



Joint Meeting Between Southern California Association of Governments and Kern Council of Governments

Kern Council of Governments (KCOG) in coordination and cooperation with the MPO directly to our south, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) held a joint meeting on October 30, at Tejon Ranch Headquarters in Lebec. The meeting was well attended by five KCOG Board Members and three staff; two SCAG Board Members and four staff. The two MPOs discussed topics of mutual interest and benefit, including:

- CAFE Standards/SAFE Rule and Federal preemption of State Fuel Economy Standards which will effect conformity for both MPOs;
- Potential Work Around of the SAFE Rule;
- Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA);
- Goods Movement (Distribution Centers in Kern County)
- Rail Facilities; and
- Ports.



Executive Director, Ahron Hakimi discussed Transportation Secretary Kim's visit to Kern COG and what was discussed during that visit including Executive Order N-19 -19, the Nationally Significant Freight Routes of Interstate 5, SR 99 and SR 58 and the Draft 2020 ITIP that proposes to rescind dollars for important projects on SR 46 and SR 99 in Tulare and Madera counties. Ahron encouraged everyone to consider attending the additional hearing on the ITIP that is scheduled for November 15 in Fresno.

Executive Director, Kome Ajise discussed SCAG's Draft Release of Connect SoCal: SCAG's 2020-2045 RTP, and the process SCAG embarked on over the past three years including multigenerational planning, technology, public input, and next steps to get to final adoption in April 2020. He also discussed the Draft RHNA

Methodology and the challenges in the SCAG region to meet the RHNA requirements. To put this in perspective, Executive Director Kome explained that HCD's Final Determination in August 2019 of housing units needed was 1,344,740. SCAG filed an objection and in October 2019 HCD issued a Final Determination that 1,341,827 housing units were needed for a small change of 2,903 units, still a very tall order.

Valley Leaders Urge Sacramento to Fully fund Highway 99/46 Projects

Dozens of Central Valley leaders including Kern leaders David Couch, Grace Vallejo, Cathy Prout, Olivia Trujillo, Jose Gurrola and Ahron Hakimi, implored the California Transportation Commission to fully fund major improvement projects along SR 99 in Madera and Tulare as well as the area known as "Blood Alley" along SR 46. The recently issued Caltrans 2020 Transportation Plan calls for the deletion of the planned \$9 million SR 99 widening in Madera from Avenue 7 to Avenue 12 and the \$8 million expansion of SR 99 through the City of Tulare. Also up for elimination is the \$15 million improvement work on SR 46 on the Antelope Pass in San Luis Obispo County.



The Caltrans plan states the funding to be eliminated will be "held in reserve for priority rail projects and other priorities" identified by Governor Newsom. The Vice Chair of the Commission, Paul Van Konyenberg, made a request to see all the other rail funding coming in — including federal funding — in a diagram at the next Commission meeting in December.



Kramer Junction Bypass

Caltrans opened a nine mile stretch on State Route (SR) 58 that allows motorists crossing the Mojave Desert to bypass a stoplight at the critical intersection of SR 58 and U.S. Route 395. In 2016 Caltrans records showed that 14,100 tractor trailer rigs per day crossed the west side of the intersection causing delays of up to half an hour. The "long overdue" relief of congestion at Kramer Junction will improve safety, speed freight and reduce air pollution caused by idling engines, said Ahron Hakimi, Executive Director of Kern COG. The opening of the Kramer Junction Bypass provides motorists who use SR 58 to access Interstate 40 and Interstate 15 in Barstow and on to the rest of the nation. Retired Congressman Bill Thomas called the Kramer Junction Bypass exciting and long overdue, a sign Bakersfield is becoming a major distribution center. The entire project cost is \$200 million of mostly federal funds and is planned to be completed by June of 2020.

Rio Tinto Discovers Lithium in Boron Mine

Rio Tinto, one of Eastern Kern County's leading industries, mines for borates in the town of Boron. Recently it discovered lithium and has launched a project to test its capacity for extracting lithium carbonate from its "trailings," which is the waste left behind by the mining process. If the \$10 million project proves successful, the company said it may invest \$50 million expanding the operation so it can become the largest domestic supplier of lithium to the growing U.S. electric vehicle market. County Supervisor, Zack Scrivner, whose District 2 encompasses Boron said the initial project could make Rio Tinto "more viable, and also bolster our renewable energy sector."

Lithium is a relatively rare element that is produced in only small quantities in the United States. China is believed to be the world's largest producer of lithium, making U.S. production of lithium a strategic priority for the Trump administration. Richard Cohen, managing director of borates and lithium at London- and Melbourne- based Rio Tinto, said the discovery of lithium in mining trailings could extend the life of the mine in Boron, which has been estimated as being on track to shut down in 40 years. The mine has been in operation for about 90 years.

Upcoming Events

November 26, 2019 - Regional Award Nominations Due to Kern COG

December 4 & 5, 2019 - California Transportation Commission Meeting in Riverside

January 8, 2020 - 20/21 Overall Work Program Meeting with Caltrans, FHWA and FTA

January 17, 2020 - San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council/Multi Agency Working Group Meeting

January 29 & 30, 2020 - California Transportation Commission Meeting in Sacramento