



HUMBOLDT COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

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AGENDA ITEM 7b
HCAOG Board Meeting
January 15, 2026

DATE: January 9, 2026
TO: HCAOG Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)
FROM: Stevie Luther, Associate Planner
SUBJECT: **Regional Transportation Plan Review of Public Comments**

DISCUSSION ITEM STAFF REPORT

Contents:

- Staff Summary
- Draft Appendix A: Community Engagement (including full survey results)

Staff Summary:

The official public comment period for the draft Regional Transportation Plan update closed on December 29th. Following the November 20th Board approval to release the public review draft plan, staff sent a notice to our list of 560 email subscribers, published a press release, and encouraged widespread public participation through social media channels including a paid ad which received 1,800 views.

The RTP update survey received a total of 216 responses which included 40 manually entered print surveys that were gathered during in-person outreach at the North Country Fair, Tri-County Independent Living Expo, Arcata Friday Night Market, and Fortuna Apple Harvest. The full results from the 13 main survey questions, including all open-format responses, are included in the attached public engagement summary. Responses came from all across the County. Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete a survey and make your voice heard in the Regional Transportation Plan update process!

Key findings will be summarized and included in the “Renewing Communities” chapter where there is currently a placeholder for a synopsis of the public engagement process and findings. Although not all results can be shared in the chapter in the body of the RTP, the full results will be published as an Appendix. For discussion, if the Board has a specific interest in any of the survey response charts, please let us know and we can include it in this section of the RTP.

Findings from the survey include:

- 43% were satisfied, 25% neutral, and 31% dissatisfied with the transportation system.
- Shopping, recreation, and healthcare were the most difficult places for people to get.
- Majority of respondents drove a personal vehicle daily, but there were 8% who never did.
- 11% of survey takers used public transit daily. While 51% never used transit, 53% stated they would like to use transit more often. Top reasons included available routes, frequency of service, and hours of operation.

- The top transportation challenges people selected were poor road conditions, lack of safe places to walk or bike, public transit service hours, and vehicle speeding.
- Only 18% of respondents agreed that roads are maintained well.
- Local road maintenance was by far the most popular project type followed by Complete Streets rehabilitation.

Overall, the survey results show a balanced view of the variety of public opinions about transportation needs in the region. Road maintenance jumps out as a top priority. This makes sense, as roads in poor condition will impact drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians, and bus riders alike. With over 200 responses to the survey, there are many individual concerns and suggestions that cannot all be addressed specifically. However, having a large body of public opinion about long-range regional transportation needs is essential to completing the RTP. The comprehensive comments are included in the Appendix A of the RTP (attached) and are referenced by staff in daily work.

Comments on Public Review Draft

HCAOG received 41 written public comments on the public review draft during the review period. Of these, 31 emails were sent in support of an action alert put out by CRTP, EPIC and 350 Humboldt. All of these community members were in support of three main points that were articulated in the December 10th comment letter from these groups. These points were:

- 1) Restore use of the term “climate crisis.” Many pointed to the science indicating the severity of climate impacts, the urgency to reduce emissions, and the disappointment they felt from the perception that local government was not taking the climate issue seriously.
- 2) Keep the existing timeframe of the policy requiring that 80% of new housing be located in areas accessible by walking, biking, rolling, or public transit.
- 3) Keep the Funding Consistency Analysis.

One letter was received from the Peninsula Community Collaborative requesting that language be added to the Trails chapter recognizing the need for a separated bicycle/pedestrian path connecting Samoa/Manila communities to Arcata. Although this area is within the County jurisdiction and was not included in the project table submitted by the County, staff finds the request reasonable to include in the Trails table and will reach out to the County to confirm.

Lastly, Humboldt Transit Authority provided editorial comments and updates to information in the Public Transportation Element which will be incorporated in the Final Draft, and Caltrans District 1 submitted a letter that staff will respond to.

Response to CRTP et. al. comments

Acknowledgement of the climate crisis

In response to comments about the language, HCAOG staff are proposing to move forward with an updated approach around the terminology. The Board and majority of the TAC supported the chapter title of “Climate Change” and staff proposes to keep that language in headings. However, the Board discussion on the draft supported adding language to reference the climate crisis to the introduction of the Climate Change chapter. Staff drafted the following language for consideration:

“The collective impacts of environmental, economic and social problems resulting from climate change are referred to as the global climate crisis. The climate issue requires global action, and while there are many pressing issues of local concern, HCAOG and its member jurisdictions are committed to taking the necessary action on the local level to respond to the urgency of the climate crisis.”

In addition, the term ‘climate crisis’ is proposed to be restored in several instances in the body of the text where it was struck out.

Page 2-1: Propose to restore the term climate crisis in the sentence: “The global climate crisis requires that we make swift and fundamental changes to **renew our transportation system.**”

Page 3-18: The term global climate crisis is more appropriate here as it is referencing the State of California’s multipronged policy response. California’s own climate policy documents use the term climate crisis and that language will be restored.

Page 3-19: A quote of CalSTA’s Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure references the ‘climate crisis’ and was incorrectly struck out. This error was corrected.

Timeline for Safe and Sustainable Housing Location Target

Staff notes that the proposed target date change does not in any way alter the intent or result in a retraction of the established HCAOG target for 80% of new housing to be in places with safe, comfortable, and convenient access to employment, shopping, and recreation by walking, biking, rolling, or transit. Comments interpreted the proposed move of the target date as a substantive change in how HCAOG would approach its work on land use policy. However, as a Joint Powers Authority with no land use authority, we work primarily to provide regional planning and advisory information to member agencies. To that end, HCAOG has been and will continue working on coordinating planning efforts as well as conducting quantitative analysis to better identify the locations that meet this target. Staff will continue efforts to support infill housing projects and planning at the jurisdiction level consistent with policies spelled out in the Land Use Element. (National expert Victor Dover reviewed the Land Use Element for a workshop during his recent visit and stated it was exceptional.) Policy Land-1, Land-4, Land-5, etc. are often referenced by HCAOG and other agencies to demonstrate consistency of projects with the RTP. Additionally, the upcoming Partnering Assets and Authorities for Comprehensive Transit (PAACT) grant project will provide a significant opportunity to establish clear connections for working relationships between land use plans and transit-oriented development planning goals.

Based on the efforts of Noah Sary, the Civic Spark Fellow who prepared an initial baseline analysis for the Safe and Sustainable Transportation Targets, further work is needed for this target to be achieved regionally. His analysis found that of the total of 210 permitted housing units in the County in the baseline year 2021, only 34% were walkable and 43% bikeable (based on the definitions from the RTP). Additional quantitative analysis is needed to determine the exact parameters of locations with convenient access provided by public transit (the “transit score”), which will be an item of work for HCAOG staff to advance in the coming years. Regardless, the baseline analysis indicates that new permitted housing since the measure was in place in 2022 was very unlikely to have met this target.

From staff’s perspective, whether the target date is kept at 2022 or revised to 2030, we will need to continue developing quantitative methods to refine the usefulness of this target for assisting member agencies with land use decisions. Staff is looking for direction from the Board on which target date to use.

Funding Consistency Analysis

The comment takes issue with the method in which HCAOG allocates discretionary funding, primarily in the process for nominating projects to the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). This issue has come before the HCAOG Board several times as it relates to the discussion about the HCAOG Board instituting a project ranking methodology that would be used to determine funding priorities for projects submitted by TAC members. Advocates are of the view that regionally funded projects should be required to be ranked against objective criteria set by the HCAOG Board in order to demonstrate projects advance regional targets in the RTP (for VMT reduction, mode shift, safety, etc). Both the TAC and the Board have discussed this ranking method, and as the Board is aware the TAC is not in favor of this approach. Having received the public comments on this issue, staff request that the Board discuss and provide direction on if the funding consistency analysis should be retained, or removed as proposed.

U.S. 101 Trinidad Area Access Improvement Project

Seven letters were received from Westhaven and Trinidad area residents commenting on the “U.S. 101 Trinidad Area Access Improvement Project” narrative submitted by the Cher-Ae Heights Indian Community of the Trinidad Rancheria for the Tribal Transportation Element. For context, the Tribal Transportation element is not one of the required elements of the RTP but has been included in the past several RTPs as a means to acknowledge and coordinate with the tribal transportation planning efforts of the sovereign Native American tribes with whom HCAOG regularly engages. The transportation directors of the tribes are contacted and invited to submit an update to their work programs. The Trinidad Rancheria responded to HCAOG’s request for updated transportation information, and their response is copied over without edits. Although included in the RTP in that context, it is not indicating a formal position on the project by HCAOG nor is it committing any regional funding. The previous RTP update also received a number of comments on the Trinidad Rancheria’s project.

The letters bring up a number of concerns from community members, but ultimately those concerns are not within the scope of the RTP to address. Comments spoke to the project process including disagreement about the inclusion of a Friends of Westhaven group in the project steering team and disagreement about the project need. The project is in the environmental phase with an EIR in preparation. Residents will have an opportunity to address concerns about potential project impacts in the EIR process. While the comments are heard and acknowledged, staff is not recommending changes to the Tribal Transportation Element.

This is a discussion item and no action is needed other than directing staff on the issues described above.