Conconstruction to Start on SR 198 Widening Project

After funds were first programmed in the 1998 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) to begin the process of widening SR 198 to a 4-lane expressway between SR 99 and SR 43, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) allocated the final $78 million to begin the construction phase of the long awaited project. This project was a long standing priority for the Kings County region and will deliver a safer, less congested travel way, and provide the necessary infrastructure that business require to move their goods and services that will have a long lasting benefit for job creation and retention.

This project is a partnership project funded between Kings and Tulare Counties and Caltrans. The project was funded by a variety of funding sources, with a major portion coming from the Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) program created by the passage of Proposition 1B in the amount of $71.6 million. Kings and Tulare Counties programmed a total of $15.9 million through the Regional Improvement Program (RIP), Caltrans programmed $16 million in Interregional Improvement Program (IIP) funds, and additional State funds in the amount of $14 million came from the Transportation Congestion Relief Program (TCRP). Federal demonstration funds of $2.5 million were made available for this project through the assistance of Congressman Jim Costa.

Caltrans is ready to award a contract for construction that could begin as soon as November of this year. Construction could take as long as 2 ½ years, but travelers will be able to watch the progress on the north side of the highway as they continue to travel along the existing lanes during the first phase of construction. Landscaping to replace the trees that were removed last year will be brought in at the end of the construction phase.

The last major highway project to be constructed in Kings County was the widening of SR 41 and the construction of an interchange at Bush St. in Lemoore. The next project to move forward is expected to be the construction of an interchange on SR 198 at 19th Ave. in Lemoore.

Work to Begin Soon on the Kettleman City Safety and Community Study

Kettleman City residents have been waiting patiently for work to begin on the Kettleman City Safety and Community Study. The Kings County Association of Governments was awarded a 2008-09 Environmental Justice Caltrans Planning Grant with the local match provided by Waste Management, to conduct a study that will focus on transportation and community development issues in this low-income and traditionally under-represented community. This is a follow-up study to the Kettleman City Community Plan that was developed through a collaborative effort by residents and the Kings County Community Development Department as part of the Kings County General Plan Update. The Kettleman City Community Plan highlighted the resident’s safety concerns when crossing at the State Route 41 and General Petroleum Avenue Intersection, the excessive speeds of traffic, and the general lack of pedestrian safety from vehicle traffic throughout the community.

The Kettleman City Safety and Community Study will address the resident’s concerns and explore potential solutions. The study will focus on strategies to provide advanced warning to motorists, evaluate traffic calming measures, examine gateway signage options to increase awareness and economic development potential, work with law enforcement to increase traffic enforcement efforts, and identify the most frequently used routes that children take while walking and biking to and from school.

The Kettleman City Safety and Community Study will kick off with a community event this summer to be followed by several public workshops. Once the planning study is complete, Kings County intends to pursue funding to implement the pedestrian safety improvements. Waste Management has committed to a local match of up to $14,000 for a potential project. For more information please contact Christina Lehn at chris.lehn@co.kings.ca.us or at 582-3211 ext. 2654.
After three years of extensive public outreach efforts and collaboration including 62 cities and 8 counties, the San Joaquin Valley Regional Blueprint Planning Process has reached an important milestone. On April 1st, the San Joaquin Valley Policy Council made up of two elected officials from each of the eight counties, voted to adopt the B+ regional scenario and a list of 12 smart growth principles.

The Valley’s adopted growth scenario includes each of the counties’ individual blueprint visions as developed through a substantial public outreach process. The scenario increases the average number of dwelling units per new acre of residential development from 4.3 to 6.8 over the next 40 years.

The adopted smart growth principles will be used as the foundation of Blueprint planning throughout the Valley. The San Joaquin Valley Smart Growth Principles include:

1. Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
2. Create Walkable neighborhoods
3. Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
4. Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
5. Make development decisions predictable, fair, and cost effective
6. Mix land uses
7. Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
8. Provide a variety of transportation choices
9. Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
10. Take advantage of compact building design
11. Enhance the economic vitality of the region
12. Support actions that encourage environmental resource management

A fourth year grant of $1.35 million will continue work on the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process. Blueprint efforts will now focus on developing a Valleywide Blueprint Final Report, creating a toolkit for implementation that will assist professional planners at the local level, translating Blueprint principles into local implementation strategies, and addressing greenhouse gas directives.

For more information please contact Christina Lehn at chris.lehn@co.kings.ca.us or 582-3211 ext. 2654.

TDA Public Hearings

Each year Kings County receives Local Transportation Funds (LTF) under the Transportation Development Act (TDA). These funds can be allocated for specific purposes such as transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, transportation planning, and streets. Before any LTF can be allocated for street and road purposes, a finding must be made that all “unmet transit needs” that are “reasonable to meet” have been funded. KCAG will hold public hearings prior to approving allocations for Fiscal Year 2009-10 totaling $3 million to be distributed to the jurisdictions of Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford, Lemoore, and the County of Kings.

The annual unmet transit needs public hearings will be held in April and May before the KCAG Transportation Policy Committee (TPC). Transit users are invited to offer their suggestions for changes they feel should be made to the transit service available in Kings County. Each concern and suggestion will be evaluated by members of the Social Service Transportation Advisory Council (SSTAC). The SSTAC, consisting of local social service providers, transit operators, and representatives from disabled, low-income, and senior groups, will review the concerns based upon testimony received. The findings will then be presented to the KCAG TPC.
President Barack Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) on February 17, 2009. The new Act was designed to stimulate the economy and create jobs during the worst economic downturn in over 70 years. ARRA includes $27.5 Billion in funding nationwide for highway transportation projects. California's share of these funds is estimated to be $2.57 billion.

Kings County will receive approximately $8.2 Million of the $2.57 Billion expected by the state. Of the $8.2 Million, approximately $6.3 Million will be for the repair and resurfacing of our highways, streets and roads, the remaining approximately $1.9 Million will be for transit projects. Kings County will also benefit from approximately $4.2 Million in (state-retained) funding in the way of State Highway Operations and Protection Program funds applied to our local highways and rail safety programs.

With the advent of the other grant and competitive funding available through ARRA, Caltrans conservatively estimates that California could receive approximately $4.4 billion from this bill. Formula programs in the ARRA apportion $2.57 billion for highways, local streets and roads, freight and passenger rail, and port infrastructure projects, and $1.07 billion for transit projects. These funds are apportioned to the Regional Transportation Planning Agencies based on population of their respective regions.

Kings County Association of Governments, the cities of Avenal, Corcoran, Hanford and Lemoore, and the County of Kings have identified the projects that will put these additional funds to work as quickly as possible and KCAG Staff has programmed the funds/projects into the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) as required by the Act.

ARRA establishes very stringent transparency and accountability requirements for projects. It requires the State and other fund recipients to provide reports at 90 and 180 days, and 1, 2, and 3 years after enactment. These reports must describe the amount of dollars and number of projects to which funds were obligated, awarded and expended. In addition, states will be required to report on jobs created and sustained by the contracts, including salary information and estimates of the number of indirect jobs created for suppliers. US Department of Transportation is required to post this, and other information about awards of grants, federal contracts, and to the extent possible, the ARRA related job opportunities on a national website, located at Recovery.gov. KCAG and the Cities and County will complete these reports on their respective projects.

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**Quarterly Action Items**

- Adopted 2009 Transportation Development Plan
- Adopted FY 2009-10 Overall Work Program
- Adopted 2009 Interim Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) Amendments, and Conformity Determination.
- Approved American Recovery Reinvestment Account (ARRA) Funds
- Approved FY 2008-09 CTSF Designation
- Approved FY 2007-08 TDA Financial Audits
- Conducted TDA Unmet Transit Needs Hearings
- Comments were ratified on several Areawide Clearinghouse review items
- Various Regional Blueprint planning process documents were approved.
KCAG Welcomes New Staff

Bruce Abanathie is a Regional Planner with the Kings County Association of Governments. Bruce has Bachelors degrees in Public Administration (University of San Francisco), and Community Affairs (Humphreys College). Bruce has completed the Caltrans Local Assistance and Planning Academies, has earned Certificates in Project Management (UC Berkeley), and Transit and Paratransit Management (University of the Pacific School of Business). Bruce brings six years of experience as a Regional Planner and one year as a Consulting Planner to KCAG. Bruce’s major planning work has been in Grant writing, Planning, Programming, Funding, and Delivery (both federal and state processes) of transportation projects. Bruce also has experience and expertise in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and how it is applied to transportation projects.

Rachel Audino has joined KCAG to work on traffic modeling, GIS, and air quality conformity. A Visalia native, she previously worked for the Tulare County Association of Governments on traffic modeling, monitoring, and the census. Prior to that, she worked for the California Institute for Telecommunications and Information Technology at the University of California, San Diego. Rachel is a graduate of UCSD and is currently pursuing a Masters in Public Administration at Fresno State.