



# MONTHLY SBCCOG TRANSPORTATION REPORT

A summary of recent federal, state, regional and local  
developments and trends in transportation

**COVERING JULY-AUGUST 2023**

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## **FEDERAL**

### **Consumer Product Safety Commission holds lithium-ion battery safety forum**

Representatives from various organizations — including the bicycle industry, independent standards groups, and consumer safety advocates — met to discuss lithium-ion battery safety at a Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) forum. CPSC members heard from stakeholders on lithium-ion battery safety, with a specific focus on fires occurring with micromobility products and the potential risks growing along with the consumer market.

In New York City alone this year, lithium-ion battery explosions have resulted in more than 100 fires and 13 deaths, after an e-bike shop blaze reached upper-floor apartments and killed four people. In March, Mayor Eric Adams signed a lithium-ion battery safety legislative package prohibiting the sale of e-bikes, other powered mobility devices like e-scooters, and batteries that don't meet recognized certification like UL.

In December, the CPSC sent a letter to more than 2,000 e-bike manufacturers and importers and other micromobility devices, urging them to comply with relevant safety standards, including UL 2849.

### **USDOT Launches New Center Focused on Delivering Infrastructure Projects on Time, on Task, on Budget**

The U.S. Department of Transportation launched the Project Delivery Center of Excellence to help recipients of federal infrastructure funds deliver projects more efficiently and effectively, from concept to completion. The Center will serve as a central resource for innovative practices and will bring project managers together to enable knowledge sharing and peer-to-peer learning.

Since President Biden signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in 2021, USDOT and the entire Biden-Harris Administration has hit the ground running to take advantage of this once-in-a-generation opportunity to rebuild our nation's infrastructure—and is already delivering major progress. Among the initial plans for the Project Delivery Center of Excellence:

- Simplifying the contracting process by providing newer, less experienced grant recipients with an off-the-shelf, high-quality model that they can use to ensure consistency and quality in design and construction contracts.
- Centralizing Project Delivery Methods Best Practices and Convening Information Exchanges
- Providing a central repository and disseminate national best practices and case studies in successful, innovative project development, project delivery, and cost containment efforts.
- Working in partnership with the American Society of Civil Engineers and Association of Consulting Engineering Companies to develop and distribute templates and model language for transportation construction contracts.

## STATE

### **Governor Newsom Announces \$1.5 Billion in Port Infrastructure Upgrades to Power Nation-Leading Supply Chain**

Governor Gavin Newsom announced an investment of more than \$1.5 billion – including approximately \$450 million for zero-emission infrastructure, locomotives, vessels and vehicles – as part of the state’s work to build a more efficient, sustainable and resilient supply chain. The \$1.2 billion will fund 15 projects creating an estimated 20,000 jobs and increase the capacity to move goods throughout the state’s global trade gateways while lessening environmental impacts on neighboring communities. Administered by the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA), \$350 million was also awarded to 13 projects that eliminate street-level rail crossings to make critical lifesaving safety improvements, reduce emissions and keep goods and people moving.

Projects receiving funding will help boost capacity to move goods through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach – the busiest ports in the Western Hemisphere – as well as enhance all major trade centers throughout the state – from San Diego to the Central Valley to the Bay Area. The high-priority grade separation projects, the majority of which are funded through the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program, will improve safety and reduce conflicts and delays at railroad crossings, helping enhance the state’s freight and passenger rail systems.

The funding – particularly the investments in zero-emission projects, which account for nearly 40 percent of the Port and Freight Infrastructure Program awards – builds on a partnership between the governments of California and Japan announced this March to collaborate on strategies to cut planet-warming pollution at seaports and establish green shipping corridors as part of the state’s broader strategy to aggressively combat and adapt to climate change. The historic investments also follow the California Transportation Commission’s recent approval of \$1.1 billion for infrastructure improvements on high-volume freight corridors as part of the Trade Corridor Enhancement Program (TCEP) – for a total state investment in supply chain infrastructure of more than \$2.6 billion in just the past week.

The awards announced include the following South Bay projects:

- Maritime Support Facility (MSF) Improvement and Expansion Project (Port of LA): \$149.33M; The project will greatly reduce truck-miles-traveled inside container terminals, incident potential inside terminal, and emissions adjacent to Wilmington and San Pedro. The MSF is an existing important container terminal support facility located on Terminal Island, at the centroid of the Ports of Los Angeles-Long Beach (POLA-POLB). The existing MSF currently provides up to 30 acres of chassis and empty container storage, on a temporary surface that is inadequate for long-term use. The MSF will be improved and expanded to provide 71 net acres of chassis/empty container storage for all 12 container terminals located in the POLA-POLB. These terminals, combined, handle 35% of all waterborne containers entering and exiting the entire United States. The MSF has been critical in mitigating potential supply chain disruptions throughout the U.S. since mid-2020 and is also important for accommodating future cargo growth. The project is expected to be completed by April 2026.

- Port of Los Angeles Rail Mainline/Wilmington Community & Waterfront Pedestrian Grade Separation Bridge: \$42.1M; This project will construct a pedestrian bridge to connect the Wilmington community, which has eight schools within one mile, to the Port of Los Angeles Wilmington Waterfront area and Banning's Landing Community Center. Currently, two freight mainline tracks in the port bifurcate the Wilmington Waterfront from the Wilmington community itself. The rail tracks being grade separated move 6 percent of all U.S. waterborne containers. The project will provide a dedicated pedestrian/cycling bridge over these freight rail tracks and connect to the State-designated California Coast Trail. The benefits of this project include the improvement of public safety by eliminating the potential for serious pedestrian-train incidents, as well as influence travel behavior and encourage more walking/biking for access to/from the waterfront. This mode shift will thus reduce vehicular trips and associated emissions. The project is expected to be completed by April 2027.
- SR-47 Seaside Ave & Navy Way Interchange Improvement Project: \$41.8M; This project directly serves 10% of all waterborne containers entering and exiting the entire United States. The benefits of this project include reduction of vehicular delays, collision potential, and emissions directly adjacent to the Wilmington and San Pedro communities of the City of Los Angeles, which are two of the most "Disadvantaged/Low Income Communities" as designated by the State. The project augments an existing partial interchange at SR 47/Seaside Avenue/Navy Way and includes the following: removal of last traffic signal and at-grade intersection on Terminal Island/SR 47 between I-110 and I-710, which is at the apex of largest port complex in the Western Hemisphere; new westbound auxiliary lane on SR 47, between Pier S Avenue and Navy Way; new eastbound, two-lane collector- distributor road, all within the existing facility and ROW, between Ferry Street interchange eastbound on-ramp and Pier S Avenue interchange eastbound off- ramp; channelization improvements at Navy Way/Terminal Way intersection; and new 5th leg/westbound off-ramp termini. The project is expected to be completed by June 2028.

## **E-Bike, Green Transit Programs Pop Up Across California**

Long Beach aims to launch an e-bike lending program to provide residents with up to 40 bikes — in one of the latest efforts in California to increase accessibility with green transportation.

The city is seeking a vendor to provide standard, cargo and tricycle e-bikes and equipment including helmets and locks. The program, which is expected to start before the end of the year, will allow residents to check out the electric vehicles for up to three months at no cost. The Long Beach effort reflects a surge in state and municipal programs to provide environmentally friendly modes of travel, including e-bikes, electric cars and zero-emission buses. The programs are intended to improve local transportation without adding to the emissions and noise generated by gas-guzzling cars and buses.

E-bike sales across the country have increased in the last several years, with many consumers

choosing them as an eco-friendly alternative to driving without the hassle of finding parking. But the increase in e-bike riders has led to a rise in bike accidents, prompting local authorities to crack down on motorists who ignore safe-driving rules around bicyclists. Experts also say that although owning an e-bike is significantly less expensive than owning a car, they are not cheap, requiring an investment of a couple of thousands of dollars.

In Long Beach, officials said the e-bike library program will increase familiarity and ridership of this zero-emission form of traveling. The bicycles are equipped with fully operable pedals and an electric motor for an extra boost. The cargo models include extra seats for children and space for groceries.

The California Air Resources Board plans to launch an e-bike incentive program this fall in response to growing interest across the state. The program will target low-income residents and those who live in "disadvantaged" communities, and will offer rebates of \$1,000 off a standard e-bike, with an additional \$750 discount for larger bikes.

E-bike pilot programs like this have already cropped up in cities across the state. Pasadena launched a pilot program in July that will provide rebates between \$500 and \$1,000 for residents who purchase an e-bike in the city. In Berkeley, more than 600 low-income residents applied to be part of an e-bike lottery program earlier this year. The project provided 56 households with bikes to use through next May.

But some cyclists are wary about sharing the road with cars. Encinitas in San Diego County declared a local state of emergency after a 15-year-old boy riding an e-bike was killed in a crash in late June. The city also launched a public education campaign that includes coordinating with school districts and private schools to relay traffic safety messages and add electronic messaging boards at high collision and traffic areas. The emergency proclamation will expedite city measures to protect the local bike-riding community, especially during the busy summer season, Kranz said. It is expected to end on Sept. 30.

One of those measures prohibits a person from riding a bicycle in a manner unintended for its design, such as sitting on it backwards. First-time violators can waive penalties if they take a bike safety course. In Encinitas, collisions involving bicycles or e-bikes tripled since 2020, with 11 crashes already reported this year, city officials said. Bike incidents occurred more frequently in the summer months from June to September.

The proclamation notes that e-bikes, which are faster and heavier, can cause more severe damage than collisions involving regular bikes. But Kranz thinks it's worthwhile to continue supporting all cycling and greener transportation alternatives. Bicycling does make sense, considering that more than half of all daily vehicle trips across the country, including car, rail, transit and air travel, were less than three miles in 2021, and almost a third were less than a mile, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

Sacramento officials launched a micro-transit service called SmarT Ride in 2018 to better serve people living in the region's suburban communities. Riders can request a shuttle to pick them up and drop them off "corner-to-corner" via a smartphone app. A study by the Institute of

Transportation at UC Davis found that more than half of the users were low-income residents and were more likely to have physical limitations.

Affordable housing complexes in Tulare and Kern counties began in 2019 hosting vehicle hubs for Míocar, an electric car-sharing program designed to improve transportation in the rural San Joaquin Valley.

East Oakland launched a universal basic mobility pilot that provided some residents with funds for public transit and shared mobility services, such as e-scooters. About 1,000 residents in West Oakland will be eligible to receive up to \$320 to use toward transportation in the fall.

## **Region**

### **Gloria Roberts Appointed Director of Caltrans District 7**

Caltrans announced that Gloria Roberts has been appointed the District 7 Director where she will oversee the freeway and highway system in Los Angeles and Ventura counties and a staff of 2,800 who maintain, design, construct, preserve, and plan the system and administer programs supporting it. As the Acting District 7 Director since 2022, Roberts has been a leader in change management and strategic planning. She combines her passion for equity with sound business acumen to leverage a holistic approach to advancing transportation programs and projects which has accelerated the ability of District 7 to become more responsive to the needs of the communities within Los Angeles and Ventura counties.

Roberts has served in a variety of Caltrans district and headquarters executive leadership roles including Business Services Manager, Chief of Public Information and Governmental Affairs, Deputy District Director of Administration, Acting EEO (Equal Employment Opportunity) Program Manager, Acting Division Chief of Safety and Management Services, and Chief Deputy District Director. In each of these roles, Roberts successfully led strategic planning initiatives that improved organizational excellence, business efficiencies, and safety and health. She began her career in the private sector in the healthcare, hospitality, and logistics industries.

Roberts will oversee transportation systems in a dynamic region that boasts 25 percent of California's population, an annual construction program of more than \$2 billion and some of the most innovative solutions to help move people and goods through southern California, and throughout the rest of the world. As District 7 Director, Roberts also will help lead progress in preparations for Los Angeles as a host city for the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Summer Olympics.

### **Metro Touts Continued Ridership Growth**

Metro had nearly 24 million bus and train boardings in June, a 13.3% increase from last June that marks the seventh straight month of year-over-year growth. Metro's monthly bus and rail ridership now stands at 81% of its 2019, pre-pandemic level, with average weekend ridership at 91% of pre-pandemic levels and 76% for average weekdays, the agency reported. In June, Metro recorded 23,824,620 passengers aboard its bus and rail systems, with an average of 866,670 rides each weekday.

Saturday and Sunday boardings averaged about 646,743 and 542,727 passengers, respectively. The agency noted that ridership recovery continued to strengthen on the weekends, with average boardings on Saturdays and Sundays reaching almost 89% and 94% of pre-pandemic levels. Bus ridership continued to lead overall with 18,679,084 rides during June, with total bus ridership at almost 84% of its level in June 2019. The agency, alongside the city of Los Angeles, installed more than 30 miles of bus priority lanes, the most recent of which opened on Venice Boulevard in June.

More than 5 million trips were taken on the rail system in June, an increase of 14.2% compared to the same time last year. Rail ridership growth was led by gains on the B (Red) and D (Purple) lines. Average weekday ridership on the B and D lines is up 15.5% year-over-year, and up 5.6% since January. Average ridership on the B and D lines now exceed its level in June 2019, before the pandemic.

According to the agency, weekend ridership was driven by special events including the Pride Parade, Pride Night at Dodger Stadium, Pride in the Park, and CicLAvia South L.A. The opening of the Regional Connector stations in the Little Tokyo/Arts District, Historic Broadway and Grand Avenue Arts/Bunker Hill also generated ridership, with more than 100,000 riding the new A and E lines on opening day. More than 82,000 people continued to ride the new lines over the opening weekend.

In a statement, the agency also highlighted various “proactive” steps taken recently aimed to “ensure its transit service is safe, friendly, fast, and frequent.” They include a new “multi-layered” public safety approach “to increase the visible presence of both armed and unarmed security and customer care personnel on the system”; a Drug-Free Metro campaign focused on drug-related crimes and targeting “hotspots throughout the system”; engaging more than 300 Metro Ambassadors to help customers navigate the system; hiring more than 1,000 new transit operators; and fully restoring bus service.

## **Angelenos Could Go Aerial: LA ART project reaches new milestone on Dodger Stadium Gondola**

The Los Angeles Aerial Rapid Transit’s (LA ART) proposal for the Dodger Stadium Gondola project has reached a new milestone following the release of a Draft Environmental Impact Report by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The report, which evaluated the environmental benefits and impacts of an aerial gondola connection between Union Station and Dodger Stadium, found that the proposed project would reduce congestion and reduce emissions by over 150,000 metric tons of greenhouse gasses over its lifetime.

The Dodger Stadium Gondola was announced in 2018 as a zero-emission transit option that would take 3,000 cars off the roads on game days, according to LA ART. The gondola would be free to ride for anyone attending a game at Dodger Stadium and cost the same price as a Metro

fare for anyone who lives or works in the area. It would operate year-round and take riders seven minutes to travel from Union Station to Dodger Stadium.

Gondola systems have proliferated globally, providing a green alternative to automotive travel that LA could learn from, with successful examples in places like London and Mexico City. The gondola network is proposed to run above roads and transit lines, inspired by the cable car lines of La Paz, Bolivia, which were built above the city streets and have reportedly carried 100 million riders since their construction.

The system, which cycles a cabin through each station every 23 seconds, would consist of three cables, two used to support the weight of the gondolas and one to pull them along. Each cabin could hold 35 to 40 people and would have a reconfigurable layout to accommodate wheelchair access. The project would also create three new stations in Downtown: Dodger Stadium Station; Chinatown/State Park Station at the southwest corner of the LA State Historic Park; and Alameda Station, which would stand adjacent to Union Station on Alameda Street. The system would serve the communities of El Pueblo, Chinatown, Mission Junction, Solano Canyon and William Meade Homes, while providing access to green spaces like Elysian Park.

While some residents and business owners in neighborhoods like Chinatown have applauded the project for encouraging visitors to return and engage with businesses impacted by the pandemic, others have criticized the proposal and argued that it would shift traffic congestion from Dodger Stadium into the communities surrounding the gondola stations.

To include community voices in the development of the gondola proposal, the project team spoke with local households, businesses, community organizations and environmental advocacy groups. This process caused the team to change the initial location plan for the Chinatown/State Park Station. To date, nearly 6,000 people and over 340 businesses in Chinatown, El Pueblo and Lincoln Heights have signed up to support the project.

The Draft EIR will have a 60-day public review period during which the public can provide comments. Grannis said he hopes the EIR will be certified by the fall. After certification, he estimated that the construction and testing phase would be completed by the first quarter of 2028.

At Dodger Stadium, a full-sized gondola cabin exhibit will remain on display for the rest of the season, allowing visitors to experience what it would be like to ride inside it and to learn more about the project.

## **Trends**

**Automakers unite to build multi-billion dollar EV charging network that would rival Tesla's**



Seven major automakers say they're joining forces to build a North American electric vehicle charging network that would rival Tesla's and nearly double the number of fast-charging plugs in the U.S. and Canada. General Motors, BMW, Honda, Hyundai, Kia, Mercedes and Stellantis said Wednesday that they will share in a multibillion-dollar investment to build "high power" charging stations with at least 30,000 plugs in urban areas and along travel corridors by 2030.

The dramatic move is intended to speed the adoption of electric vehicles, allaying fears that chargers won't be available for long distance travel. The companies wouldn't disclose the exact number of charging stations or financial details of the joint venture they're forming to put the network in place. They said the first of the U.S. chargers will be ready by next summer.

There are currently just under 8,700 direct-current fast-charging stations in the U.S. and Canada with nearly 36,000 charging plugs, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Even with 30,000 more plugs, the U.S. will need far more chargers. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory estimates that 182,000 fast chargers will be needed by 2030.

Fast chargers can get a battery to 80% of its capacity in 20 minutes to one hour, making them optimal for travel corridors and in some cases comparable to the time it takes to fill a car with gasoline. They're much quicker than 240-volt "Level 2" chargers that can take hours to get a battery to a full charge. The new network is expected to have 10 to 20 charging plugs per station, meaning there would be a minimum of 1,500 stations and a maximum of about 3,000. Tesla's network, with the largest number of fast chargers in North America, has 2,050 stations and more than 22,000 plugs in the U.S. and Canada, the DOE says. The network formed by the seven automakers would be public and open to all electric vehicle owners. It will have connectors for both Tesla's North American Charging Standard plugs as well as the Combined Charging System plugs used by other automakers. In their statement, the seven automakers said they would use renewable energy as much as possible to power the chargers, and they will be in convenient locations with canopies and amenities such as restrooms, food service and stores nearby.

The current charging network, being built by a hodgepodge of companies, is growing but is often unreliable or in poor locations. This has prompted Ford, General Motors and others to sign agreements with Tesla to give their EVs access to its much larger network of fast chargers.

In the U.S., electric vehicle sales continued to rise during the first half of the year to more than 557,000 vehicles, or 7.2% of all new vehicle sales. The EV share of the market last year was 5.8% with just over 807,000 sales. Most industry analysts predict continued growth in EV sales for the next decade or more.

But in June, EV inventories began to grow as factories started cranking out new models. Not including Tesla and Rivian, dealers had enough EV supply on hand for 103 days of sales, according to Cox Automotive. But there was only a 53-day supply of all vehicles, indicating much lower inventories of combustion engine vehicles.

New greenhouse gas emissions standards proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency say automakers could meet the requirements in 2032 if 67% of all new vehicle sales are electric.