

**Air Quality Conformity Task Force
Summary Meeting Notes
March 7, 2011**

Attendance:

Ginger Vagenas – EPA
Ted Matley – FTA
Stew Sonnenberg– FHWA
Dick Fahey – Caltrans
Mike Brady – Caltrans
Andrea Gordon – BAAQMD
Jacki Taylor – ACTC
Laurel Poeton – ACTC
Wajahat Nyaz – Caltrans
Glenn Kinoshka – Caltrans
Dianne Steinhauser - TAM
Jit Pandher – TAM

John Martin - TAM
Chris Barney - SCTA
Lauren Bobadilla – VTA
Leo Scott – VTA
Dawn Cameron – County of Santa Clara
Roads and Airports Department
Mike Griffis – County of Santa Clara Roads
and Airports Department
Ashley Nguyen – MTC
Grace Cho – MTC
Brenda Dix – MTC
Sri Srinivasan – MTC

1. **Welcome and Self Introductions:** Ashley Nguyen (MTC) called the meeting to order at 10:05am. See attendance roster above. She stated the purpose of the task force meeting was to conduct interagency consultation for PM_{2.5} project level conformity.
2. **PM_{2.5} Interagency Consultations:** To begin the interagency consultations for PM_{2.5} project level conformity Ashley asked each project sponsor give a brief project summary prior to opening up the project for question.

POAQC Status Determinations

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA): SR-237/I-880 Express Connectors

Lauren Bobadilla (VTA) explained the scope of the project is to convert existing dedicated HOV connectors to I-880 to SR-237 into express lanes in order to allow single occupancy drivers use of the lanes for a fee. The environmental document being completed for this project is a categorical exclusion and VTA believes the project is not a project of air quality concern (POAQC).

Dick Fahey (Caltrans) did not have any further questions about the project and felt this project is not a POAQC. Mike Brady (Caltrans) said he believed, from a technical standpoint, the project is not a POAQC, but had other concerns that the conversion of HOV to express lanes has not been studied enough to know the impacts to HOVs. However, Mike mentioned he believed test cases needed to be done before the impacts can be seen.

Mike followed up asking a related question to EPA. He asked if the HOV lanes were a TCM for the region. Ashley responded saying the project is not a TCM and Ginger Vagenas (EPA) concurred Ashley's response. Mike said if the project was a TCM then a substitution would be likely. Mike agreed with Dick the project is not a POAQC. Ginger, then Stew Sonnenberg (FHWA), Ted Matley (FTA), and the remainder of the Task Force concurred.

Mike asked if there are any studies being conducted on HOV conversions to express lanes. Lauren responded mentioning this is the first HOV to express lane conversion project to be

seen in Santa Clara county. Leo Scott (VTA) added the legislation authorizing the implementation of the VTA HOV to express lane conversion project requires the project sponsor provide traffic counts and a report on the operations for the first three years from when it is implemented. He is unsure if there will be a study, but assured the data is being collected and reported.

Final Determination: FHWA, FTA, EPA, Caltrans, and the remaining Task Force members concurred and determined the SR-237/I-880 Express Connectors project is not a project of air quality concern.

Transportation Authority of Marin/Sonoma County Transportation Authority: US 101/U.S. 101 HOV Lanes – Marin-Sonoma Narrows

Wajahat Nyaz (Caltrans) provided a brief presentation, explaining Marin-Sonoma Narrows is a 16.1 mile corridor project which is separated into three segments. One segment is contained within the City of Petaluma and the second segment is in the City of Navato. The third segment is the span which connects both segments, often referred to as the “narrows” because the section reduces down to a four lane expressway. The scope of the project is to build HOV lanes throughout the entire length of the corridor. Additionally, the narrows section would be converted from an expressway to a freeway where two new interchanges and new frontage roads would be constructed. There will be a continuous bike path as well. The project looks to be completed by 2017 and is being constructed in two phases.

Dick had said the truck volumes for the project were low enough to support the project as not a POAQC, but he did wonder where the 10-20% increase in traffic volume was coming from the build/no build situations. Glenn Kinoshka (Caltrans) responded by saying the traffic volume increases are likely because there is not an alternate north/south route and result of more people using the HOV lanes. Once receiving that clarification, Dick reaffirmed he still believed the project is not a POAQC.

Mike then responded he felt he was on the fence with the project. He expressed concern about a refuse station being located in the project area because presumably the trucks accessing the site are all diesel. So he asked the project sponsors what are the truck volumes attributed to the refuse site since it is a point source of trucks and diesel emissions. He also mentioned feeling conflicted since the only added lanes for the project are HOV, and therefore the truck volumes would not change significantly because the additional lanes are for light duty vehicles only. He felt without a clear sense of the truck volumes due to the refuse site, the project is a very borderline POAQC.

Glenn responded to Mike saying he did not have disaggregated truck volumes which would identify the truck volumes at the refuse site. Ashley followed up by stating the HOV lanes do not facilitate more truck traffic to the refuse site. Dianne Steinhauser (TAM) also clarified there are not any alternate routes to the refuse site and the refuse site traffic would not affect the traffic generated by the project. She also mentioned Marin county had recently adopted limitations on the refuse site through a reuse plan which would limit the facility’s growth in the future. She reiterated the project does not have a direct nexus in supporting or not supporting the refuse facility. She also confirmed the land use for the area has been zoned for agricultural and therefore there are no future land uses to generate more truck traffic.

Mike continued to state he felt the project was on the fence as a POAQC because of the increase in future traffic volumes, but would be okay if the project was determined not a POAQC by the Task Force. Stew Sonnenberg (FHWA) agreed with Mike and reiterated that while the traffic volume goes above the thresholds stated in the EPA guidelines, the truck volume remains nearly unchanged build/no build scenarios. Stew viewed the project as not a POAQC. Ginger agreed. All Task Force members came to consensus that the project is not a POAQC.

Final Determination: FHWA, FTA, EPA, Caltrans, and the remaining Task Force members concurred and determined the U.S. 101/U.S. 101 HOV Lanes – Marin-Sonoma Narrows project is not a project of air quality concern.

Santa Clara County: Almaden Expressway Improvements

Mike Griffis (Santa Clara County) explained the project is on the Almaden expressway in the City of San Jose with about 38,000 ADT. The project will make improvements between Brandon Lane and Blossom Hill road. The project scope includes adding a northbound and southbound lane and making improvements to some of the intersections to eliminate some of the free running right turns and improve pedestrian access. Additionally, pedestrian and bicycle signal timing is being incorporated.

Dick said the project is not a POAQC based on the low volumes and truck traffic. Mike also agreed based on the general character of the project. Stew and Ginger also agreed.

Ginger also reiterated that the thresholds outlined in the EPA guidance is not a bright line rule for determining POAQC, but EPA also wants the consultation process to consider the differences between build and no build scenarios when determining POAQC.

Final Determination: FHWA, FTA, EPA, Caltrans, and the remaining Task Force members concurred and determined the Almaden Expressway Improvements project is not a project of air quality concern.

Exempt Project List from PM_{2.5} Project Level Conformity

Grace Cho (MTC) explained the project list submitted to the Task Force are those which the individual project sponsors identified as exempt from PM_{2.5} project level conformity. Grace explained in light of some questions posed by EPA regarding certain projects which did not appear to fit an exemption code clearly, MTC asked the Task Force to remove the following projects from the exempt project list so MTC may follow up with project sponsors.

TIP ID	Project Sponsor	Project Title	Follow Up Action
CC-110024	Contra Costa County	Marsh Creek Safety Improvements – Deer Valley	Follow up clarify project scope.
CC-110025	Contra Costa County	Marsh Creek Safety Improvements - Russelmann	Follow up clarify project scope.
MRN050001	Transportation Authority of Marin	U.S. 101/Greenbrae Internchange Corridor Improvements	Clarify the scope of work of this project. Is the project constructing a new interchange or is it a traffic synchronization project?
MRN050014	Transportation Authority of Marin	Central Marin Ferry Access Improvements	Follow up to clarify the project scope.
MRN070019	Marin County	Marin Parkland Visitor Access – Phase 2	Follow up to clarify the project scope.
MRN990035	Marin County	Marin Parkland Visitor Access	Notify the project sponsor this project is not exempt from project level conformity and will need to undergo consultation.
SM-110007	City San Mateo	Deleware Street Bike Lane and Streetscape	MTC will follow up with Ginger about what are the outer boundaries of what is considered a safety project. Ginger will follow up with OTAC to determine if a road diet project be deemed exempt under a safety exemption in 40 CFR 93.126
SM-110033	City of South San Francisco	Sister Cities Blvd. Gaurdrail Project	
SON090031	City of Santa Rosa	Sixth Street Bicycle and Pedestrian Linkage	Clarify the scope of work and determined if the project is constructing a new roadway and if the project is bicycle and pedestrian project.
SON110006	City of Petaluma	Petaluma Boulevard South Road Diet	MTC will follow up with Ginger about what are the outer boundaries of what is considered a safety project. Ginger will follow up with OTAC to determine if a road diet project be deemed exempt under a safety exemption in 40 CFR 93.126

Mike noted some of projects being removed from the exempt project list are park and ride construction projects which he has never figured out if an exemption applied. In other regions, Mike said he observed the park and ride expansion projects going through

interagency consultation. He asked that Ginger raise the question to OTAC to see if park and ride facilities may fall under an exemption category and she said she would follow up.

MTC also made the request to correct the exemption code for City of Oakland project W. - Grand Avenue – Left Turn Phasing – HSIP from a Safety – Hazard Elimination Program to a Safety – Safety Improvement Program. The Task Force agreed.

Mike also noted several of the projects MTC has requested to remove from the exempt project list are ultimately “road diet” projects and asked Ginger if EPA considered road diets a capacity changing project? Ginger responded it is unclear because the removal of a travel lane may impact service levels at intersections, ultimately leading to negative local air quality impacts and can cause redirection of traffic. Mike followed up by saying he believes it would depend if the facility is regionally significant.

Ashley stated the road diet projects being seen and funded by MTC are often projects on residential streets with low traffic speeds and volumes. Mike responded saying that ultimately the road diet projects are highly unlikely to be projects of air quality concern, even if located on a regionally significant facility. Mike then posed the question to EPA, can road diet or traffic calming projects which reduce the number of travel lanes be considered exempt under one of the EPA exemption categories? Sri Srinivasan (MTC) asked if a safety exemption can qualify for road diet projects, because ultimately road diet projects are being completed to improve the safety of users. Mike said he would ultimately like to see an exemption code for these projects. Ashley and Mike asked EPA guidance on the matter since road diet projects are more commonly being seen throughout the region. Ginger responded saying she would review the issue with EPA staff, but did ask MTC for guidance on what is the definition for a safety improvement project or a traffic calming measure. MTC agreed to follow up with Ginger on this item so she could consult with EPA staff.

Following the list of projects being removed from the exempt project list, MTC also asked the Task Force for guidance on the approach in reviewing the regionally exempt programs for PM_{2.5} project level conformity. In the exempt project list several programs were identified as exempt by staff based on the nature of the program. Ginger raised some concerns that reviewing the programs as a whole removes the ability to review the individual projects which consist of the program and ensure each project is being categorized properly. Ginger believed there can be some problematic classifications and would be interested in seeing the different projects as part of each program.

Ashley then explained that the projects grouped into these programs are previously reviewed by the Task Force when developing the transportation improvement program (TIP) and conducting the conformity analysis. Sri then explained that the projects in the TIP show the air quality status of each project and the Task Force has the ability to change the air quality status. Those projects which are exempt and can be bundled in a group under a program and placed in a group listing. For example, Safe Routes to School is a group listing. Additionally, all the projects within each program (identified as a group listing) can be seen on the MTC website at <http://www.mtc.ca.gov/funding/tip/2011/grouped.htm>.

Mike mentioned if the Task Force reviewed the projects, then the current process of concurring the exemption status seems unnecessary. Ashley agreed summarizing that if the individual projects have been previously reviewed and then there should not be a question of whether the projects are exempt.

Ginger responded saying she understood the issue, but also noted she does not always get to review each individual project with scrutiny and a second opportunity for a full review is helpful. Mike followed up by saying that the situation Ginger presents is possible, but unlikely to occur. Then Sri explained she conducts a review of all the projects a part of a group listing to spot if there are any projects which may appear that it is not exempt from conformity. Under those circumstances, Sri said she pulls those projects and they are placed in the TIP as individual non-exempt projects. Mike then restated he really believed the projects identified in the TIP do not need to return to the Task Force for review and concurrence. Ginger then stated she agreed with Mike because she felt that given one opportunity to review projects, it is redundant to review the same projects again in another venue.

The Task Force suggested that the group listed projects do not need to return to the Task Force for concurrence since they have been reviewed in a prior process.

Stew continued to express concern that despite these projects undergoing review by the Task Force, he noted there are small hand full of projects the Task Force may have further question. Stew suggested on a semiannual basis an exempt project list be brought before the Task Force as an information item where member can conduct an informal review and address any projects of concern. Mike also suggested providing a link to the list of projects in the group listing. Stew felt that was a better approach and Ted Matley (FTA) agreed. Ted also voiced concerns of duplicating review efforts and adding value to the process.

MTC staff agreed to provide the Task Force a link where all the projects in a group listing can be seen and Task Force members are welcome to review the individual projects on their own. The remainder of the Task Force then agreed the group listed projects presented at the meeting are concurred exempt.

Following the discussion of the group listed projects, Ashley asked the Task Force if there were any other projects on the exempt project list which attention should be raised. Andrea Gordon (BAAQMD) asked for more information about a bike-mobile project being sponsored by Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC). Jacki Taylor (ACTC) and Laurel Poeton (ACTC) clarified the bike mobile is an ice cream van-like vehicle which would be making about 2-3 site visits a week within the county of Alameda to educate and teach about bicycling. Andrea received the clarification and had no other concerns.

Dick made a motion to allow the remaining projects on the exempt list to move forward. The Task Force agreed and the remaining projects were concurred exempt.

Final Determination: FHWA, FTA, EPA, Caltrans, and the remaining Task Force members concurred the amended list of project as exempt from PM_{2.5} project level conformity.

- 3. Defining “Minor Fleet Expansion” Project Level Conformity Exemption (40 CFR 93.126) for PM2.5 Interagency Consultation:** Ted explained the purpose of bringing this item up for discussion was to address that there is not really any guidance on defining a “minor” fleet expansion and he wanted to explore if the Task Force was interested in creating a rule of thumb about what is considered a “minor” fleet expansion. Ted had mentioned FTA loosely uses 20% as a cut off for a minor fleet expansion, but as Sri pointed out in other processes 25% is used.

Ginger had mentioned she took this issue to OTAC and their response was that EPA strongly feels the Task Force should not create a rule of thumb to determine minor fleet expansion and should instead look at each project on a case-by-case basis.

Ted said FTA would be fine with following EPAs approach since it would make the make defining “minor” more context oriented based on the transit agency and project. Mike agreed and noted that for some transit agencies, a 20% rule of thumb would equate to an expansion of 2-3 buses whereas for others it could be 200 buses. Ted then suggested that the Task Force establish a regional threshold so it would not penalize any transit operators. Ashley also suggested that a general threshold might be a numeric increase because a two bus increase in fleet would seem strange to be considered beyond a minor expansion. Ginger then reiterated EPA strongly believes this should be considered on a case-by-case basis, however if the Task Force wanted to put forth a proposal to EPA she would be happy to take it to them. Ashley said MTC staff would review our TIP projects and get a sense of magnitude of the transit fleet expansions and bring it back to the Task Force to begin crafting a proposal. Ted thought it would be a good idea and felt that regardless of the number, if there is a rational to defend the number to define minor then he’d be satisfied and agree to a proposal.

- 4. Air Quality Conformity Task Force Summary Meeting Notes Approval:** Ashley requested that the Task Force begin to approve summary meeting notes of the previous Task Force meeting as the Task Force begins to meet on a regular basis. This is in light of project sponsors requesting documentation from MTC that the sponsor had completed the interagency consultation requirements for PM_{2.5} project level conformity. The Task Force agreed to begin approving summary meeting notes starting with the meeting summary notes for the meeting held on January 18, 2011. The Task Force approved the meeting summary notes, with one small addition, which was to include a summary of the follow up conversation which occurred after the meeting for the VTA U.S. 101 Auxiliary/HOV Lanes – SR 85 to San Mateo County Line.
- 5. Other Business:** Mike had mentioned the Statewide Conformity Working Group meeting was planned for Thursday March 10th. If any Task Force members are interested in participating, MTC has reserved a conference room to participate and to RSVP with MTC staff. He noted there are going to be some items issued by EPA that will be up for discussion that would be important for members input.

Ginger asked if there was any additional news about scheduling a regular monthly meeting? Grace said a doodle poll is in progress and she would follow up with Task Force next week on a regular meeting date.

With no additional business items, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15am.