, Haschak, and Gjerde*; 0 Noes; 0 Abstaining; 0 Absent): IT IS ORDERED that the actions taken by the Policy Advisory Committee are ratified by the MCOG Board of Directors.

12. Reports - Information

- a. Caltrans District 1 – Projects Update and Information. There was no report.
- b. Mendocino Transit Authority. General Manager Jacob King reported MTA has acquired five new cutaway electric vehicles and grant funds are approved for a 35-foot all-electric Gillig bus. A total of six zero emission busses are expected to be in service by mid-2022.
- c. North Coast Railroad Authority. There was no report.
- d. MCOG Staff - Summary of Meetings. Ms. Orth briefly reported the California Energy Commission’s approval of a historic investment of \$1.4 billion in its Clean Transportation Program at their meeting of November 15, detailed in the Information Packet provided with MCOG’s agenda materials (noted also under Agenda #8a).
- e. MCOG Administration Staff
 - i. *Status of Covelo SR 162 Corridor Multi-Purpose Trail Project.* Good news is the fully executed settlement agreement was finalized in the CEQA lawsuit. Challenges remaining are several right-of-way issues that are threatening a timeline for ROW certification; staff is working on this with consultants and Caltrans, including a backup strategy. District 1 and CTC staff are very supportive of the project, however there is cause for concern as to meeting the January allocation deadline for construction funds.
 - ii. *50th Anniversary of MCOG – 2022 Recognition/Celebration.* The item was continued.
 - iii. *Miscellaneous.* None.
 - iv. *Next Meeting Date.* Monday, February 7, 2022.
- f. MCOG Planning Staff
 - i. *Feasibility Study - Mobility Solutions for Rural Communities of Inland Mendocino County.* The item was continued.
 - ii. *Miscellaneous.* None.
- g. MCOG Directors. There were no reports.
- h. California Association of Councils of Governments (CALCOG) Delegates. No report.

13. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at 3:59 p.m.

Submitted: NEPHELE BARRETT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By Janet Orth, Deputy Director