

Executive Summary

Inyo County 2015 Regional Transportation Plan

The Inyo County 2015 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) provides a coordinated, 20-year vision of the regionally significant transportation improvements and policies needed to efficiently move goods and people in the region. As the Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA), the Inyo County Transportation Commission (ICLTC) is required by California law to adopt and submit an approved RTP to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) every five years. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) assists with plan preparation and reviews draft documents for compliance and consistency. The RTP must be consistent with other planning guidance in the region such as adopted general plans, airport plans, bicycle plans, and public transit plans.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

The ICLTC solicited public comment from a wide variety of groups, including the general public, resource management agencies administering public lands, public/private transportation operators, truck traffic generators, transportation advocacy groups, tribal governments, large land holders and surrounding counties.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

Environmental documentation for an RTP is required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The ICLTC has preliminarily determined that the Inyo County 2015 RTP will not result in significant impacts. Therefore, an Initial Study/Proposed Negative Declaration was prepared and is being circulated with this Draft RTP.

REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Inyo County is located in easternmost portion of central California and generally spans the southeastern length of Sierra Nevada Mountains between Bishop on the north and just north of Walker Pass on the south. The county is bordered by the State of Nevada to the east, Mono County to the north and San Bernardino and Kern Counties to the south. Inyo County's landscape includes the low desert of Death Valley, the high desert of the Owens Valley and the dramatic escarpment of the eastern High Sierra including Mt. Whitney at an elevation of 14,495 feet. The City of Bishop is the only incorporated city in the region. Other major communities within the county include Big Pine, Independence, Lone Pine, and Shoshone.

Demographics and Economics

According to the US Census 2013 American Community Survey, Inyo County has a total population of 18,482 people. This represents a 2.9 percent increase over 2000 Census counts. Of this total, roughly 3,856 people live in the City of Bishop. According to American Community Survey 2009 – 2013 five year estimates, predominate ethnicities are White (65.2 percent), Hispanic (19.9 percent), and Native American (10.4 percent). Roughly 5.4 percent of the residents speak English less than “very well”. Just less than 20 percent of the population in Inyo County was age 65 or older in 2013. The California Department of Finance estimates that Inyo County population will grow at a rate of less than one percent annually over the next twenty years.

Five tribal governments own land within Inyo County: Bishop Paiute, Big Pine Paiute, Fort Independence, Lone Pine Paiute Shoshone, and Timbisha Shoshone. US Census data do not reflect the high level of visitors to the region which also has impacts on the regional transportation system. Death Valley National Park alone served on average 897,400 visitors annually between 2000 – 2013. According to National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) surveys conducted in Inyo National Forest in Fiscal Year 2006, there were roughly 3.9 million total estimated national forest visits. During the winter months, Mammoth Mountain Ski Area attracts around 1.4 million skier visits annually. The majority travel on US 395 from the greater Los Angeles area. Heavier traffic volumes occur on US 395 during peak periods as a result.

Inyo County includes several communities which qualify as disadvantaged in terms of certain grant funding. As of 2012 (the most recently available data), the median household income for Inyo County Census Tract 4 (which includes the City of Bishop area) and Census Tract 8 (which extends from Lone Pine across Death Valley to Shoshone) is less than 80 percent of the statewide median income. Greater than 75 percent of students receive a free or reduced lunch at the following schools: Big Pine High, Big Pine Elementary, Keith B. Bright High (Bishop), Death Valley High Academy, and Sierra Alternative Learning Academy (Lone Pine).

Major employers in Inyo County include the land management agencies, school districts, hospitals, Inyo County, City of Los Angeles, and big box stores. Just over half of the 7,387 employed Inyo County residents commuted outside of the county for work in 2011 per the US Census. There are no major development projects or land use changes over the next five years which will impact transportation conditions, particularly as only two percent of land in Inyo County is under private ownership.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Roadways and Bridges

The Inyo County regional roadway network comprises over 3,500 miles of streets, roads and highways. The roadway network includes paved and dirt roadways owned by the National Park Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) jurisdiction and the Bureau of Land Management.

The primary roadway serving Inyo County is US 395 which travels north/south and connects the county to urban areas of Reno, NV and the greater Los Angeles area. Other state highways include US 6, and State Routes (SR) 127, 136, 168, 178, and 190. There are a number of State Highways and county maintained roads that provide access for residents and travelers to small communities and recreational areas in the Sierra Nevada. These include: Pine Creek Road, SR 168, South Lake Road, Sabrina Road, Glacier Lodge Road, Onion Valley Road, Whitney Portal Road, Horseshoe Meadows Road, and Nine Mile Canyon Road.

Traffic Data

The highest average annual daily traffic volume in Inyo County in 2013 (the latest year for which data is available) was observed in Bishop along US 395 at the intersection with SR 168 (14,900). The lowest traffic volumes occurred on SR 168 at the Inyo Mono County line in Fish Lake Valley (170). Generally, traffic volumes on US 395 in the Bishop area have decreased over the past ten years. US 395 traffic volumes only increased near Lone Pine and Pine Creek Road (north of Bishop). Traffic volumes have increased in some of the recreational areas such as South Lake Road on SR 168 near Death Valley Junction at SR 127 and Stateline Road at the Death Valley NP South Boundary. However, traffic volumes through the National Park on SR 190 have decreased. Daily vehicle miles travelled in Inyo County

decreased by seven percent from 2008 to 2013 (California Public Road Data). The county average Pavement Conditions Index (PCI) is 62 out of 100, as of 2014. The average PCI for the City of Bishop is 56.

Caltrans has designated LOS “C” as the concept LOS for Inyo County state highway segments. According to recent Caltrans Transportation Concept Reports and LSC estimates using the Highway Capacity Manual, only the section of US 395 in the Olancho – Cartago area currently operates at LOS D, below the concept LOS. After the construction of the proposed four lane highway project, LOS is anticipated to improve to “A” on this roadway segment.

A total of 111 serious (injury and/or fatality) accidents were recorded in Inyo County in 2013 by California Highway Patrol (CHP). Three of these accidents involved fatalities. The majority of the accidents (77 accidents) were “solo” auto or motorcycle accidents. The US 395 corridor has had a history of accidents, particularly in the section that remains a two-lane highway.

In Inyo County, there are a total of 29 state highway bridges and 37 local bridges. Eleven of the local bridges have a sufficiency rating of 80 or below; thereby qualifying for funding for rehabilitation funding under the Highway Bridge Program. Of the local bridges, one bridge is considered structurally deficient. An additional two bridges in the county are considered functionally obsolete.

Transit Services

The Eastern Sierra Transit Authority (ESTA) was formed through a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) between Inyo County, Mono County, City of Bishop and Town of Mammoth Lakes in 2006. Public transit service consists of a variety of demand-response, fixed route, deviated fixed route and intercity connections to multiple communities in both Inyo and Mono Counties. The service is operated out of facilities in Bishop, Mammoth Lakes, Lone Pine, Walker and Tecopa. Maintenance is contracted with outside vendors throughout the region. Other human service agencies such as Inyo-Mono Association for the Handicapped (IMAH), Toiyabe Indian Health Project, Eastern Sierra Area Agency for the Aging (ESAA), Big Pine Education Center provide transportation services for clients.

Non-Motorized Facilities

Non-motorized facilities encompass a wide variety of transportation improvements designed to provide safety and greater mobility for bicyclist, pedestrians, skateboards etc. For pedestrians this includes, sidewalks, crosswalks, push button signals, and curb ramps. Currently, there are some Class I bicycle paths in the Bishop and Death Valley area as well as Class II/III bicycle lanes/route in Bishop, Wilkerson, and Tecopa.

Sidewalks are generally limited to those streets within a block of US 395 and along US 395 through the center of Inyo County communities. There is also an extensive network of sidewalks in the Meadow Creek subdivision. The City of Bishop has also constructed sidewalks along many of the streets within the incorporated portion of Bishop. Crosswalks exist along US 395 in the communities of Bishop, Lone Pine, Big Pine and Independence.

Aviation Facilities

There are seven publicly operated airports in Inyo County and six private air strips. These include the Bishop Airport, and the Independence, Lone Pine, and Shoshone Airports which are operated by Inyo County. Trona Airport is operated by the Searles Valley Community Services Council and Stovepipe Wells and Furnace Creek airports are owned and operated by the National Park Service. There is also a

public backcountry dirt airstrip in Saline Valley in Death Valley National Park. The Bishop Airport is the only airport in Inyo County which can accommodate regularly scheduled commercial air freight service. For commercial airline service, Inyo County residents must travel to the nearby Mammoth Lakes Airport or south to the Inyokern Airport in Kern County.

Goods Movement

The Surface Transportation Assistance Act (STAA) sets forth specific dimension requirements for trucks related to the overall length, length of semitrailer and length from the King Pin to Rear Axle (KPRA). US 395 and US 6 are part of the National STAA network while SR 127 is part of the Terminal Access STAA network. All other state highways in Inyo County are designated California Legal or California Legal Advisory routes. STAA sized trucks are not allowed on these highways.

A review of historical truck traffic on Inyo state highways shows that truck traffic has generally decreased over the last seven years on US 395 with the exception of at SR 168 and US 6 in Bishop. SR 190 between Olancho and Junction with SR 136 has seen an increase in truck traffic of 10 to 18 percent from 2006 - 2013. Truck traffic has also increased on SR 168 between Brockman Lane and US 395 (3 to 12 percent increase). The largest decrease in truck traffic during the seven year period was observed on US 395 just south of the SR 168 junction in Big Pine (167 trucks per day).

There is no passenger or freight rail service in Inyo County. There are several rail corridors where the tracks have been removed. The limited rail facilities are used for recreational purposes or historic interest. It is anticipated that freight or passenger rail facilities will not expand in Inyo County over the next 20 years.

Transportation Systems Operations and Management

Rideshare databases and websites are a good method of matching commuters and thereby reducing the number of vehicles on the road. ESTA administers a small vanpool program between Mammoth Lakes and Bishop.

AIR QUALITY

Air quality is a significant consideration in planning for and evaluation of transportation systems. Both state and federal law contain significant regulations concerning the impact of transportation projects on air quality. Inyo County is considered “in attainment” or unclassified for every federal air quality standard except for the PM-10 standard, which is not in attainment in the Owens Valley area. As for state standards, Inyo County is not in attainment for PM-2.5 and PM-10. In the Owens Valley area, PM-10 pollution is directly related to windblown dust from the dry Owens Lake Bed. The Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District prepared a State Implementation Plan (SIP) for PM-10 in 2008 with a 2013 amendment. The majority of the SIP addresses mitigation measures for LADWP to reduce windblown dust in the Owens Lake area. The plan does not attribute PM-10 levels to transportation. Thus, this RTP can be considered to be in compliance with air quality plans.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION NEEDS AND ISSUES

Inyo County experiences many of the same regional transportation issues as other rural counties in California. The following list summarizes the region’s most important issues:

- ♦ Funding – There is a shortage of revenues to carry out an adequate maintenance and rehabilitation program, needed road and bridge improvements, and maintenance needs for local roads and state highways.
- ♦ Demographics and Economics – Disadvantaged areas exist within the communities of Bishop and Lone Pine. Residents of these communities have fewer resources available and therefore are generally more dependent on alternative modes of transportation, such as transit, bicycling, or walking.
- ♦ Roadways – Traffic congestion and unsafe driving conditions occur on US 395 between Olancha and Cartago. A large portion of local roadways are in need of rehabilitation. Connectivity is an issue in the Bishop area and tribal communities where there are many dead end and discontinuous streets.
- ♦ Transit – In addition to replacing vehicles as they reach the end of their useful life, improvements such as sidewalks and curb cuts in the City of Bishop and adjoining areas will help for the loading/unloading of passengers with wheelchairs and other disabilities. There is also a long-term need for improvements to the operations facility for ESTA at the Bishop Airport.
- ♦ Bicycle and Pedestrian – There is a need to enhance bicycle and pedestrian facilities for recreationalists, tourists, and residents alike. Wider shoulders, bike lanes and paths will greatly increase safety in the region while way-finding signage, sidewalks and connections between communities and trailheads will improve the overall experience for both visitors and residents. Sidewalks, crosswalks, and lighting are particularly important for residents with disabilities.
- ♦ Aviation – It is important to continue to maintain Inyo County airports at a safe and acceptable level. There is also the long-term potential to reinstate commercial air service at the Bishop Airport. This will require security and other airport improvements.
- ♦ Goods Movement - Trucking is the primary form of goods movement in Inyo County. The potential for issues arise in the downtown areas of communities where bicycle/pedestrian travel is more common. Maintaining state highways to a level that is sufficient for goods movement and providing adequate truck parking will continue to be an important regional transportation need.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION GOALS

The ICLTC proposes the following general regional transportation goals:

Goal 1: Streets, Roads, and Highways Maintained at a Safe and Acceptable Level

Goal 2: A Transportation System Which Is Safe, Efficient, and Comfortable, Which Meets the Needs of People and Goods, and Enhances the Lifestyle of the County's Residents

Goal 3: Maintain Adequate Capacity on State Routes (SRs) and Local Routes in and Surrounding Inyo County and City of Bishop

Goal 4: Provide Effective, Economically Feasible, and Efficient Public Transportation in Inyo County That Is Safe, Convenient, And Efficient, Reduces the Dependence on Privately Owned Vehicles, and Meets the Identified Transportation Needs of the County, Emphasizing Service to the Transportation Disadvantaged

Goal 5: Encourage and Promote Greater Use of Active Means of Personal Transportation in the Region

Goal 6: Provide for the Parking Needs of Local Residents, Visitors, and Tourists

Goal 7: Enhanced Airports in the County

Goal 8: Encourage and Pursue Railroad Facilities in the Region

Goal 9: Incorporate New Developments in Transportation Technology, Including ITS Approaches

Goal 10: Management of the Transportation System

Goal 11: Transportation Demand Management (TDM)

Goal 12: Land Use Integration

Inyo County adheres to these goals as demonstrated in the RTP capital improvement project lists. Additionally, these goals reflect existing conditions in the county.

PLAN ASSUMPTIONS

In addition to the data discussed above, it is necessary to base the Action Element on a series of planning assumptions. The RTP sets forth planning assumptions for: environmental conditions, travel mode choice, traffic projections, population growth, visitor use, and inflation projections.

TRANSPORTATION SAFETY AND SECURITY/EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The policy element of this RTP includes safety goals and objectives that comply with the California Strategic Highway Safety Plan. Transportation improvement projects that specifically address safety for all types of transportation modes are included in the project list tables in this chapter. Transportation safety is a main concern for roadways and non-motorized transportation facilities in the Inyo region.

In the Inyo County region, forced evacuation due to natural disasters such as wildfire is the most likely evacuation scenarios. Evacuation routes and other methods of evacuation are identified in the RTP. The best preventative measures with respect to this document for an emergency evacuation would be to continue to implement projects in the RTP which upgrade roadways, airport facilities and public transit.

FUNDING STRATEGIES

As demonstrated in the Financial Element, there are insufficient revenue sources available to construct all RTP transportation improvements identified in this plan over the next twenty years. Therefore a basic funding strategy should be developed to help prioritize regional transportation improvements.

Balanced Focus – Stakeholders and the public have indicated that funding should be focused on a variety of transportation needs. Over the short-term, expanding the state highway system is a top priority to increase safety and maintain an acceptable LOS. However, pavement management reports have indicated the need for local roadway rehabilitation. A balanced focus also includes an emphasis on alternative types of transportation improvement such as non-motorized facilities and public transit. This RTP update follows the balanced focus funding strategy.

REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Chapter 4 of this document, the Action Element, includes a series of tables listing both financially constrained and financially unconstrained roadway, bridge, transit, aviation, and bicycle/pedestrian projects which will address the needs and issues identified in the earlier chapters of the RTP. ICLTC has developed project level performance measures and desired outcomes to evaluate potential RTP projects. Further, through prior RTP updates, project selection criteria was developed in an effort to maximize limited funding opportunities for transportation improvement projects. In the Action Element tables, RTP projects are linked to performance measures, purpose and need categories and adopted RTP goals.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING PROGRAMS

The Financial Element describes numerous federal, state, and local funding sources and programs that are available to the ICLTC for transportation programs. Unfortunately many of these funding sources are discretionary and allocated on a competitive basis and are therefore very difficult to predict. The primary state transportation funding source is fuel tax revenues which have been decreasing over time accounting for inflation and as vehicles have become more efficient. This RTP is based on a very conservative outlook on transportation funding over the next 20 years and includes a large financially unconstrained or “wish list” project list.

As part of the Financial Element, recurring roadway, bridge, aviation, and transit revenues were forecasted over the next 20 years by using a variety of methods. Estimated costs to meet designated “financially constrained” transportation needs meet projected funding available for the regional transportation system. If financially unconstrained projects are considered, there will be a shortfall of \$147.6million over the 20-year planning period.

INYO COUNTY STRATEGIES TO REDUCE GHG EMISSIONS

RTPAs that are not located within the boundaries of a metropolitan planning organization (which ICLTC is not) are not subject to the provisions of SB 375 that require addressing regional GHG targets in the RTP and preparation of sustainable community strategies. With the exception of the remaining 2 lane section of US 395, the Inyo region experiences little traffic congestion. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, overall traffic volumes on Inyo state highways have generally decreased in the last ten years. As such, the Inyo region is not a significant contributor to statewide GHG emissions. Regardless, this RTP identifies improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities which will encourage residents and visitors to use alternatives to the private vehicle for transportation, thereby helping to reduce GHG emissions. Given the importance of the consideration of climate change in transportation planning, this RTP outlines the following strategies to reduce GHG emissions:

- Implement Active Transportation Project Improvements
- Implement Transit System Improvements
- Expand Vanpool/Rideshare Programs

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

In compliance with California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, an Initial Study Checklist and Negative Declaration was prepared for the RTP, providing environmental analyses and a general overview of the potential impacts of proposed projects.

The RTP is a general planning document containing policies, guidelines, and lists of potential projects to meet regional transportation needs. Preparation and adoption of the RTP represents long-term transportation planning for the Inyo County region, and by definition does not examine individual projects that would have individual impacts. Specific environmental impacts of projects discussed in the RTP will be addressed on an individual basis at the time of each project review. The Initial Study checklist found that there will be no significant environmental impact resulting from adoption of this plan.