

MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC
April 9 – 11, 2024

INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY

ISSUE: As Congress and the Biden Administration consider Fiscal Year 2025 and future year funding, the Monday Morning Group urges investment in Riverside County that will enhance the goods movement, multimodal transportation options that provide traffic relief, and habitat conservation in support of streamlining project delivery.

Surface Transportation Reauthorization

BACKGROUND: The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funds investments in the nation's infrastructure through 2026. Congress and the Administration will soon begin to hold conversations regarding surface transportation reauthorization to ensure continuity of transportation funding beyond the IIJA. Riverside County leads the nation in the goods movement with more than 40% of the nation's goods traveling through the region by truck and train. Additionally, Riverside County is the fourth-most populous county in California and the 10th-most populous in the United States. Rapid population growth is expected to continue, reaching 3 million residents by 2048, up from 2.5 million in 2022. Riverside County's roads, highways, and transit systems cannot keep up with this growth, and that is why the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) is strategically planning for the future. RCTC's Draft Traffic Relief Plan identifies over \$25 billion in needed mobility improvements to keep residents and goods moving.

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group urges Congress and the Administration in the next surface transportation reauthorization bill to prioritize formula and competitive grant funding for geographically large regions, such as Riverside County, that are experiencing significant population and goods movement growth. Riverside County's place in national goods movement is indispensable for the economy, but hardworking residents cannot be expected to compete with semi-trucks on congested highways and freight trains at grade crossings to make ends meet. RCTC is counting on the federal government to redouble its role as a funding partner and ensure the long-term viability of Riverside County's nationally significant infrastructure system.

Coachella Valley Rail Project

BACKGROUND: The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) has long supported developing multimodal transportation solutions to improve mobility choice, relieve traffic congestion, and improve air quality. More than 160,000 people travel through the San Geronio pass in Riverside County each day, demonstrating a clear need for daily intercity rail service that provides a meaningful alternative to traveling on Interstate 10 or State Route 60. The Coachella Valley Rail (CV Rail) Project will deliver new service that bolsters the regional economy, provides alternatives to traffic congestion, reduces climate impacts, and meets the diverse transportation needs of millions of Southern California residents. The CV Rail Project will extend approximately 144 miles between Los Angeles County and the Coachella Valley, with stops in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties. RCTC certified the CV Rail Tier I service-level environmental review in 2022 and has made significant progress toward advancing the Tier II environmental review to assess project-level impacts of construction.

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group applauds the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) inclusion of the CV Rail Project in the federal Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program, which aims to guide intercity passenger rail service development in the country. Inclusion of the CV Rail Project in this program enables the project to be more competitive for future federal funding. As CV Rail advances, the Monday Morning Group encourages the FRA and Congress to prioritize funding opportunities for the Project in future competitive grant programs and formula funds in the next surface transportation reauthorization legislation.

Additionally, the Monday Morning Group encourages the FRA to collaboratively engage with Union Pacific Railroad (UP), which owns the right-of-way and operates freight rail along the eastern portion of the preferred route for the CV Rail Project. Receiving approval to build an additional track and operate intercity passenger service from UP is critical to ensuring the project's overall success and continuity of UP's rail operations.

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Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority

BACKGROUND: In January 2021, RCTC became the managing agency for the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA), which is charged with administering the Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (MSHCP). The MSHCP is one of the largest plans of its kind and calls for establishing a 500,000-acre habitat reserve for the conservation of 146 native species, 34 of which are endangered or threatened. As a federally designated Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP), the MSHCP protects the environment while streamlining the environmental review process for housing and infrastructure project delivery, resulting in improved efficiency, certainty, and cost savings.

State and federal governments have collectively committed to acquiring 56,000 acres for the MSHCP habitat reserve. Federal funding to support HCP land acquisition peaked at \$80 million in 2002 and now would be funded at \$26 million for Fiscal Year 2024. However, the number of HCPs has increased and the cost for land have surged over recent decades, especially in rapidly developing Riverside County. This leaves the MSHCP with fewer resources to meet its habitat conservation goals that enable streamlined infrastructure delivery. Recognizing this concern, Senator Alex Padilla and Representative Ken Calvert sent a letter to Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in October 2023 urging the Department to request an increase in funding for HCP land acquisition to at least \$100 million in Fiscal Year 2025.

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group supports Senator Alex Padilla’s and Representative Ken Calvert’s request and encourages Congress to appropriate \$100 million to the HCP Land Acquisition Grant program under the Land and Water Conservation Fund in Fiscal Year 2025. This funding will enable the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to meet the demand for funding under this overprescribed program, supporting the Endangered Species Act and the “America the Beautiful” initiative goals to conserve 30% of the nation’s lands and waters by 2030, while advancing critical infrastructure projects across the country. The MSHCP enables smart growth in western Riverside County and the federal government must continue investment to meet its commitment to the MSHCP.