

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

May 3, 2021

TO: SBCCOG Transit Operators Working Group –5/6/21 meeting
SBCCOG Transportation Committee - 5/10/21 meeting
SBCCOG Infrastructure Working Group –5/12/21 meeting
SBCCOG Board of Directors –5/27/21 meeting

FROM: Steve Lantz, SBCCOG Transportation Director

RE: SBCCOG Transportation Update Covering April 2021

Adherence to Strategic Plan:

Goal A: Environment, Transportation and Economic Development. Facilitate, implement and/or educate members and others about environmental, transportation and economic development programs that benefit the South Bay.

Federal

American Rescue Plan Provides Transit Opportunity To Plan Now For Post-COVID Travel Patterns

Last year, two stimulus packages totaling \$39 billion helped keep the trains and buses running, at least for the time being. And after the transit operators were given the newest fiscal shot, \$30.5 billion available from the just-passed American Rescue Plan, transit operators have been able to rescind some of the draconian measures being contemplated.

Several cities across the country are already moving to reinstate service closer to pre-pandemic levels. Los Angeles Metro will restore a 20% cut in rail and bus service by September 2021. A proposed 40% reduction in subway service was recently canceled by the New York City Transit Authority, and existing plans to modernize the country's largest transportation network were at least partially revived. Transit officials in Washington are scrapping plans to close nearly a quarter of the system's subway stations while cutting the number of bus lines by 50%.

While the American Rescue Plan one-time money is being spent, agencies have the opportunity to reimagine their services in the post-COVID commuter culture which may look much different than it did two years ago. The pandemic has disrupted the way many Americans earn a living. The number of those working remotely has been approximately equal to the number of those taking transit for some time. But that may radically change in a post-pandemic world. For example, a recent survey by the Partnership for New York City, a nonprofit organization of business leaders, found that less than half of Manhattan's one million office workers are expected to return by September.

After the last federal stimulus dollar is spent, state and local governments may find it difficult to subsidize transit at previous levels. Also, revenue from fares is unlikely to rebound anytime soon. The pandemic-induced disruptions on public transportation will still be felt for years to come as planners balance budgets with the need for service that accommodates essential on-site workers and the new travel patterns in the post-pandemic economy.

Federal Transit Administration Offers \$10M For Transit-Oriented Development Planning

The U.S. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has opened the application period for the agency's Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Planning pilot program. A total of \$10 million will be awarded to projects nationwide. Applications will be accepted through June 21st.

The TOD Planning pilot program funds projects that increase transit access and encourage ridership with mixed-use and mixed-income development near public transportation projects. Eligible projects include comprehensive planning studies around commuter rail, light rail, heavy rail, or bus rapid transit systems with a designated right-of-way. Funding also will support projects that help connect communities, promote equitable delivery of benefits to underserved communities, combat climate change, improve access to affordable housing, and advance environmental justice.

Applicants must be existing FTA recipients to qualify for funding. This means they either are an entity with land use planning authority in the project corridor or are a project sponsor of an eligible transit project. They also must partner to conduct the planning work.

White House Hopes To See \$2.25 Trillion Infrastructure Bill Passed By Summer

President Biden hopes to see Congress pass his infrastructure and climate proposal by this summer, but even Democrats view the timeline as ambitious for such a large package, and it's possible that it could take several months to get a bill through.

The package would fund improvements to roads and bridges, expand broadband and invest in climate-friendly technologies. The measure would be paid for by increasing the corporate tax rate.

Republicans have already voiced opposition to the package and have proposed a \$568 billion package. The Republicans' framework covers a far narrower swath of infrastructure projects than Mr. Biden's. It would allocate \$299 billion to roads and bridges — more than double the figure the president proposed — and set aside \$61 billion for public transit, \$44 billion for airports, \$65 billion in broadband infrastructure, \$20 billion for rail and \$35 billion for drinking water and wastewater. Although their two-page outline does not identify funding sources, Republican leaders have said they would not support an increase in corporate taxes, as Mr. Biden has proposed, or a repeal of the cap on the state and local tax deduction, which some Democrats have championed.

The White House has said it would prefer to pass the proposal with bipartisan support but has not ruled out using budget reconciliation to get the bill through Congress without any GOP votes.

USDOT Makes \$1 Billion Available For Competitive RAISE Grants

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) on April 13th has published a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for \$1 billion in its new Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) \$1 billion in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 discretionary grant funding grants, formerly known as BUILD and TIGER grants.

Of the \$1 billion available in the 2021 RAISE grant program, up to \$30 million will be awarded to planning grants, including at least \$10 million to Areas of Persistent Poverty. The maximum grant award is \$25 million, and no more than \$100 million can be awarded to a single state. To ensure that the benefits of infrastructure investments benefit communities large and small the Department will award an equitable amount, not to exceed half of funding, to projects located in urban and rural areas respectively. Projects for RAISE funding will be evaluated based on merit criteria that include safety, environmental sustainability, quality of life, economic competitiveness, state of good repair, innovation, and partnership. Within these criteria, the Department will prioritize projects that can demonstrate improvements to racial equity, reduce impacts of climate change and create good-paying jobs.

The USDOT will be hosting a series of webinars regarding RAISE grants in the coming weeks and

the deadline to submit an application is July 12, 2021. A link to the USDOT's press release with respect to RAISE grants can be found [here](#),

White House Releases "Skinny Budget" For Fiscal Year 2022

President Biden's proposed Budget for Fiscal Year would increase transportation spending by approximately 14%. The discretionary requests include \$625 million for a new low-carbon intercity rail program, \$2.5 billion for the transit Capital Investment Grant (CIG) program, \$250 mil for purchase of low and no-emission buses, \$1 billion for the RAISE grant program and \$110 million in a competitive Thriving Communities Initiative Pilot that is intended to advance transportation equity by improving access to destinations and fostering community vibrancy.

New MUTCD Traffic Manual 'To Fall Asleep By' Stirs Call for Complete Overhaul

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) is an 862-page sleep inducing, guide that has provided uniformity of traffic signs and signals across the nation since 1935. However, the update released in March has ignited a tussle over how the federal government approaches transportation policy between the FHWA and pedestrian advocates, bicycle coalitions and advocates for multimodal transportation who say the manual is a relic of an era when the automobile was king.

The Federal Highway Administration can theoretically withhold federal dollars to communities that don't abide by the manual. Cities, meanwhile, often cite the manual as evidence that their streets were designed according to federal specifications when facing litigation over traffic issues.

Critics argue that the effectiveness of transportation should be assessed not only for how fast people and goods move but also for how safely our systems connect all modes of road users with jobs and education. They criticize the manual for applying a one-size-fits-all model to every street in the U.S. and are urging the FHWA to re-write the MUCTD to focus more on safety and equity, citing data that shows higher deaths in Black and Brown neighborhoods.

Pedestrian advocates increasingly see the potential for the manual to become a means to better protect them, arguing that for too long it has emphasized vehicle speed at the expense of safety. Among their key concerns is the 85th percentile speed rule, which recommends that agencies set speed limits based on the current traffic speeds on the road (within 5 miles per hour of the most-recently-documented 85th percentile speed of free-flow traffic).

State

EPA To Allow California To Again Set Stricter Efficiency and Tailpipe Emissions Standards

In a big rollback of a Trump-era revocation of California's right to set stricter-than-Federal tailpipe emission standards, the EPA on March 25th initiated the process to restore the state waiver of compliance with the federal fuel efficiency and emission standards. The EPA will seek the public's input at a June 2nd public hearing before it rescinds the 2019 Trump-era restriction. The move is significant as tailpipes are the biggest source of greenhouse gas pollution in California.

The proposed rule change would restore California's authority to set fuel efficiency and greenhouse gas emission standards for cars and SUVs, and to require car companies to sell more electric vehicles.

The state's special authority dates to the 1960s, when state officials acknowledged the smog enveloping Southern California as a public health crisis. By the time the federal government began to take an interest in enacting tailpipe emissions controls, California had already taken the lead.

Bill Would Eliminate Minimum Parking Requirements On Developments Near Transit

A.B. 1401 was introduced on April 6th to prohibit cities from imposing minimum parking requirements on developments located within ½-mile of existing public transit which is defined as a high-quality transit corridor or a major transit stop. The bill would leave the amount of parking to be provided up to the developer rather than imposing a municipal minimum requirement.

According to Meea Kang, an affordable housing developer who currently serves as a director for the Council of Infill Builders, on-site minimum parking requirements can cost between \$30,000 and \$75,000 per space, which is passed on by developers to renters and homebuyers. SBCCOG opposes this bill.

The US Is Facing A Supply-Chain Crisis As 21 Cargo Ships Wait Off the Coast Of LA

A US supply chain crisis is quietly brewing off the coast of Southern California as massive freighters wait for dock space at the two San Pedro ports to open up. California ports in Los Angeles and Long Beach account for about one-third of US imports. These ports operate as a primary source of imports from China and have been heavily congested for months. On a Wednesday in mid-April, 21 ships were anchored off the coast waiting for a dock with half of them carrying more than the equivalent of 10,000 20-foot containers.

Part of the problem is the ships are double or triple the size of the ships the ports served 10 or 15 years ago. They take longer to unload and more trucks, more trains, more warehouses are needed to put the cargo. In addition, consumer spending has risen dramatically during the pandemic with the ports setting records moving cargo. But they are overwhelmed.

As a result of California port delays, train and truck capacity limits, and the global container shortage, customers will likely face rising prices and limited options as commodities become increasingly difficult to obtain and produce and companies are forced to compete for containers and delivery dates.

Region

Metro to Decide In May If Fareless Pilot Will Start In August 2021, Initially for Students

For many years, public transit advocates have been pressing Metro to provide transit for free. During the COVID pandemic, Metro has essentially already been operating a “universal fareless pilot program” on all of its buses by not enforcing fare collection and boarding all passengers at the rear door of its buses. The debate is whether to continue free fares for all, offer free fare for some rider categories or resume fare enforcement for all riders. As Metro emerges from its COVID operations and resumes front-door boarding, the Board seems to be narrowing its options to implementing an 18-24-month pilot project that would provide TAP cards programmed to allow free travel for K-12 students, community college students, and/or low income riders on Metro or on all public transit agencies within the County.

Metro has historically discounted fare programs for low-income, student, and senior riders, but relatively cumbersome enrollment processes have kept enrollment in these programs fairly low. Approximately 70 percent of Metro riders could qualify for the agency’s low-income fare program – called LIFE (for Low-Income Fare is Easy). LIFE enrollment is currently only around 79,000 participants – around 40 percent of Metro’s 200,000+ core frequent riders. Metro estimates that 1.6 million L.A. County residents are eligible for LIFE. Another 15% of Metro riders purchase student passes.

If all three categories were allowed to ride free during the pilot program, Metro would forego more than 75% of its pre-pandemic fare revenue. Metro typically collected \$230-240 million per year in gross fare revenue (pre-COVID) while spending \$70 million to collect that revenue and enforce fare payment.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, transit ridership was dropping. Between 2014 and 2018, L.A. Metro lost more than 85.3 million annual boardings, a drop of more than 17.8%. In 2019, the system saw about 1.2 million weekday daily riders. At the height of the pandemic, ridership dropped to about

30% of pre-pandemic levels. The system is recovering riders slowly with current ridership at approximately 600,000, even while fare payment enforcement continues to be suspended. Once regular boarding resumes, Metro fares and passes will be half-off for at least six months – under a program approved in May 2020.

Many experts say the best way to move people out of their cars and into public transit is to increase the cost of driving. That could mean, for example, higher road tolls or raising the price of public parking. Metro is exploring congestion pricing as an element of its recovery initiatives. However, pilot programs could not be implemented before 2025 in downtown and three potential corridors.

Trends

Street-Based Radar System Designed To Save Pedestrian Lives

Many cars are now equipped with pedestrian-detecting radar systems, but those systems can still be blocked by obstacles such as buildings or other vehicles. A new setup is intended to get around that problem, by taking the radar to the streets at pedestrian-heavy locations such as bus stops, school zones or crosswalks.

Continuously scanning the area 100 times per second, each sensor unit is capable tracking 8 people at once by first identifying an object as being a person, and then ascertaining the speed and direction in which they're walking or running ... if they're moving at all, that is. Should the system determine that the person is heading toward the road at too fast of a speed – so that they're about to step out in front of oncoming traffic – it emits a warning signal. Such a wireless signal would be picked up by the vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) system in cars close by, causing an audio/visual alarm to sound/appear in any vehicles that might be about to hit the pedestrian. The system could perhaps even automatically activate those cars' brakes.

Additionally, even if no one were about to step onto the road, the system could still warn drivers to slow down if they were approaching an area where numerous people were milling about on the sidewalk. And because no cameras are involved, there shouldn't be any privacy concerns. The system is currently being developed as part of the HORIS project, by three separate branches of Germany's Fraunhofer research group.

At-Home Workers Want to Continue to Work From Home, At Least Part Time

According to a survey released in mid-April by USC's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the California Emerging Technology Fund, more than half of Californians surveyed who are now telecommuting want to keep working from home at least three days a week want to continue to telecommute after the pandemic ends. Just 18% are hoping they'll go back to in-person work every day.

The survey, looked at the impact that access to broadband internet has had on people's ability to work, learn and conduct doctor's visits remotely. Just over half of people with access to broadband internet were working at least some of the time from home.

Like other research on remote working during the pandemic, the survey found wealthier workers are more likely to telecommute than those who were considered "low income workers," who were twice as likely to report they are working in-person five days per week compared with higher earners.

Almost one-third of current telecommuters, 31%, say they would be happy working from home five days a week if they had that option. Lots of others want something in between their Zoom-based present and a full return to daily commuting. Just over 20% said they would like to work from home three to four days per week, and another 29% said one to two days of telecommuting were the right balance. The USC survey was based on phone interviews with 1,650 California residents conducted in English, Spanish, Mandarin and Vietnamese in February and March.

A separate survey released in April by the Bay Area Council, which asked how often today's telecommuters "anticipate" they will work in-person next year, as opposed to their preference, found 38% expect they'll be back in the office five days a week, more than double the 16% that said they think they will work from home every day.

Self-Driving Cars That Watch You Watch Them Drive Are On The Horizon

Full self-driving cars are taking longer to arrive than techno-optimists predicted a few years ago. In fact, in a financial filing on April 28th, Tesla acknowledged it may never be able to deliver a full self-driving car. But with features such as automated cruise control, steering assist and automatic highway lane changing, new cars already come loaded with driver-assist options.

The National Transportation Safety Board, after several fatal Tesla Autopilot crashes, has recommended that safety regulators require more robust systems than the one Tesla uses to keep drivers engaged. European regulators plan to require such systems be installed on every new car sold there by mid-decade.

The next evolutionary step for the human driver is to shift from operating the vehicle to supervising the systems that do to make sure humans are monitoring the car when they are not controlling its operation. Driver-monitoring systems come in two basic types: eye trackers and steering wheel sensors. In either case, if a driver is detected not paying attention, warnings are sounded through lights or sounds or both. If the driver doesn't reengage, the car pulls itself to the roadside and stops.

Driver-facing camera systems that monitors eye and head movements already have been deployed in tens of thousands of long-haul trucks, mining trucks and heavy construction vehicles, mainly to recognize drowsiness, alcohol or drug use, and general distraction. And steering wheel monitoring developers are worried that a set of weights hung from the steering wheel can fool the monitoring software.

Despite the technology maturing rapidly, there are potential nagging privacy and distraction issues to be resolved when a driver is not being paid to drive. There are concerns that storing images of a distracted driver may have privacy implications.

Freeing the driver from driving also opens up a controversial opportunity to insert real-time advertising into in-vehicle or smartphone screens during the "rider's" trip. As the focus of automakers shifts from the driving experience to the riding experience, monitoring systems likely will move beyond keeping drivers alert to analyzing their moods and expressions in order to "customize and personalize" that rider/supervisor experience. But there is a fear that, by recommending the right movie or providing a virtual coupon for a nearby Starbucks, more distractions will be added to compete with a rider's supervisory responsibilities.
