

## **Nevada County Transportation Commission meeting – November 8, 2023**

### PUBLIC HEARING: FY 2023/24 Regional Transportation Improvement Program Presentation by NCTC Executive Director Mike Woodman

Mike Woodman:

Every two years Caltrans prepares a new estimate of the available State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) revenues. The STIP is a multi-year capital improvement program of transportation projects both on and off the state highway system that is funded with revenues from the Transportation Investment Fund, gas taxes, and other funding sources. The STIP fund estimate serves to identify the amount of new funds available for programming for transportation projects for both Regional Transportation Planning Agencies such as NCTC and Caltrans. The State Transportation Improvement Program is made up of two programs, the Regional Improvement Program, which includes formula funding for projects nominated by regional agencies such as NCTC, and the Inter-Regional Improvement Program, which includes funding for projects nominated by Caltrans.

Once the STIP fund estimate is adopted by the California Transportation Commission (CTC), Caltrans and the Regional Transportation Planning agencies are required to submit a Regional Transportation Improvement Program for submittal to the CTC by December 15th. Regional agencies prepare the Regional Transportation Improvement Program, and Caltrans prepares an Inter-Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

The purpose of NCTC's Regional Transportation Improvement Program is to identify the regional priority projects and proposed funding recommendations for NCTC's formula share of the Regional Improvement Program funding for inclusion in the STIP. The Regional Transportation Improvement Program outlines the plan for programming the available funding over the five-year STIP period, beginning with fiscal year 2023/24 through fiscal year 2027/28. The funding recommendations for the STIP will ultimately be considered by the CTC for adoption at their March 2024 meeting.

When the CTC adopts projects from the Regional Transportation Improvement Program into the STIP, essentially a schedule and commitment to the proposed funding is established and the projects are considered programmed. Projects must be programmed in the STIP to receive a funding allocation from the CTC. NCTC has a total of \$5,431,000 of Regional Improvement Program funding available through fiscal year 2028/29 to program in the 2024 STIP.

During each STIP cycle, each Regional Transportation Planning Agency can utilize up to 5% of its Regional Improvement Program funds for planning, programming, and monitoring activities. Utilizing what we call PPM funds reduces the need for NCTC to use Local Transportation Funds for planning activities approved in our annual Overall Work Program, making more LTF available for local jurisdictions. NCTC has a total of \$412,000 of PPM funds available in the 2024 STIP for planning, programming and monitoring activities.

For the 2023/24 Regional Transportation Improvement Program, NCTC staff proposes to program \$4,385,000 of available Regional Improvement Program funding for Phase Two of the State Route 49 Corridor Improvement Project in Federal Fiscal Year 2024/25. This programming amount is proposed to fulfill the required match requirement for the Trade Corridor Enhancement Program grant funding that was awarded to NCTC in June of 2023 and in the amount of \$14.6 million.

Additionally, in consideration of ongoing and future planning activities, including preparation of the next update of the Nevada County Regional Transportation Plan, NCTC is proposing Planning Program and Monitoring funds to be programmed in the Regional Transportation Improvement Program to include \$65,000 in 2024/25, \$65,000 in 2025/26, \$100,000 in 2026/27, the year we will undertake the update of the Regional Transportation Plan, and then \$65,000 in 2027/28 and 2028/29 for a total of the PPM funds of \$360,000.

The recommended RTIP programming for PPM funding and the Regional Improvement Program funding for the Phase Two construction of the State Route 49 Corridor Improvement Project will leave NCTC with a balance of \$686,000 of Regional Improvement Program funds to be carried forward into future STIP cycles. I'm also happy to report that in response to NCTC's request, Caltrans has recommended \$2 million in the Draft Interregional Transportation Improvement Program for the State Route 49 Corridor Improvement Project Phase Two to fund the construction of the new entrance to the transit operation center off of State Route 49. The staff recommendation is for approval of Resolution 23-31, adopting the proposed Fiscal Year 2023/24 Regional Transportation Improvement Program for inclusion in the 2024 State Transportation Improvement Program. And that concludes my presentation and this commission may now open the public hearing.

Public Comment by Al Bulf:

I don't think Highway 49 should be improved anymore. I think you'd need to look at other modes of moving people because the more traffic you put on 49... People don't realize that Nevada City and Grass Valley are in bowls. You'll concentrate more pollution in those bowls by increasing the traffic on Highway 49. We want to de-emphasize the automobile only. We need to look at other forms of transportation to move people. I came off of many ships and they all had backup systems for very important systems on ship. And I looked at transportation and I've been trained at the university too to look at alternate systems to back up what we have today. We can't keep putting all our eggs in the same basket continuously. The environment is changing and so is the energy and raw materials. Through that work, our energy systems are getting more critical. Mexico just recently nationalized their lithium deposits and that's going on with Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile, which are major producers of lithium in South America. And now I read this morning, of course China is putting more restrictions on graphite or manufacture of batteries. So, we should look at other means of transportation. Thank you.

Ed Scofield:

Thank you, Al. Any other public comments in the chambers or online? No. Then I'll close the public comment portion of the hearing, and bring it back to the commissioners.

Commissioner:

Thank you. Mike, I see a lot of this deals with safety and the public comment raises the induced demand issue, which I think we're going to hear about a little bit later. I was looking at the emission reduction benefits and the reports. It appears the staff is saying that the increased VMT will not result in increased emissions of either NOX or greenhouse gases, because vehicles will be driving faster. I was wondering if you could elaborate on that, if you're familiar enough with the reasoning. I don't know if this is having to do with the top of the power curve or fuel economy versus complete combustion or what. Can you explain why going faster actually reduces emissions?

Mike Woodman:

The emission reduction benefits are calculated with the air resources board impact air quality emissions model. How that works is the NCTC Travel Demand Model runs the baseline scenario with the projects. With those scenarios, you get an output from the Travel Demand Model that includes vehicle miles traveled by five mile per hour speed increments. Those speed bins, the different speeds and the different vehicle miles traveled, get fed into the air quality emissions model. Based on the speeds the vehicles are traveling, they either emit less or more emissions. If you have congested conditions, they're going to emit more emissions. If you have a more efficient transportation system operating at the optimal speeds, it will result in less emissions. So that is essentially how it is calculated. So, by reducing

the congestion, reducing the slower speeds and making the system operate more efficiently, it results in the emission reductions that you see.

Essentially the way the model is set up, it's suggesting that with the lower speeds when you hit those congested conditions, it creates more emissions than if the vehicle's operating at a more efficient speed. It reminds me back when they were promoting the green speed, which was 55 miles an hour. It comes down to the calculations based on engine efficiency the Air Resources Board has adopted in the impact model.

Commissioner:

Some of these studies I believe are older, so maybe not as accurate as new testing technology could give us. But what I understand is that the sweet spot is 45 to 55 and that anything below 45, you increase. Anything above 65, you start increasing. That becomes obvious because we see we get less miles per gallon as we go faster, obviously. So, they work in a mirror image of each other. Then the other thing, so we do not have the money at the air district to do a lot of our own modeling. But Waste Management was nice enough to give us some data that I requested where they had done a sample of idling vehicles at McCourtney at the landfill. I wanted it because we were trying to do a comparison. What we looked at is on Dorsey Drive down here in Grass Valley, we have a congested area.

I think I've mentioned it in this meeting before, from Dorsey going westbound up on Sierra College Drive to Ridge Road and vice versa, we have a huge congestion each morning from the people going to the college and the high school, as well as to jobs in our area. By matching that study the best we can doing comparisons, the vehicles in about a 30 minute window, both in the morning crunch and another 30 minute window in the afternoon crunch that are stopped, it's about a 1.3 mile stretch going east to west, produced more vehicle emissions than the rest of the eight plus hour day combined. So that's where we get the, again, stalled traffic jams are producing a huge amount, whereas a vehicle moving faster, it decreases up to a point.

Commissioner:

I would love for some of these complete transit ideas to be incorporated in the Highway 49 Corridor Improvement Plan. Maybe the Dog Bar bike trails, what we've talked about skipping, going uphill and behind some of the dangerous section. I suspect we're past that, but I'd love to keep planning that. That would be super widely used by the community.

Mike Woodman:

Next year we intend as part of the Overall Work Program to update the Nevada County Active Transportation Plan, so that'll be an opportunity to take a comprehensive look at our multimodal ped and bike network and any other opportunities to make enhancements or recommendations.

We're actually in the process of retrofitting a number of capital projects to include bicycle and pedestrian improvements. For example, the Rough & Ready project is no longer just a roundabout. It's going to have bike and ped facilities connecting to the schools and along Ridge Rd. We're looking into using the Rule 28 to provide for undergrounding utilities, but using the opportunity to widen the corridor and provide bicycle facilities along Red Dog Road, for example. So, we're changing the projects as we speak and I'd be happy to provide follow up information.

Commissioner:

If I may, I just wanted to follow up on this last little comment. In designing the improvements, was consideration given to the potential of eventually converting part of the expansion of the roadway to a dedicated bus line or bus lane?

Mike Woodman:

I can provide some insight on that. Right now, there's only one route, Route Five that runs a limited service down State Route 49 to Auburn that provides a key connection at the Auburn multimodal station, which allows connections to the Capitol Corridor trains as well as Placer County Transit. But it doesn't run at a high enough frequency to warrant a bus only lane.

In the future if we get to that point and there's interest and a need for something like that, it's definitely something that we could consider. In relation to bike improvements as part of the State Route 49 Corridor Improvement Project, it does provide the multi-use shoulders. We looked at the opportunity to potentially maybe add a class one trail as part of the process, but the additional right of way impacts for that, we're going to just add to the right of way impacts where we're trying to minimize the right of way impacts for the project. One benefit of the project though, in Phase Three of the project, which we haven't secured funding for yet, we were proposing to do a frontage road system to close some of the egresses to the highway to minimize low speed, high speed conflicts and bring those individuals to controlled intersections, roundabout intersections.

With Phase Two, what we're finding through the design of the project, in order to safely get some of those folks that live adjacent to the highway onto the highway, essentially, we need to construct the frontage roads as part of Phase Two. That frontage road, I don't know if you're familiar with it, Jan, but a portion of it will connect folks to Taylorville Road. So, folks will actually be able to get into town and avoid the highway completely. As part of that, there will be a striped shoulder for bicycles as well.

Commissioner:

The bottom line for a lot of this is emergency access. These improvements are going to allow us to be able to get people more safely out of our area because of the high fire danger that we're in. So, we can't get away from that part of this conversation. This is needed for those types of emergencies. It's not about building or making more traffic. It's being able to move us out more smoothly and more efficiently.

Mike Woodman:

The ultimate focus of the project is safety operations and then improving evacuation efficiency. Just three weeks ago I think we had a head-on accident in the project limits. For the evacuation efficiency, the merge point just south of the McKnight Way interchange will be eliminated. That has been a major choke point during evacuation events such as the River Fire. We see that also with the I-80 emergency detours. It's a significant choke point that's been identified as a concern of Cal Fire, the sheriff and the highway patrol.

Commissioner:

Actually, we just noticed it as they redirected the traffic off of Highway 20 during the construction. We saw that right there as a good example without it being an emergency.

Ed Scofield:

All right, commission. I think I'll entertain a motion to approve Resolution 23-31, which is approval of the Regional Transportation Improvement Program.

Resolution 23-31 was approved by the Commission.