

Mono County Local Transportation Commission

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MINUTES

February 10, 2014
(Adopted March 10, 2014)

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS: Tim Fesko, Larry Johnston, Fred Stump
TOWN COMMISSIONERS: Jo Bacon, Sandy Hogan, Matthew Lehman
COUNTY STAFF: Scott Burns, Gerry Le Francois, Jeff Walters (videoconference), Garrett Higerd, Megan Mahaffey, C.D. Ritter
TOWN STAFF: Peter Bernasconi, Jamie Robertson
CALTRANS: Forest Becket, Ryan Dermody, Tom Hallenbeck
ESTA: Jill Batchelder, John Helm
PUBLIC: Leisha Baldwin, Alice Suszynski, Dorothy Burdette, Chris Lizza

1. **CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Chair Larry Johnston called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m., and attendees recited the pledge of allegiance.
2. **PUBLIC COMMENT:** Alice Suszynski presented a letter on a US 395 gateway monument for June Lake, touting strong community support. Caltrans staff could not place it as requested because 395 is not contiguous to the community. But, on SR 158, it would not be seen. She noted that June Lake is not a town with a boundary. She requested an LTC support letter to Caltrans. On future agenda? Yes, hear other views.
3. **ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** Commissioner Bacon was nominated **and elected** Chair (Ayes: 6-0.) Outgoing Chair Johnston turned over gavel. Commissioner Stump was nominated **and elected** Vice-Chair (Ayes: 6-0.).
4. **MINUTES:**

MOTION: Approve minutes of January 13, 2014, as amended: 1) 8A, third-to-last graph: **Caltrans employees are empowered to make decisions**; and 2) 8B, line 3: Remove numeral 7 within a word. (Hogan/Fesko. Ayes: 6-0.)
5. **ACTION ITEM:**

A. Midyear budget adjustment to current Overall Work Program (OWP): Megan Mahaffey and staff reevaluated projects, moved funding to those ready to complete. Done in collaboration with Town staff. Mono needed to fund RTIP. Scott Burns added RTP also.

MOTION: Approve Minute Order M14-02 adopting midyear budget adjustment to current Overall Work Program (Johnston/ Bacon. Ayes: 5-0. Lehman had stepped out.)
6. **COMMISSIONER REPORTS:** Johnston: Attended **California Transportation Commission US Fish & Wildlife meeting in Sacramento**, presented letter on frogs/toads, good scientific backup. Lots of Westside entities attended.
7. **ADMINISTRATION**

A. 2014-15 Overall Work Program (OWP): Megan Mahaffey referred to draft OWP in packet, and will bring back in March, requesting LTC revisions. Any significant changes?

Reword Work Element 900-13-0: "The purpose of this work element is to create a policy with Mono County, the California Department of Transportation, District 9, and Yosemite National Park for Tioga Pass **partial or complete** closure and other **passes, including SR 120E.**"

Fesko: Opening Tioga up to park boundary would allow recreation. Johnston: Not everyone wants it open all the way, but positive things happened when it was open into January a couple years ago. Based on weather, NPS has ability to open, but need policy to help define when road should be open. Hogan: For two years Eastside could have had recreation. Need written policy with criteria.

Johnston: Strategic list of projects is somehow connected. *Presented unconstrained project list. Call out priority projects.* Johnston wanted outcomes.

Bacon: No rating method. Get first go-around and then bring it back for selection. *All projects are incorporated into RTP, but need priorities.* Johnston: Don't close door if it's not high priority. Bacon: Priorities were identified, but need another round on realistic options, not all. Would staff provide estimate on size and funding sources for tier 1 projects? Johnston: Make sure to integrate into OWP.

B. Report on California Transportation Commission (CTC) State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) hearing: Gerry Le Francois, Peter Bernasconi, and Caltrans went to Los Angeles. No questions addressed to them, but it was important to go. CTC's recommendations consistent with LTC's, higher STIP reserve for future projects. Olancho-Cartago still in mix? Yes. Tom Hallenbeck noted CTC is supporting only three projects in state. Partnerships were identified; other counties encouraged to do likewise. Inyo was asking way over its shares, needed help from Kern and Mono. Centennial project has three miles funded. CTC could skip and take on Olancho-Cartago. CTC congratulated Mono/Inyo's success. Johnston congratulated LTC for keeping partnerships going. Hallenbeck noted fatalities have been eliminated by 75%.

Freeman Gulch project was split into three pieces. Funding for first is ready, last construction 2020. Kern County asked for shares. Is SR 58W new? Hallenbeck: Yes, with federal and local sales tax. Build and then adopt into state highway system. First two-mile segment was built already. Tension exists, but no effect on Kern paying back its shares;

C. Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Yosemite policy including road closures: Scott Burns presented Caltrans response letter on seasonal closures. Need to clarify when road could reopen in low-snow season. Policy is to open as soon as conditions are safe. Maybe highlight Heritage Highway concept. Economic Development is keen on promoting Tuolumne as alternative to Valley.

Tom Hallenbeck stated policies on winter closure are all about safety and resources. Work is funded by route, none in wintertime. Two maintenance crews are working on 120E for earlier opening in spring with traffic control. Tioga is completely different – engineering does not move water away; freeze/thaw; and significant rockfall keeps slopes unstable. No delineation (poles) for snowfall. Once park gate is open, it's an interregional route. Caltrans plans to open 120W by fishing opener.

Commissioner Stump thanked Hallenbeck for response on SR 120E. Updates on potential opening date? Tri-valley constituents work in North County.

Johnston noted everyone is under economic stress, looking for relief. Open sooner and longer when possible. Hallenbeck will reevaluate when storm subsides.

Chris Lizza of Lee Vining patrols at Mammoth Mountain, where crews open every possible run while balancing risk and service. Seeing closed signs on dry highways is frustrating as user and business owner. A great experiment occurred two years ago when Tioga was open. Increased daily business 70%, a substantial difference. Open at least through holidays when people are looking for something to do, providing recreational opportunities where snow exists. Easiest is along Tioga Road.

Garrett Higerd was at USFS regarding Rock Creek Road project. Resident engineer is also involved with Tioga Road within Yosemite. Get update from NPS. Jeff Walters has best contact.

Johnston cited environmental issues along park road. Accommodate cyclists like Yellowstone does. Uphill climbs need a couple feet at least. Higerd suggested opening lines of communication with NPS.

D. LTC audit report ending June 30, 2013: Megan Mahaffey distributed audit reports. No issues were discovered. Bring up any questions to Mahaffey or LTC next month. Could anybody local conduct the audit? Commissioner Bacon noted that audits involve more than just CPA qualifications.

8. TRANSIT

A. Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA): John Helm will send Chalfant Transit Survey results summary. Operating costs increased on highest-speed routes that use more fuel. Averaged > 35% return on

farebox recovery, exceeding 10% minimum required. Some exceptions existed in outlying areas. Experimenting with “guest fare of \$1 to additional passengers” to reduce operating costs.

Walker DAR destinations? *Senior center, post office, shopping, Topaz resort. Disabled fare is paid by other agencies.*

Commissioner Johnston thought ESTA was using wrong kind of buses. Could get double mileage with high-efficiency diesel for long-distance routes. Helm acknowledged point well taken. Finalizing order this week for four sprinter-type vehicles. Change on long routes is capacity: sprinters carry 12, current buses carry 23. Service changes at Mammoth: Green Line discontinued (Gray Line services that area). Red Line changed from 15- to 20-minute intervals. Ability to surge on holidays? *ESTA adds “trippers” so no long waits would occur.*

B. Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS): Authority Advisory Committee meets Wednesday regarding outreach via social media and online ticket sales.

9. CALTRANS

A. North Conway overview: Ryan Dermody mentioned alternative transportation plan: where shoulders are, adding shoulders, pedestrian/cycling facilities. Origin/destination studies showed RVs decreasing from 14.34% to 3.2% to 1.7%. Courtney Weiche appeared in cover photo. Decide which projects to move forward.

Becket described Bridgeport shoulders in 2009, and North Conway gap closure was not fully addressed. Shoulder widening or wider southbound uphill lane would address speed differential of slow-moving vehicles. Price tags are in 2002 dollars. Did 2002 consider bike lanes and sage grouse? Consider Conway Ranch in 1990s for comparison later. Look at priority for developing corridor. Get cost estimate, scope and schedule.

Commissioner Johnston spoke with Tim Hansen regarding plowing snow along road. Drifting in rock section closed road entirely. Southbound travel has been an issue since 1995. Commissioner Fesko thought pullouts were not viable – semi-trucks will not pull over on uphill. It’s only a two-mile bottleneck; the 18-mi section north is more of a concern. Commissioner Stump also cited frustrating section north of Bridgeport.

Four-lane segment on Conway? Commissioner Hogan thought three lanes would solve problem at lower cost. Johnston still saw problem with uphill section, but Commissioner Lehman thought it’s not that big an issue.

Becket indicated long lead time, so get project in hopper this summer. Would discussing Conway Ranch in March be in time for summer? *Yes, Dermody indicated.* Hallenbeck added that all good ideas are accepted throughout the year regardless of timelines.

B. Activities in Mono County & pertinent statewide information: Tom Hallenbeck introduced Ryan Dermody, with 15 years at Caltrans, as new deputy district director. Changes are under way at Caltrans, spurred by recommendations by State Smart Transportation Initiative, including: 1) modernize from highway building to dealing with climate change, greenhouse gas, etc.; 2) be partner rather than master builder; 3) more transit, multimodal, complete streets; 4) keep roads in good shape instead of expanding; 5) innovate and integrate all modes of transit; 6) focus on corridors, not just highways; 7) instead of car vs. train, car *and* train *and* bike; 8) gas tax is not keeping up, so be more efficient; and 9) reform from ground up with new strategic plan that’s sustainable and inclusive.

Caltrans was included with non-transportation entities, now combined with CHP, boating/waterways, DMV. Faced with drought cutbacks on water, reduced landscape watering 50%, some turned off. Slow down planting projects. Turf grass gets no water. Install smart meters that water only when needed. Use tertiary water in landscapes. No car washing. White streaks on pavement are due to brine system. Use 150-200 lb salt/lane mile in storm, but if spray salt solution prior to a storm, snow would not stick to pavement. Brine uses much less salt that impacts plant life.

Commissioner Stump expressed general concern about Eastern Sierra being left out of discussions in Sacramento, thus disempowered. Hallenbeck had seen District 9 disappear in past, so will be on alert. Keep corridor functioning and improving.

10. INFORMATIONAL

A. LTC letter to Caltrans & National Park Service

B. Car-charging request: Leisha Baldwin, The Village Neighborhood Co., reported installation is proposed at Village. Commissioner Johnston suggested LTC work with Village and consider natural-gas charging as well. Hallenbeck noted Caltrans is installing charging station at district office for electric company vehicles.

C. Statewide Local Streets & Roads Needs Assessment

11. **UPCOMING AGENDA ITEMS:** 1) June Lake monument sign; 2) Yosemite policy as part of RTP draft, car charging, natural gas too; 3) NPS staff on park road project; 4) Conway four-lane; 5) tier-one projects, staff reports; 6) projects for 5311 grants.

12. **ADJOURN** at 11:20 a.m. to March 10, 2014

Prepared by C.D. Ritter, LTC secretary