



MOTHERLODE BICYCLE COALITION

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Jeff Schwein
Green DOT Transportation Solutions
jeff@greendottransportation.com

Dear Mr. Schwein,

The Motherlode Bicycle Coalition (MLBC) appreciates the opportunity to review the Draft Tuolumne County Active Transportation Plan (Plan). The Plan is a master plan for bike and pedestrian improvements proposed for implementation in Tuolumne County and the City of Sonora. MLBC understands the effort expended to prepare the Plan. Please consider integrating the constructive comments included in this letter before the Plan is finalized.

The Plan will act as an update to the 2005 Bikeway and Trails Plan (2005 Plan) by addressing the need for community support and providing project prioritization for competition in the State Active Transportation Program (ATP). MLBC believes the Plan should address changes in Tuolumne County due to new and planned development since the 2005 Plan was adopted as well as provide a range of priorities for implementing active transportation improvements. Improvements identified in the Plan should be implemented with diverse funding strategies ranging from local funds, development impact fees, regional transportation funds and through providing complete streets in association with local and Caltrans projects.

The Plan does not include important recent and planned development and fails to prioritize improvements serving the motor vehicle-centric urban areas of Sonora. Projects in this area would improve access to shopping, jobs and services on the Mono Way corridor. Of the available opportunities in Tuolumne County, such improvements may be the most cost-effective, serve the largest number of users, result in the highest reduction in vehicle miles traveled and best align with the objectives of the ATP.

The Plan focuses so closely on the ATP that it downplays opportunities to do small things with local and regional funds and does not provide the full context of community needs and solutions. In short, an active transportation plan need not be an ATP only plan. The failure

of the Tuolumne County Transportation Council (TCTC), the City of Sonora and Tuolumne County to demonstrate a significant local and regional financial commitment to a robust program supporting active transportation and Complete Streets may reflect poorly on their ATP applications. A review of the Regional Transportation Plan confirms that very few active transportation needs are funded beyond association with a Complete Streets project or identification as an ATP candidate.

The Plan lacks a thorough evaluation of the successes and failures of the 2005 Plan which proposed ambitious projects connecting our rural communities over relatively long distances. Little has been implemented except some local sidewalk and recreational trail improvements. Recreational trails are important but they are not central to the TCTC's role as a Regional Transportation Planning Agency.

Given this history of failure to implement costly protected facility projects that promise to entice new users to use active transportation, the MLBC supports two emphasis areas for investing in active transportation in Tuolumne County:

- Protected facility improvements on the corridors that support the heaviest short trip vehicle usage. These would serve existing users and entice hesitant users to commute, shop and access services using active transportation. These projects would reduce the need for more costly investments in vehicle capacity on local roads.
- Small strategic improvements to increase safety by reducing conflicts with vehicle traffic on routes with established existing active transportation use. These could include interim improvements where larger, hard to fund projects are proposed.

We support the Safe Routes to School improvements in the Plan as well as most of the priority projects. But we urge the City of Sonora, Tuolumne County, and the TCTC to emphasize more core transportation benefits in their applications for the ATP because essential active transportation needs are better aligned with the program.

The most glaring omissions in the Plan are in the East Sonora area. The tortured vehicle circulation around the Mono Way interchange, sidewalk gaps, and lack of bike facilities between the Junction and Sonora on the Mono Way corridor are barriers to active transportation access to jobs, shopping and services in East Sonora. This includes the Crossroads, Junction, Timberhills, and Sonora Plaza shopping centers and the hospital, medical offices, library, Senior Center and Sonora Elementary School via Greenley Road.

Section 3.10 of the Plan states that the Courthouse is a destination which is currently accessed by walking and biking, presumably referring to the current location in downtown Sonora. The new Courthouse is nearing completion adjacent to the Mono Way corridor and will share the Law and Justice Center campus with the Jail, County Sheriff, Juvenile Detention Center, Transit Center, and additional office space. Old Wards Ferry Road

leading to the current (future secondary) access to the Law and Justice Center does not have sidewalks or dedicated bike facilities. There is no current plan for bike and pedestrian access to the proposed Gardella Ranch Road primary entrance to the Law and Justice Center via Sanguinetti Loop.

Map 5.3 shows the priority projects in the Plan, and this Sonora to East Sonora corridor is conspicuously missing. The MLBC recommends a joint City/County comprehensive circulation and active transportation study of the Mono Way corridor between Sonora and the Junction shopping center as a top priority of the Plan.

Because the TCTC, City, and County have not been successful in funding or implementing large bike and pedestrian projects. We recommend an emphasis on smaller projects and reliance on diverse funding sources to improve the road network for current road users. This would include those that are dependent on bikes and walking for transportation as well as dedicated enthusiasts. Planning big and building nothing is not sufficient for current users.

There are multiple locations in the Sonora area where free right “slip ramp” turning movements encourage speeding at driver decision points where bikes and pedestrians are most vulnerable. “Squaring up” intersections such as SR 49/Columbia Way at the High School, Mono Way/Sanguinetti Road, and Mono Way/Sanguinetti Loop would shorten pedestrian crossings in addition to slowing traffic. The recently constructed slip ramp at the Old Wards Ferry Road entrance to the Law and Justice Center has no shoulder and endangers pedestrians seeking access to services and the Transit Center.

There are also locations where urban bike lane markings at intersections are needed including bike through lane markings at right turn pockets. Examples include Mono Way/Tuolumne Road, the Mono Way interchange, and Mono Way/Greenley Road. We recommend that low cost pavement marking projects, such as installing sharrows on Stewart Street, Racetrack Road, and Shaws Flat Road be implemented with local funds, such as LTF Bike/Ped funds, rather than incorporated into larger ATP applications that may not be awarded.

The Plan includes projects for widening the State highways to four to eight feet. We recommend identifying shoulder gaps and priority locations on the highways where alternate routes are not available instead of making a blanket request that is likely to be ignored. In general, we would prefer to see a longer section of highway widened to four feet than a short stretch widened to eight feet and prefer priority given to gap fill near communities. There are also many locations on rural roads where traffic is sparse and sharing the road is feasible, but blind corners and vertical crests challenge safe passing. We recommend identifying these conflict areas for targeted safety improvements utilizing multiple funding sources. Resolution of conflict areas also benefits vehicle users.

Finally, we would like to note that projects ATP County 06, 07, and 08 for shoulder widening on the State highways are not included in the State highway project list in Table 5.6. The Old Wards Ferry Complete Street project in Table 5.6 and discussed in Attachment F would not affect the highway since Old Wards Ferry Road is grade separated from the highway.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Becker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "J".

Jack Becker, Executive Director

Cc: Darin Grossi, Executive Director, TCTC
Mary Rose Rutikanga, City Administrator, City of Sonora
Kim MacFarlane, Public Works Director, Tuolumne County