

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

August 9, 2021

TO: SBCCOG Steering Committee

FROM: Steve Lantz, SBCCOG Transportation Director

RE: SBCCOG Transportation Update Covering July 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

\$1.2 Trillion Bi-Partisan Infrastructure Bill Introduced In The U. S. Senate

The U. S. Senate introduced a \$1.2 trillion, eight-year infrastructure bill following weeks of negotiations that culminated in a rare Sunday session on August 1st. The 2,702-page bill includes \$550 billion in new spending for transit, roadways, bridges, broadband, water, wastewater, and other infrastructure needs.

The infrastructure package includes a broad range of new spending categories but it is considerably narrower and less ambitious than the original \$579 billion agreed upon by White House and Democratic Senate negotiators in June. The new expenditures also would be a one-time supplemental appropriation rather than increasing baseline spending. The bill includes the following major appropriations categories:

- \$110 billion for roads, bridges and major road projects
- \$39.2 billion for modernizing transit infrastructure by addressing a backlog of rail car procurements, station upgrades, track replacement, and accessibility improvement
- \$66 billion to address Amtrak's maintenance backlog, modernize its Northeast Corridor and to expand rail service to other parts of the country
- \$7.5 billion to build out a national network of electrical vehicle charging stations
- \$45 billion for zero-emission buses, low emission buses and ferries.
- \$46 billion to improve the resiliency of U.S. infrastructure and protect against droughts, floods and other natural disasters, and cyberattacks.
- \$73 billion to upgrade the nation's power infrastructure, emphasizing renewable energy
- \$55 billion for drinking and wastewater infrastructure, including replacement of poisonous lead service lines
- \$65 billion to improve access to broadband internet service

- \$11 billion for highway and pedestrian safety programs
- \$25 billion for airport terminal, taxiway and control improvements
- \$17.3 billion for ports waterway and coastal infrastructure improvements
- \$13 billion in additional funding for existing programs with bi-partisan support

The spending would be financed through a combination of redirecting \$205 billion in unused COVID-19 emergency relief funds, targeted corporate user fees, strengthening tax enforcement of crypto currencies, and other bipartisan funding assumptions including a higher return on investments due to economic growth.

Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer has vowed that he will hold two votes before he lets senators leave for their break: One on passing the bipartisan infrastructure deal and a second on a budget resolution that greenlights Democrats passing a \$3.5 trillion spending package on their own.

The bill is likely to be amended during the next week, but Senate leaders hope to pass the bill before their summer recess (tentatively from August 9th to September 10th). Conservatives immediately bristled over that timeline, arguing for the Senate to take a slower pace and allow members, who were largely on the sidelines during the negotiations, to read the bill. If every Democratic senator supports the bill, they will need at least 10 Republicans to pass it in the Senate.

The bill faces bigger headaches in the House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) has warned she won't take it up until the Senate passes the larger spending package later this fall. The U.S. House of Representatives started its summer recess on July 31st without addressing several contentious issues including FY 21-22 appropriations for several federal departments and extending the COVID-related federal moratorium on tenant evictions that expired at the end of July.

Will 'Connecting Neighborhoods' Disconnect National Trucking Routes?

Buried in the U.S. House and Senate versions of highway reauthorization legislation currently being negotiated are provisions that would allow billions of dollars to be spent dismantling portions of the interstate highway system without replacing the lost transportation capacity. Traffic would be re-routed from the former freeway to surface streets through the targeted areas to restore former neighborhoods.

The Congress for New Urbanism, whose mission is to “champion walkable urbanism”, has identified 15 projects beginning with the I-81 in Syracuse, New York, I-10 in New Orleans, and I-980 in Oakland (none of the targeted segments are in Southern California).

The bill provisions — "Reconnecting Neighborhoods" in the House, "Reconnecting Communities" in the Senate — reflect the Biden administration's goals of using infrastructure funding to redress historic racial and social inequities. According to the House bill, there are countless examples of interstate highways that were directly and purposefully routed through established minority communities, causing community upheaval, loss of homes and businesses, and economic hardship.

Trucking advocates fear the bill places the freight supply chain at risk by allowing an interstate segment to be torn down without replacing it. The truckers are concerned that reductions in capacity to move freight by truck will mean increased roadway congestion, longer travel times for carriers, increased fuel costs, and will impact the 11-hour daily drive time restrictions, all of which will increase costs that will be passed onto consumers..

Los Angeles Loses No. 1 Ranking For Worst Traffic After 30 Years At The Top

A new Texas A&M Transportation Institute study released at the end of June found that Los Angeles is no longer the nation's worst traffic city, with flexible work hours and remote work during the pandemic leading to less traffic on roadways in the region (and throughout the country).

The study concluded that, after holding the first-place spot for three decades, Los Angeles was replaced by the New York City area as having the nation's worst traffic. Los Angeles dropped to fourth place on the list, while Boston, Houston, and San Francisco rounded out the top five. The rankings are based on the total number of hours drivers are delayed in traffic each year.

The study authors don't expect the 2020 trend to continue. Every urban area showed considerably more change in 2020 than has ever been recorded, and 2021 is already seeing the fastest increase in traffic levels and consequent delays since 1982 when the annual study was initiated. In Los Angeles and Orange Counties, daily traffic congestion levels are already higher than pre-pandemic levels.

State

California Releases CAPTI: Its Plan To Combine Transportation And Climate Goals

Forty percent of California's greenhouse gas emissions come from the transportation sector. In response, the California State Transportation Agency in mid-July released the state's "Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI)", which is intended to guide transportation spending by encouraging alternatives to driving.

CAPTI recognizes that technological improvements to reduce vehicle emissions won't be enough to mitigate, much less reduce, climate change. Under CAPTI, where feasible, the state will invest discretionary transportation funds in sustainable infrastructure projects that align with its climate, health, and social equity goals.

The state will prioritize those types of projects in funding decisions within the following state transportation funding programs:

- Active Transportation
- Interregional Transportation Improvement
- Local Partnership
- Solutions for Congested Corridors
- State Highway Operations and Protection
- Trade Corridor Enhancement
- Transit and Intercity Rail.

AB 43 To Allow More Local Control, More Flexibility In Setting Local Speed Limits

AB 43 was approved on July 14th by the California Senate Transportation Committee and referred to the Appropriations Committee. The bill would provide local authorities more flexibility in setting speed limits, including:

- Allowing local governments to lower speed limits by 5 mph below a traffic engineer's recommendation if the portion of the street is identified as a high-injury street, or near places where pedestrians and bicyclists congregate, which can include “vulnerable groups such as children, seniors, persons with disability, and the unhoused”
- Allowing speed limits to stay the same or revert to a previous, lower speed on streets where safety upgrades have not been added as recommended in a previous traffic survey
- Allowing cities to set a standard speed limit of 20-25 mph in business activity districts
- Allowing law enforcement to use radar guns to enforce speed limits in senior zones or business activity districts without the justification of a traffic survey
- Extending the period of time that an engineering and traffic survey justifies a speed from 10 to 14 years if a traffic engineer evaluates that section of the street and determines that no significant changes in roadway or traffic conditions have occurred
- Expanding which streets are eligible for school zone speed limits

Region

SCE To Add 40,000 EV Charging Stations Throughout Southern California In Next 4 Years

Southern California Edison announced on Monday, July 12, a second phase of its charging station initiative in which it plans to increase the number of passenger car chargers installed in its Southern California service area from about 3,000 today to more than 40,000 over the next four years.

SCE plans to target facilities in underprivileged communities. The agency is also adding incentives to existing and new multifamily complexes rebates and, in some cases, covering installation and infrastructure costs.

The budget approved by the Public Utility Commission of California is sufficient to add approximately 38,000 new charging ports to the SCE service area in four years. SCE had approximately 5,500 charging ports in its service area at the end of 2020, counting large and medium-sized charging stations for buses, trucks and fleet vehicles, as well as passenger car charging.

SCE officials estimate that more than 9,000 will be added annually under the new program. Approximately 26 million cars and 6 million trucks are currently registered in California, of which approximately 860,000 EVs. About 280,000 of the EVs are registered in SCE's territory.

For more information on the program, go to sce.com/chargeready .

Metro Board Adopts First/Last Mile Guidelines To Improve Paths To Transit Stops / Stations

On June 24th, the Metro Board of Directors adopted new First/Last Mile ("FLM") Guidelines, which standardize Metro's vision for safe and connected pathways to transit. The Guidelines outline the process through which new Metro transit projects will integrate FLM planning and delivery and delineate responsibilities for Metro and local jurisdictions as partners in planning and delivery of FLM projects.

Significantly, the FLM Guidelines describe the process through which local jurisdictions may utilize their required 3% local funding contribution to a rail transit project being built in their jurisdiction in the form of FLM street improvements. The partnership arrangements with local agencies allow the 3% local funds to be used for safe and continuous connections on major access routes up to a half-mile from future stations.

Trends

Climate Change Could Destroy America's Roads

Many roads aren't built to withstand extreme heat, an increasingly common occurrence in many parts of the country as roads are getting so hot they expand beyond their design limits and buckle, causing delays at best and closures requiring major repairs at worst.

Due to Southern California's experience with designing and building roads to survive heat waves, but higher long-term temperatures will mean road buckling is just the beginning of the potential problems climate change will have on maintenance costs, vehicle repair costs, fuel efficiency and traffic delays.

Generally speaking, there are two types of roads in the U.S.: concrete and asphalt. Concrete roads typically are made of slabs about 15 to 20 feet long. Concrete expands and contracts as the temperature changes, so road builders put some space in between each slab. These spaces are called joints—you likely know them from the *bu-bum...bu-bum...bu-bum* sound as you go over them on the highway—so the concrete has somewhere to expand as temperatures rise. Road buckling occurs when there is no more space in the joints for the concrete to expand and the pressure builds until the concrete blows up.

The other major type of road surface, asphalt, is less prone to buckling. But asphalt has a different problem with temperature. Heat and cold will make asphalt harder, which makes it more likely to crack, or soften, in which case it will deform. These problems are less likely to need major emergency repairs but can cause serious maintenance headaches over time. If it is too hot out when the asphalt is laid, the asphalt will not oxidize properly, making it more likely to have major deformations just months into what is typically assumed to be a decades-long life cycle.

But there are long term options. More joints can be added to concrete roads which gives the concrete more room to expand before buckling. And new asphalt pavement compositions that are more heat-change resistant can be used when roads are replaced.

Cities are also piloting a new process that seals asphalt with a white titanium dioxide coating. The substance penetrates deeply into asphalt to repair blemishes, reduce road temperatures, and dissolve airborne vehicle pollutant particles. Initial pilot projects in Southern US communities are hopeful the coating can extend the life of asphalt streets by five years.

Startup Plans EV Taxi Battery Swapping Service

An IPSOS market survey found that adoption of electric vehicles is being slowed by concerns over the time needed to re-charge batteries and access to charging stations, with 48% of Americans worried about being able to charge their vehicle when necessary.

Tech startup Ample is hoping to address some of these concerns for taxis and ride-hailing vehicles with a battery swapping service. It has partnered with Sally, a rental company that offers electric vehicles for “taxi, ride-sharing, and last-mile delivery services.” The partners will create battery swapping stations in four major cities: New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

The swapping stations, which Ample says are the size of two parking spots, will also function as a rest stop for drivers as bathrooms will be readily available. The firm says the swaps take about 10 minutes.

Ample claims that it can work with electric vehicles from multiple manufacturers by using modular batteries that allow swapping stations to work for a variety of vehicles regardless of size.

So far, five Ample stations have been implemented in the San Francisco Bay Area in a partnership with Uber. Nearly 100 drivers are using them, completing an average of one swap per day. Ample’s partnership with Sally will add hundreds of Kia Niro EVs to the Bay area by the end of the summer.

Bloomberg plans swapping stations to be inaugurated in New York City in the fall.

LA Times Readers Suggest How To Return To Spring 2020 Traffic Congestion levels

The LA Times asked readers in June to send in their burning business-related questions about Los Angeles and California. The winning question: “What would it take to get our traffic under control like it was back in April 2020?”

On June 30th, daily traffic in Los Angeles and Orange counties was above pre-pandemic levels by 4%, according to the traffic data company Inrix. Traffic during peak morning hours was 86% of pre-pandemic levels for Wednesdays, while traffic during peak afternoon hours was the same as pre-pandemic levels. The most extreme increase in traffic based on June 30’s data was observed during off-peak hours, during which Inrix found traffic to be 14% higher than pre-pandemic levels. This may point to the new flexibility of people who are still working remotely. According to AAA, leisure travel has also largely boomeranged back to pre-pandemic levels.

The 50% decline in traffic was an indication of the pandemic's devastation on the economy and society as a whole, so we might not wish to recreate the situation in which no one has any place to go. But it may be possible to make a big difference in congestion without changing the habits of all that many people. The Times suggested the following strategies:

- Work from home several days a week. At least 70% of US workers prefer to switch to a hybrid or full-time remote work site. One-in-three workers could do their job from home. Employers could be enticed to embrace remote work with financial incentives, tax credits and other regulatory changes
- Shift work hours to enable travel to and from work in non-peak commuter travel periods
- Take public transit or ride share
- Charge drivers to use freeways during peak hours. "Congestion pricing" (e.g.: Metro's ExpressLanes) mediates traffic supply and demand through variable pricing and generates revenue to fund commute alternatives like transit and ride sharing
- Optimize signal timing to reduce fast acceleration and deceleration and to reduce idling
- Drive safely and obey speed limits - less crashes, less backups