

STAFF REPORT



MEETING DATE:	10/25/11
SUBJECT:	Request that the County of Shasta Reinstate Full-Time Planning Positions to the RTPA
AGENDA ITEM:	6
STAFF CONTACT:	Daniel Little

SUMMARY:

Under the RTPA's bylaws, the Shasta County Department of Public Works (DPW) provides staff to the RTPA. Shasta County (county) is then reimbursed for staff hours dedicated to RTPA activities. In August DPW removed two full-time planning positions previously available to the RTPA. A third planning position is vacant and cannot be refilled without county approval. Compared to levels approved by the RTPA board and prior RTPA hours billed, the net effect is a loss of nearly two full-time equivalent (FTE) planners.

The RTPA's ability to meet mandates, secure grants and pass-thru funds to the cities and county is compromised with the loss of these positions. The reinstatement of up to two full-time planning positions is needed to maintain RTPA efforts and grant successes.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the board request that the county reinstate up to two full-time planners to the RTPA.

DISCUSSION:

The RTPA board annually adopts an overall work program (OWP) and budget which identifies tasks and activities that the RTPA will perform in the next fiscal year. The board adopted the FY 2011/12 OWP on April 26. The following seven FTE positions were approved by the board:

1. Executive Director (1)
2. Senior Planner (2)
3. Assistant Planner (2)
4. Accountant Auditor III (1)
5. Administrative Secretary II (1)

On August 16 the county reorganized the Plans and Programs Division within DPW separating DPW and RTPA activities. One senior planner and one assistant planner were removed and are no longer available to provide staff support to the RTPA. In addition, a senior planner position is vacant due to a recent retirement and cannot be refilled without county approval.

The county action to reduce staff was taken without first seeking input from the RTPA board, RTPA staff or partner agencies. No analysis of impacts to RTPA programs and responsibilities was performed. Considering the RTPA board's obligation to provide adequate staff to carry out RTPA goals pursuant to RTPA bylaws, it is appropriate for the RTPA board to communicate the following impacts to the county and request adequate RTPA staffing.

August staff reductions are below board budgeted staff levels and actual prior year levels:

The county has taken the position that RTPA staff levels were not cut, but rather separated between RTPA and county functions. Supporting figures provided by the county were compared to the RTPA board's approved staffing levels, as well as actual hours billed to RTPA functions over the past two years. By either measure, RTPA staff has been reduced by two professional planners. The training and experience invested by the RTPA on these individuals has been lost to the agency:

- RTPA professional planning staff hours (assistant and senior planners) were reduced by 50% over levels approved by the RTPA board. Compared to actual planning staff hours billed over the prior two fiscal years, the August reductions also total nearly 50%.

Since 2010, three senior planners have retired from the RTPA. The county action removes two additional planners. One assistant planner remains to offset these losses.

The RTPA's workload has grown in recent years:

The county has taken the position that the increase in staffing levels over that last two years was attributable to overlapping staff. A review of staff hours shows little overlap. The added hours are due to new RTPA mandates, an RTPA board emphasis to aggressively pursue grants and creation of a new assistant planner position in 2010 to meet these new demands:

- Trends in state and federal law over the past few years have shifted more responsibilities to RTPA's, including advanced travel demand modeling practices, land use modeling, extensive GIS-based analytical capabilities and an expanded Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) document. Competitive grants have become the defacto funding source for these otherwise unfunded mandates. These trends will continue into the foreseeable future (see Attachment A).
- In 2010, the county approved a new assistant planning position specifically to meet Senate Bill 375 mandates. The RTPA was fortunate to recruit a highly skilled and trained individual. The August action removed this individual from the RTPA.

The RTPA return on investment has grown exponentially:

The RTPA board and executive director maintain a frugal operation. The county's rationale for RTPA staff cuts is unclear given existing RTPA efficiencies and the return on investment:

- In the past five years, each dollar spent on RTPA staff time has yielded over one dollar in competitive planning grants and fifteen dollars in competitive capital grants.
- In the prior fiscal year, the RTPA obtained \$24.5 million in transportation operating, capital and planning revenue. Ninety-seven cents of every dollar was passed-thru for city, county, Redding Area Bus Authority and Caltrans projects.
- The RTPA has reduced its reliance on Transportation Development Act funds by nearly 100% over the last three years, freeing up over \$350,000 annually for local agency projects.
- The RTPA has built and maintained a three-year, \$1.6 million operating reserve through lean staffing and the aggressive pursuit of discretionary grants.

Staff reductions will impact the region:

Capital grants reduce the need to rely on local funding sources such as traffic impact fee programs. For the past five years, the RTPA board has directed staff to aggressively pursue discretionary capital grants for major transportation projects. While time consuming, this direction has resulted in \$45 million for major projects, including those under construction today on Interstate 5. These efforts will be curtailed as basic RTPA mandates (core functions) take precedent. The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) is one example of the RTPA's core functions. Without a legally compliant RTP, the region's cities, county and Caltrans would not be eligible for most state and federal discretionary grants or formula transportation funds, including State Transportation Improvement Program funds.

In addition to capital grants, the RTPA has over \$2.2 million in planning grant obligations through 2014. With only half the planning staff, it is not possible to put forth this level of effort. Current grant-funded projects, including the travel demand model and GIS platform have already been delayed. Further delays and/or a reduced scope may also be necessary. Despite the need and potential benefits, it may be impractical to pursue additional grants.

The county has suggested that the RTPA staffing cuts can be mitigated by requiring existing staff to work overtime, by hiring extra help or contracting out for services. Working overtime to offset the loss of nearly two planners is impractical with only two planners remaining. Extra help hours are limited to part-time and require willing and qualified individuals. Contract services come at over double the cost. Whether employing part-time help or consultants, this is a stop-gap solution that does not allow the RTPA to develop and retain the in-house skills necessary to manage and maintain RTPA work products and analytical tools.

Unless the current RTPA board chooses to alter staffing arrangements with the county, the RTPA has no authority or control to restore staff. It is recommended that the RTPA board request reinstatement of up to two full-time planning positions to maintain the RTPA board's work plan, goals and past grant successes.

ALTERNATIVES:

The RTPA board may decline to make a recommendation to the county board. This is not recommended because it would impact RTPA operations, RTPA member agency support and the RTPA's continued success in securing competitive grants. Without reinstatement of staff, an amended OWP would be prepared to reflect the reduced budget and staffing, and to complete a scaled back work plan to match reduced resources.

The board may suggest contracting for RTPA staff services to maintain the current level of effort. This could be done without county approval, but would be less efficient compared to the reinstatement of the positions. The OWP budget would need to be amended to reflect the cost increases.

The board may defer action on this item pending the outcome of a memorandum of understanding to determine if the RTPA board, or the county, will control RTPA staff. Any resolution of this issue may take time. RTPA workload is building and a solution is quickly needed.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

This item was discussed with the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). A staff report could not be prepared in time for the TAC meeting and no TAC recommendation was requested.

FINANCING:

This action seeks to restore RTPA staff levels, expenditures and the work plan previously authorized by the RTPA board.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Little', is written over a horizontal line.

Daniel S. Little, AICP, Executive Director

Attachments: Full-time Equivalent (FTE) Billed to Grants Exhibit
RTPA Staffing Levels for Comparable Sized Agencies

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
2006/07							
2007/08							
2008/09							
2009/10							
2010/11							
2011/12							
2012/13							

of FTEs
Dedicated
to Grants

Shasta County RTPA

Staff Levels in Comparable Agencies

	Population	RTPA	Function MPO	Full Time Staff
Santa Barbara County Association of Governments	423,895	X	X	20
Transportation Agency for Monterey County	415,057	X		14
Placer County Transportation Planning Agency	348,432	X		7
San Luis Obispo Council of Governments	269,637	X	X	18
Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission	262,382	X		13
Butte County Association of Governments	220,000	X	X	11
Shasta County RTPA	177,223	X	X	5*
Kings County Association of Governments	152,982	X	X	6
Tuolumne County Transportation Council	55,365	X		6
San Benito County Council of Governments	55,269	X		8

*Reduced from 7 to 5 per County Board of Supervisors Action

Source: California Association of Councils of Government, 2010