

Fresno COG “One Voice” - 2011 Regional Issues

Issue	Summary	Area Affected
High Speed Rail – Streamlining	<i>We request assistance in streamlining the environmental permitting process for high speed rail development in Fresno and the Central Valley in order to reduce the cost estimates of the project and potentially extend the length of track constructed in the initial corridor.</i> Approximately \$5.5 million in federal and state matching funds has already been dedicated to the California High Speed Rail Authority to date for construction of as many as 120 miles of the project’s 520-mile first phase, and incorporate the Valley’s largest urban centers: Bakersfield and Fresno. Efforts to provide federal flexibility and streamlined permitting processes should be sought to ensure the efficient and effective build-out of the system.	Central Valley
High Speed Rail – Designation of High-Speed Rail Development Center	Fresno County is proposing the designation of Fresno County as the nation’s High-speed rail development center. This designation would encompass the federal training, testing, certification and maintenance facilities, as well as function as the research and development center for the nation’s high-speed rail system. A major outcome of Fresno County being designated as the nation’s High-Speed Rail Development Center would be the transformation from an area known for high poverty/high unemployment to a vibrant, economically healthy region. Fresno County is requesting the Obama Administration, through the Department of Transportation and Federal Railroad Administration, acknowledge and support Fresno County being designated as the nation’s high-speed rail development center.	Fresno County
Department of Labor Apprenticeship Programs	Under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), the Department of Labor provides four (-4-) primary performance measures for adult-aged clients. The current policy, however, does not consider placement of an unemployed or underemployed worker into a training program leading to an apprenticeship as a successful performance outcome. We are seeking a waiver from the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) to allow placement in a recognized apprenticeship program as equal to "Entry into unsubsidized employment."	Fresno County
Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics	Under the previous administration, the United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics stopped counting agricultural workers, forestry personnel, fishermen, and government workers in its compilation of mass layoff statistics. As in the Central Valley of California, farm workers, forestry personnel, fishermen and government workers are contributing members of the workforce around the country. Not counting these workers in the overall statistics produces inaccurate figures that are used to make precise decisions. We are requesting that the current administration reverse this policy to once again include these workers into the calculus of mass layoff statistics.	Fresno County

Department of Labor Funding Flexibility from to Allow for Increased Layoff Aversion Tactics	Current Workforce Investment Act (WIA) regulations dictate that Layoff Aversion tactics can only be funded through WIA Rapid Response funds. This restriction limits the number and effectiveness of programs that can help businesses to retain employees, and prevent layoffs, during difficult economic times and shifting industry trends. We are requesting the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) to also allow WIA Dislocated Worker Funds to be used for Incumbent Worker Training as a proven Layoff Aversion tactic. Incumbent Worker Training programs equip employees with new skills and techniques needed to keep jobs that require evolving skill sets. These programs are particularly useful in preparing the existing workforce for technological advancements and new manufacturing techniques. If this flexibility for Dislocated Worker Funds is allowed, employee retention facilitated by Layoff Aversion tactics will be closely monitored and documented.	Fresno County
Internal Revenue Service Empowerment Zone data	The Empowerment Zone (EZ) was established to spur the creation of businesses in economically distressed areas and to create job opportunities for economically disadvantaged workers. These tax incentives are an important component of the larger economic development and revitalization strategies in these federally designated areas. The extension of these tax incentives are part of the current on-going budget negotiations. To advocate that these tax incentives be renewed, the designated regions must be able to provide accurate data that reflects the efficacy of the program. To show the efficacy of the program we are requesting that the Internal Revenue Service provide aggregate data based on the designated regions (through ZIP codes) to allow for 1) better tracking, 2) better management and 3) quantifiable defense for the renewal of this incentive program.	Fresno County
FCC Narrowband Rules Reconsideration	The FCC issued rules in 2004 that require public safety licensees in the VHF and UHF bands to migrate to narrowband operation by January 2013. Due to the economically distressed budgets of states, counties, cities and special districts over the past two and a half years, many public safety agencies have been unable to migrate to the narrowband frequencies. The Fresno Council of Governments, representing 15 cities and the County, ask that the Rule's implementation date be modified to ensure public safety agencies continue to have the necessary operability and interoperability of their radio systems. When considering whether to grant the preliminary order for relief, three factors should be considered: • The threat of irreparable harm absent preliminary relief • The degree of harm to the FCC or other agencies which hold frequencies would be minimal in our opinion • Whether the preliminary order for relief would further the public interest	San Joaquin Valley
Energy Efficiency	<i>We ask for continued appropriations for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) Program administered by the US Department of Energy.</i> This program provides needed funding for energy	San Joaquin

	efficiency and renewable energy projects in all jurisdictions throughout the San Joaquin Valley in 2009. Much has been accomplished as a result of this federal clean energy funding. Much more remains to be done. We ask that the EECBG be continued to enable the Valley jurisdictions to fully utilize these clean energy funds in order to reduce their energy usage/costs and further develop renewable energy capacity in their communities.	Valley
Sustainable Communities Initiative	We ask for continued support for the region on Sustainable Communities activities. The Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program, administered by HUD, is designed to support multi-jurisdictional regional planning efforts that integrate housing, economic development, and transportation decision-making in a manner that empowers jurisdictions to consider the interdependent challenges of economic growth, social equity, and environmental impact simultaneously. The first round of funding was completed in October 2010, but there will likely be other similar opportunities through HUD, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the US Environmental Protection Agency, working together as The Partnership for Sustainable Communities. We appreciate the support we have received to date as the Compact of Cities (Smart Valley Places) representing the 14 largest cities in the Valley received a \$4 million Sustainable Communities Planning grant in October 2010.	San Joaquin Valley
Water – Supply, Reliability and Quality	Water is currently the most critical issue being faced by the San Joaquin Valley. Many pressing concerns—new as well as long standing—are affecting water supply reliability, quantity, and quality of the region’s agricultural, urban, and environmental water needs. The San Joaquin Valley needs the support and partnership of State and Federal legislators, and water management and infrastructure agencies as we work through the complex issues surrounding water supply, reliability, and quality. Several recommendations are included on accompanying materials.	San Joaquin Valley
Air Quality Enterprise/ Empowerment Zone Designation Federal Tax Legislation (Authorization)	The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is seeking the establishment of a new designation as an Air Quality Enterprise/Empowerment Zone at the state and federal level. The new designation would recognize that the Valley has a unique air quality and economic situation that calls for additional state and federal resources to effectively meet the challenges that we face. Given the Valley’s climate and economic situation, it is abundantly clear that aggressive regulatory measures alone will not yield the needed reductions to attain the federal air quality standards. A primary reason for this is that new tail-pipe standards for on-road and off-road engines will not produce any reduction in emissions until old engines are replaced with new cleaner engines. Without incentive grants, the full benefit of the new engine standards will not be realized for decades. Additionally, incentive grants can allow for adoption of cleaner technologies that may otherwise be unaffordable. Furthermore, industrial equipment at stationary sources could be replaced with newer and cleaner equipment with appropriate incentive funding.	San Joaquin Valley

Juvenile Information Sharing	This policy-focused project will improve quality of life outcomes for at-risk youth by increasing data sharing between Fresno County Department of Social Services and over 22 identified key stakeholders throughout the County, including: 19 unified school districts, Probation, Children’s Mental Health Services, and Fresno County Superior Court Juvenile Delinquency Division. Moreover, information sharing can ensure youth not only have the services they need regardless of where they move in the County, but that staff have the information they need to ensure safety at our public school campuses, at the juvenile justice campus, as well as our neighborhoods and communities. We are seeking exemptions and/or waivers to certain rules and policies that create limitations in being able to adequately share information between agencies in a timely manner. Support of this project in this fiscal year, will leverage its available funds and provide the much needed regulatory assistance to complete a longstanding vision.	Fresno County
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program	We urge the Obama Administration to support continued funding of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program, as pledged during the presidential campaign. CDBG funds are used effectively and discretionally by local governments to target local priorities and positively impact unique local economies. Annual CDBG funds are distributed to communities according to statutory formulas based on population, poverty, pre-1940 housing stock, growth lag, and housing overcrowding. Most all CDBG funds are targeted directly to low- and moderate-income persons and communities. Recipients such as Fresno County have given priority to responsible activities that are awarded and/or constructed quickly to have an immediate positive impact on those in need. Local government in Fresno County, the same as in states and other locales around the nation, have a backlog of such critical projects that are implemented efficiently and effectively and positively impact the local economy for years to come. While we understand the fiscal challenges facing the federal government, we urge that the Obama Administration stave off any cut to the uniquely valuable CDBG program.	Fresno County
Streamline Environmental Permitting	Developers of real estate and renewable energy projects are often faced with the challenge of having to file, process, and secure Federal Environmental approvals for their projects. Some Federal processes have fixed timelines; some do not. Developers need to be able to have some assurance about processing times or they will not be able to secure financing or plan for construction, marketing, or sales. We urge the Administration to explore ways to expedite and streamline environmental processing timelines for real estate and renewable energy projects. Several possible streamlining methods are included in the white paper.	Fresno County

