



Item #05-11-14 Action

Board of Directors

November 10, 2005

SACOG Efforts to Link Planning to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Issue: What progress is SACOG making in streamlining the federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process by linking it to regular planning requirements and activities?

Recommendation: This item was scheduled to be heard by the Transportation & Air Quality Committee; however, due to lack of a quorum, the Transportation & Air Quality Committee did not meet. It is the recommendation of staff that the Board approve that SACOG continue to pursue NEPA streamlining to the fullest extent federal agency agreements and resources allow, and that the Executive Director continue to seek additional resources to make the maximum use of this opportunity.

Discussion: A year ago, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) offered SACOG the opportunity to pioneer NEPA streamlining in California, based to some extent on the success and promise of the Blueprint. Federal agency, state, and local leaders met at an Executive Seminar in May 2005, with Chairman Gaines representing the Board, to consider up to four streamlining options:

- Define NEPA Purpose & Need for major projects in the Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP);
- Identify environmental impacts and mitigations in context of the MTP that need to be considered for projects in the MTP;
- Narrow project alternatives to be studied for certain MTP projects, based on Purpose & Need of the overall MTP; and
- Agree on and document regional-scale environmental impacts and avoidance or mitigation for urban MTP projects and associated Blueprint land developments.

The executives approved moving forward toward all four objectives. A follow-on Manager's Workshop in June 2005 came up with an Action Plan, a copy of which is attached. The Executive Seminar reconvened on November 2 to ratify its original direction that the present reactive process is not producing the desired outcomes, entrusted SACOG's proposal as a desirable alternative approach to test, made suggestions about continuing collaboration, and endorsed the Action Plan. The group decided that the next steps over the next two to three months would (a) clarify and add details to the Final Action Plan, including how it relates directly to the SACOG MTP process; (b) spell out assurances for a streamlined NEPA process the resource agencies will support; (c) obtain the very best national resource databases in-house at SACOG; and (d) ensure staffing all around for the consultation process with the resource agencies.

SAFETEA, enacted in August 2005, contains provisions to delegate NEPA responsibilities from U.S. Department of Transportation to five states, one of which is California, for a six-year pilot period. FHWA and Caltrans must define the terms and conditions for this delegation by May 2006, which in turn may affect the content and completion of the Action Plan developed for SACOG.

Approved by:

Mike McKeever
Executive Director

MM:PH:gg
Attachment

Key Staff: Pete Hathaway, Director of Transportation, (916) 340-6235

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Glossary of Terms

1. **AA** – Alternatives analysis: an FTA process for comparing different alternatives of a project.
2. **ACOE** – Army Corps of Engineers
3. **CalFed** – A state and Federal agreement concerning water shipments, the environment, and the Delta.
4. **CDFG** – California Department of Fish & Game
5. **CEQA** – California Environmental Quality Act (1970)
6. **CTC** – California Transportation Commission
7. **EPA** – Federal Environmental Protection Agency
8. **FHWA** – Federal Highway Administration
9. **FTA** – Federal Transit Administration
10. **FWS** – U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
11. **GIS** – Geographic Information Systems: a tool for analyzing and displaying data geographically, including maps
12. **MOA** – Memorandum of Agreement
13. **MPO** – Metropolitan Planning Organization, federally reorganized planning agency for urban areas; SACOG fulfills this role in the Sacramento region
14. **MTP** – Metropolitan Transportation Plan
15. **NEPA** – National Environmental Protection Act (1970)
16. **P&N** – Statement of Purpose and Need, for describing project objectives in the federal and state environmental process
17. **PIP** – Public Involvement Plan
18. **QUANTM** – A proprietary computer program used by consultants for transportation planning.
19. **SHPO** – State Historic Preservation Office
20. **WQCB** – Water Quality Control Board