

A Citizens' Guide to Transportation Planning in the Kern Region

Getting involved in the process

Role

Kern COG's mission is to solve regional problems by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the region's local governments as well as the quality of life in Kern County. Essential functions are:

- providing a forum for addressing issues which extend beyond individual governmental boundaries by fostering collaborative regional planning and
- facilitating intergovernmental relations among local governments and state and federal agencies.

As the regional planning partnership for Kern County, Kern COG is accountable to local governments that join as members. Membership is open to the County of Kern and the eleven incorporated cities within the county.



Responsibilities

Kern COG's principle activities support local planning through use of

Kern COG's technical data and intergovernmental resources. In collaboration with local governments, Kern COG is responsible for adopting regionwide plans and policies for housing, transportation-related air quality and transportation including approval of funding for most state and local transportation projects. Funding for Kern COG is provided by federal and state grants, contracts and local planning funds.

Policy Decision Making

All Kern COG policy decisions are made by local elected officials, ensuring that regional policies reflect the interest of member communities. Participants serve on both the Transportation Planning Policy

Committee and the Kern COG Board of Directors.

Prior to policy adoption, technical advisory committees provide the structure for gaining input on housing, transportation, air quality and data analysis issues. This deliberative process includes broad-based representation for local governments, and transportation user groups.

Educating the Public – changing the course

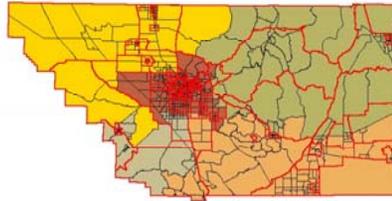
This booklet outlines regional planning for citizens of the Kern region. We hope to familiarize you with the activities of Kern COG, the Kern Council of Governments, and show you how you can participate as a concerned citizen.



The pages of the *Citizens Guide* will zero in on Kern COG's role in transportation planning and tell you how to get involved in the process. If there is something you want to change, our basic message is that **the earlier you get involved, the better your chances will be to create the impact you desire.**

Is it worth the effort to become interested in the mobility business? More and more Kern citizens are answering "yes" to that question. Whether motivated by a wish to improve public transit, a quest to understand why every road seems to be under construction, or a desire for radically different transportation systems, all seek a say in how the millions of dollars in public monies are spent annually on the region's extensive network of highways, public transportation systems, bicycle and pedestrian routes, local roads, and bridges.

Our aim is to encourage informed and productive citizens participation in transportation activities. No single organization has a monopoly on good ideas. Often, good ideas happen through an open exchange of information and viewpoint. And, given increasing demands on limited public funds, transportation programs and projects cannot proceed without citizen acceptance and support that come through an educated public and an open inclusive process.



Kern Region Facts

Population

With a population of more than 702,000, the Kern region has doubled its population since 1977. By the year 2030, the

region's population is expected to climb to 1.14 million, while the number of households will grow by 62 percent from the current 222,700 to 360,400. In addition, the number of jobs regionwide will increase from 272,000 to 440,000.

The Region

The Kern region encompasses all of Kern County. Home to eleven incorporated cities, the region's 8,075 square mile area is the third largest county in the United States. The region is larger than the states of New Jersey, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, Delaware and Massachusetts. To accommodate the anticipated growth in the Kern region, an additional 150 square miles could be developed by 2030 at an average density of 300 persons per square mile.

Transportation Network

The Kern regional transportation network includes 876 miles of state highways, 564 miles of major roads and 2150 miles of local streets and 150 miles of bike paths. In all, that's 3740 miles that must be maintained,

policed, cleaned and frequently repaved or rebuilt. In addition, there are 523 miles of active railroad track, one major airport and fourteen public use airports.

The public transportation system consists of 14 publicly operated transit systems in the region. Golden Empire Transit



(GET) District operates 65 buses on 21 routes, and 20 Get-a-Lift vehicles in Metropolitan Bakersfield. GET buses travel a total of 11,546 miles each day. Total daily ridership on GET averages about 22,114.

Public transit systems are operated by the cities of Delano, McFarland, Wasco, Shafter, Taft Arvin, Tehachapi, California City and Ridgecrest. The county of Kern operates dial-a-ride systems in Lamont, Mojave and Lake Isabella. The county also operates intercity services between Mojave and

Bakersfield, Kern River Valley and Bakersfield, Taft and Bakersfield and Delano and Bakersfield with stops in McFarland, Wasco and Shafter.



Vehicles

In the Kern Region, there are 440,176 passenger vehicles, light duty pickups, SUVs and vans traveling our road network, plus some 6617 additional passenger cars that travel through into our region each day. Also sharing the roads each day are 5,891 - 18-wheel trucks, and 9687 motorcycles. In total, those vehicles travel 7.97 billion miles annually; by 2030, that will increase to 14.5 billion miles annually. The typical household accounts for ten (10) trips a day.

Commute

Works trips account for nearly 11.4 % of all travel in the Kern Region. On an average work day, 73.8 % of the region's commuters travel to work by car, van or light truck; 18.4 % by car or van pool with one or more persons; and 1.4 % by public transit, 1.9 % walk and 1.8 % travel by some other means, such as bicycle, motorcycle, or taxi.

How to Influence Transportation Decisions

Whether you'd like to see improved transit service for your area or just wish someone would repaint the crosswalk at the corner, you have a stake in the region's transportation system. And, as a citizen, you



can have a voice in how

transportation dollars are spent. The key is learning how best to be heard.

Federal money = Federal Requirements

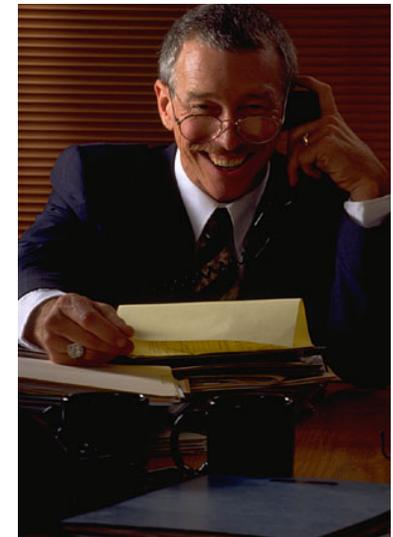
Nearly all major transportation improvements made in the Kern region receive federal funding. Most often, the federal and state governments pay for part of a project and the local community of



transportation agency matches their funds. But, before a transportation project can receive those federal and state funds, it must take a series of steps to make sure that the public money is spent well. Each step presents an opportunity for citizen involvement – for your voice to be heard. As the federally designated metropolitan planning organization, Kern COG represents an important

part of the process. For any transportation project in the region to receive federal or state money, it has to be included in the Kern COG RTP.

For instance, if a local community plans to request federal or state funds to upgrade traffic signals, they must submit their plans to be included in the RTP. Kern COG evaluates each project according to broad regional priorities outlined in the RTP. If you want to shape regional policies, Kern COG is the place to go. However, if you hope to influence a particular project, your impact will be greater a little closer to home.



Go To the Source

The best place to influence a project is at the local level – where projects begin. For instance, if you have a suggestion for resurfacing a road, find out who has jurisdiction over the road (is it a city, county or state road?). Caltrans, your city government public works department, or county road commissioner will be able to direct you to the right place (see page ____). Once you know who's in charge, take full advantage of opportunities they present to voice support for or objection to projects. Often, this will mean commenting at a local council, committee meeting, or town hall meeting. You can write a letter, phone, or e-mail the appropriate elected official(s).

The sooner and closer to home you comment, the greater the impact. Officials can more easily incorporate your suggestions if they come at the beginning of the process, before time and energy have been invested hammering out the details. Projects aren't set in stone until they receive federal approval, but after local approval, the cement begins to dry. When projects are at the

ground level you can speak with those most familiar with them. By the time they reach Kern COG, the project you care about is just one among many.

The Path to Completion

Kern COG staff compiles the many projects received from other agencies into a single list. This list moves through a series of committee meetings to final adoption at the Kern COG Board of Directors. During this entire process, individual projects remain open to public scrutiny and comment and are subject to change. Kern COG accepts comments via fax, mail, e-mail, hand delivered; or come to one of Kern COG's meetings and voice your ideas in person.

When projects from the long-range RTP are ready to be implemented, they are taken from the RTP and submitted to Kern COG again – with yet



another round of evaluations, voting, and public comment – for programming into the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). Inclusion in the TIP basically means that the planned project is ready to become a reality.

From the TIP, projects are sent to the California Transportation Commission for inclusion in the State TIP (STIP). By now, the major steps have been completed. After the STIP receives approval for the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), projects are completed by their sponsoring agencies and FHWA and FTA sends reimbursements from federal funds.

An Overview of the Kern Region

What is Kern COG?

Kern COG, the Kern Council of Governments, is legally organized as a multipurpose regional planning agency through Section 6500 et. seq. of the California Government Code. Kern COG was formed in 1970 and is an organization

of local member governments. Kern COG recognizes that the best solutions are those developed in partnership with other local agencies so that a consensus solution is developed. Thus, this partnership improves the ability of local governments to solve common problems in a regional setting.



Organization - Kern COG is the regional planning agency as well as the technical and informational resource and rideshare administrator for the area's 11 incorporated cities and the County of Kern. A Board of Directors comprised of mayors or city council members from each of the incorporated cities and two supervisors from the Kern County Board of Supervisors governs Kern COG. The planning process is executed in conformance with all applicable Federal requirements and is certified annually.

Staff and Budget – Kern COG has a full-time staff of 18 and an annual operating budget of \$2.4 million, funded through grants from federal, state, and local revenues.

Offices – the Kern COG offices are located at 1401 19th Street, Suite 300 in Bakersfield, California. A map and directions to the offices are posted on the Kern COG Web site (www.kerncog.org).

What does Kern COG do?

Kern COG staff wear many hats, but their goal is always the same – working together to enhance the quality of life in Kern County. Here are some examples:

Kern COG spreads the word

– Kern COG is a forum where all levels of local government officials in Kern County meet and deliberate on regionwide issues. Kern COG also takes its message on the road meeting with local governments and citizens on issues of regional importance.

Kern COG's roles and responsibilities – As a regional planning agency, Kern COG supports local planning

through technical, data, and intergovernmental resources.

Metropolitan Planning Organization – As the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO), Kern COG, in cooperation with the State of California, is responsible for implementing the comprehensive transportation planning process for the urban Bakersfield area. Kern COG, pursuant to 23 U.S.C. 134 and 49 U.S.C. 1607, is responsible for regional transportation planning.



An integral element of the planning process is the Overall Work Program (OWP). The OWP contains a detailed narrative of Kern COG's planning activities, as well as

related planning responsibilities of local, state and federal governments. The OWP is designed to clarify the planning process and serves as the basis for applications for state and federal funding. Similarly, Kern COG is required to bi-annually develop and endorse the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP).

Regional Transportation Planning Agency

– Pursuant to state law, Kern COG has been designated the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA) for the Kern County region. Acting in this capacity, Kern COG is responsible for the development and adoption of several transportation planning documents and studies, including the:

- Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) – a comprehensive, 20-year plan for developing transportation facilities in Kern County. The RTP identifies transportation issues and a consistent set of goals, policies, and implementation actions for maintaining and improving the overall transportation system.



- Transportation System Management (TSM) - A system-wide approach to maximize use of existing facilities and available financial resources. TSM fosters cooperation among jurisdictions while minimizing duplication of efforts in the metropolitan Bakersfield area. Kern COG, in cooperation with the City of Bakersfield, Kern County, Caltrans, and GET, develop TSM strategies to reduce traffic congestion, fuel consumption, and vehicle emissions. These strategies reduce vehicle trips and improve traffic flow, both of which tend to enhance air quality.
- Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) - A Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) is a multimodal listing of capital improvement programs to be implemented over a seven-

year period. Biennially, in cooperation with member agencies, GET, local airport districts and the California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Kern COG prepares a Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP) for all highway, street and road, aeronautic, transit and guideway projects in Kern County that utilize federal or state funding.

Areawide Planning

Organization – In accordance with federal law, Kern COG is designated the Areawide Planning Organization (APO) for the Kern region. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires that an APO develop and maintain areawide land use, housing and open space plans, such as the following:

Regional Housing Allocation

Plan – Kern COG is designated to prepare the Regional Housing Allocation Plan in accordance with California Government Code Section 65584. The Plan

addresses housing needs for all income levels in the Kern County area. Need is based on available data, market demand for housing, employment opportunities, the availability of suitable sites and public facilities, commuting patterns, type of tenure of housing need, and the housing need of farm workers. Kern COG evaluates the aforementioned criteria and determines the existing and projected housing need for this region.

Local Clearinghouse

– In accordance with Executive Order 12372, Kern COG is designated the Local Clearinghouse for the Kern County region. Kern COG's primary responsibility is to review and comment on local applications for state and federal funding assistance. The local clearinghouse process is designed to provide an opportunity for inter-jurisdictional coordination of federal and federally assisted activities within state and regional localities.

Affiliate Data Center

– The California Department of



Finance has designated Kern Council of Governments as the Affiliate Data Center for Kern County. The U. S Census Bureau recognizes data centers throughout the state for the decennial census and all other census programs. Kern COG provides assistance to census data users, maintains a publicly accessible collection of census bureau reference and statistical publications and determines the need for census workshops within Kern County. The Executive Director of Kern COG is the “key person” in charge of coordinating activities for the upcoming year 2010 census. As the state-

designated Affiliate Data Center, Kern COG produces Kern Data Books.

Home Mortgage Disclosure Depository

– The Federal Reserve Board has designated Kern COG as the central depository for bank mortgage residential loan reports. Kern COG is required to provide public access to the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act information.

Kern County Transportation Authority

– On May 31, 1988, the Kern County Board of Supervisors (Resolution No. 88-466) appointed the Kern Council of Governments as the Local Transportation Authority, in accordance with Division 19 of the Public Utilities Code (Section 180000 et. seq.). As the Local Transportation Authority, Kern COG may adopt an ordinance that outlines an expenditure plan of transportation projects and proposes an increase in transactions and use taxes.



Kern Motorist Aid Authority – In accordance with Sections 2500, 2550-2560 of the California Streets and Highways Code, the Kern Motorist Aid Authority (KMAA) was created on May 19, 1988. The KMAA Board of Directors consists of the Kern COG Board members. KMAA is authorized to finance, implement, operate and maintain a motorist aid call box system. Coordination of the installation, operation and maintenance of the system with the California Department of Transportation and the California Highway Patrol is required.

Kern Congestion Management Agency – Pursuant to California Government Code Section 65089 (a), Kern COG has been designated the Congestion Management Agency (CMA) by a majority of the cities representing a majority of the population and the Kern County Board of Supervisors. The Kern Congestion Management Agency is made up of one representative from each of the 11 incorporated cities and two representatives from the County of Kern. The Golden Empire Transit District, Kern County Air Pollution Control District, the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District, and Caltrans are represented on the Agency Board in an ex-officio capacity. As the state-designated CMA, Kern COG maintains the Congestion Management Program (CMP).

Transportation Demand Management/Kern Commuter Connection – In a contract with the California Department of Transportation, Kern COG administers Kern Commuter Connection for the region. The rideshare program assists employers and commuters to reduce the number of Single Occupant Vehicles (SOVs) in

the region. Staff educates employers on Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies and provides commuters with potential car and vanpool match lists. Reduction in SOVs plays a significant role in the Transportation Control Measure portion of the Air Quality Attainment Plan.



Planning for the Future

Kern COG's Regional Transportation Plan

Kern COG's most important function is preparing a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) for

the Kern County region. The RTP is at least a 20-year plan that guides the region's transportation decisions. This plan is a "living" document, subject to continual review, and is updated to reflect changing conditions and new planning priorities. Any federally funded transportation project in the region must be included in the RTP before the project can receive funds. The RTP assesses current and future conditions and needs, estimates the transportation system's future funding expectations, and identifies and analyzes solutions for those needs.

Because the challenges that the transportation system presents extend beyond local boundaries, Kern COG collaborates with local and state transportation planners, transit agencies, the general public, and special interest organizations in preparing and managing the RTP.

Once a draft RTP is completed, it is evaluated in many ways, most importantly to ensure that it continues to advance the plans goals. Since a lot of the money needed to complete the projects in the RTP comes from the federal government, it must

meet the requirements of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) and include only those projects the region can afford, thus assuring the RTP is “fiscally constrained” (i.e., a source for funding is already identified). In addition, 1990 amendments to the Federal Clean Air Act say that projects in the RTP, taken as a whole, must keep the region within agreed upon air-quality standards. Finally, Federal regulations require that issues of environmental justice be considered and addressed consistent with Title VI, and Executive Order 12898.

No transportation project in the region can move forward unless it is consistent with regional goals and is, therefore, included in the RTP. The RTP in effect is the *Destination 2030 Regional Transportation Plan* adopted in August 2004. (The RTP is available for viewing on the Kern COG Web site (www.kerncog.org).

TIP: Putting the RTP into Action

If you think of the RTP project list as a warehouse full of transportation projects for the next 20-plus years, the

TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) is the vehicle that carries those projects to market. Every two years the TIP pulls projects from the RTP that will be ready to begin within the next three years.

The process begins when Kern COG’s technical committee requests projects from the local agencies for the coming TIP cycle. Projects submitted for review must include the anticipated schedule and cost. Like the RTP, the projects in the TIP must be financially constrained, undergo a series of evaluations, and include opportunity for public comment. Once compiled, review of the TIP begins. Next, the technical committee, an advisory committee to Kern COG, convenes to recommend the list of projects. Projects receive air quality and environmental justice analysis, and during this time there is a 30-day public review.

Upon final approval by the Kern COG Board of Directors, the TIP is submitted to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) for approval, and then forwarded to the federal government



(FHWA and FTA) for final approval.

The TIP is changing document. Frequently, projects may be added to meet changing priorities or to take advantage of a special opportunity. Other projects may need to be dropped from the list, or delayed because of environmental or technical issues. For this reason, the TIP may be changed after it is approved. It can be amended in order to add, change, or delete projects for a variety of reasons. Amendments to the TIP must undergo the same review and public scrutiny as the original TIP.

Public Comment Opportunities

The process for developing the Regional Transportation Plan is a complex, collaborative effort

involving Kern COG, the Federal Highway Administration, Caltrans, local public agencies, public transit operators, special interest groups, and the general public.

Public comment on the region’s transportation system is ongoing. It begins with dialogue at the local level government level at local government meetings and public hearings. Letters, phone calls, and e-mails are also effective. Public comment is always encouraged and appreciated. Informed citizens should be aware of Kern COG’S transportation planning partners, as they all contribute to the RTP.



Outreach Activities

Kern COG reaches out to the public in many ways. Here are some examples:

Local Community Meetings –

Throughout the year, Kern COG in conjunction with our partners, conducts community meetings designed to address specific issues associated with specific plans and projects. These community meetings are announced in advance through a variety of methods, including radio, newspapers, flyers, and specific mailings.

Public Workshops – Kern COG in conjunction with our partners, conducts public workshops that generally concern a specific plan or project. These workshops generally are hosted in the project or planning area. The workshops are designed to educate the public on the proposed project and to gather information, ideas and concerns about the specific plan or projects.

Speakers Bureau – Kern COG maintains a speakers bureau, offering public presentations on the transportation process to any group upon request.



Although primarily used to disseminate information and educate people, each presentation is also a major opportunity to gather new ideas, opinions and concerns from meeting participants.

Community Fairs – Each year, Kern COG attends several community fairs throughout the region. Kern COG displays transportation and community profile information about the community hosting the festival. Although these are primarily

opportunities to disseminate information and educate people, they are also opportunities to gather opinions and concerns from the area residents.

Kern COG's Web Site – Another way to access Kern COG data is through its web site – www.kerncog.org. The site contains the following items: current agendas for the Board of Directors and technical committees, meeting and workshop announcements, community profiles, and library

of Kern COG documents, plus much more.

Televised Monthly Meetings

– Beginning in January 2003, Kern COG began to video tape its month meeting of the Board of Director which is then replayed each Monday at 7 PM on KGOV, the local government access channel cable systems throughout the region.

Regional Forums – Four regional committees have been formed, consisting of members of the Kern COG Board of Directors, meeting twice each year (fall and spring). These Regional Forums are held in various communities throughout four specific geographic areas.

Rideshare – Kern COG provides a free regional rideshare matching service called Kern Commuter Connection, which provides alternatives to driving alone – carpooling, vanpooling and telecommuting. For additional information on these programs, call 661-832-RIDE (832-7433) or visit the Kern COG web site www.kerncog.org, go to Get Involved – Customer Feedback.