

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Regional Transportation Plan is a long-range plan that every Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) is required to complete. The plan is meant to provide a long-range, fiscally constrained guide for the future of Tulare County's Transportation system. The long-range plan extends to the year 2046 in its scope. The plan accomplishes its goals by forecasting future growth, identifying regional priorities, and planning for infrastructure improvements. This plan is required to include four elements which include: the Policy Element (Chapter B), the Action Element (Chapter D), the Fiscal Element (Chapter E), and the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS; Chapter C) mandated by the state of California. Tulare County's 2022 RTP/SCS also includes chapters on goods movement, air quality conformity and valley-wide efforts.

A closely related federal requirement is the Congestion Management Process (CMP) which provides information on transportation-system performance and alternatives to relieve congestion and improve mobility of people and goods. Under those regulations, the Tulare County region exceeds the urbanized area population threshold to be designated a Transportation Management Area (TMA). TCAG is therefore required to maintain a CMP for the region. Because our region is in non-attainment of air quality (ozone) standards there is the additional requirement of incorporating in the CMP a process to analyze any project with the potential to significantly increase capacity for single-occupancy vehicle (SOV) travel before that project can be programmed with federal funds (23 CFR 450.320). The CMP is coordinated with the development of the RTP/SCS. The CMP is described in greater detail in Appendix 2-Q.

The process of developing the RTP/SCS includes:

- Collecting data and developing goals
- Analyzing existing conditions
- Inputting the federal planning factors
- Inputting the state performance measures
- Assessing financial resources
- Developing projects lists
- Coordinating air quality efforts
- Incorporating the Regional Housing Needs Allocations (RHNA) and working with their committee
- Including the congestion management program
- Conducting extensive public outreach including with the Tribe
- Coordinating with the RTP RoundTable, Rural Communities Committee

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- Developing an Environmental Impact Report
- Taking it to the TCAG Board for approval
- Obtain Federal conformity determinations.

Tulare County features many unique regional qualities that create a significant need for transportation facilities, as well as new and better ways to provide these services. Population growth in the coming years is expected to be near the highest (per capita) in the state, driven in part by the flight of urban residents from the state's larger cities toward rural areas like Tulare County during the Covid Epidemic, higher birthrates than other parts of the state, and lower property costs. The region also is consistently in the top three counties in the nation for agricultural production – an industry heavily relies on transportation facilities to move goods to market. The county has a healthy tourism industry thanks to two National Parks (Sequoia National Park and Kings Canyon National Park), a National Monument (Sequoia National Monument), and other natural and recreational attractions.

However, the region also faces many unique challenges. Tulare County suffers from some of the worst poverty rates in the nation, exasperated by a chronic lack of adequate services, facilities, and public funding. The County is in the most polluted air basin in the country. State Route 99, which transects the county, is a goods movement corridor of national and international importance; the United States Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration designated SR-99 as a Primary Freight Network route on the Primary Highway Freight System<sup>1</sup>. It is also the most congested highway in the nation not on the National Highway System (NHS), and it is consistently found to be among the deadliest highways in California based on the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS). The exclusion of this critical goods corridor from the NHS, however, results in a dire lack of the federal funding for maintenance from which most other major highways benefit. The challenges in this region are enormous and balancing these needs in a Regional Transportation Plan with limited resources from which to draw is no small feat.

The growth scenario selected by the public and by the various stakeholder committees during the outreach process was titled the Cross Valley Corridor, Blueprint Plus Scenario. It is based on the development principles of the 2009 Tulare County Regional Blueprint and the Cross Valley Corridor Plan. This scenario proposed the highest residential densities and the greatest mode share of all scenarios considered. More information on this scenario is available in the Sustainable Communities Strategy included in this plan.

The transformational vision contained in the Cross Valley Corridor Plan adopted as part of the previous 2018 Regional Transportation Plan forms the foundation of the future of mass transportation in the region, and it is a significant departure from reliance on the

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<sup>1</sup> [ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/infrastructure/ngn/maps/nhfn\\_map.htm](https://ops.fhwa.dot.gov/freight/infrastructure/ngn/maps/nhfn_map.htm). Accessed February 10, 2022

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automobile as the primary form of moving around. The vision was built around the planned High Speed Rail Station in the Hanford Area with connections to an existing east-west rail corridor that stretches from Huron in Fresno County to the west, through Naval Air Station Lemoore, the City of Lemoore, Hanford, and eastward into Tulare County through Goshen, Visalia, Farmersville, Exeter, Lindsay, Strathmore, and Porterville. The ultimate vision of passenger rail sharing the existing rail line or right of way with freight trains is the backbone of an increasingly dense corridor that would concentrate future growth in urban centers surrounding future passenger rail stations that are planned or now operating as bus transit centers.

Under this new plan, higher residential and commercial densities would be encouraged to allow a greater number of residents and businesses to be located within walking distance of the new stations, reducing some dependency on the automobile. Those who did not live in walking distance of a station would be served by new and improved transit services, such as on-demand transit, active transportation corridors, and electric vehicle car-sharing services all oriented toward bringing people into the transit centers along the rail line. Cities and communities not located on the rail line, such as Tulare, Dinuba, and Woodlake would be served by an efficient and coordinated busing system designed to link those communities with the Cross Valley Rail Stations. When fully implemented, most urban residents in the region will have access to the High-Speed Rail Station in Hanford, through this diversity of modes, without ever having to drive a car. The 2022 Regional Transportation Plan not only builds upon that vision, but quantifies through the scenario planning efforts, the results of such development in terms of important metrics like air quality improvements, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, savings in per capita use of electricity and water, improvements to public health, improvements in disadvantaged communities and other benefits.

Serving disadvantaged communities in the Tulare County Region has long been a top priority and is reflected in the structure of the Governing Board of the Tulare County Association of Governments that strives for equal representation to both unincorporated areas as well as our cities large and small. Many of our programs and funding target disadvantaged communities specifically, for example:

- Complete community transformations of Lindsay and Woodlake
- All regional projects funded in the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Grants have gone to disadvantaged communities
- Almost all of the Active Transportation Program funding has been spent in disadvantaged communities, including those within the cities.
- All the new transit center funding has been directed to project locations within disadvantaged communities.
- Nearly all grant and regional funding for Complete Streets Plans have been in disadvantaged communities.
- All Bike Rodeos put on by TCAG have been carried out in disadvantaged communities.

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- Most of the new roundabouts that have been funded through TCAG have been in disadvantaged communities.
- Most of the new rail crossings that have been funded through TCAG have been in disadvantaged communities

The Tulare County region relies heavily on goods movement due to its agricultural productions, centralized location, and distribution centers. Goods movement in the San Joaquin Valley is currently dominated by a single transportation mode (trucks). In the past, 90% of all goods that moved in and out of, and within the region were done by trucks. Although truck movements will continue to play an important role in goods movement in the region, it is important to continue to study the potential of expanding into other modes, which could include greater short haul rail opportunities, improvements to the use of Class 1 rail and increased use of air cargo.

The Commodity flow of products entering and leaving Tulare County are diverse and numerous. The type of products that are being moved include farm products, aggregates, food, materials, fuels, paper products, plastics, electronics, textiles, consumer products to be shipped into distributions and to be shipped out to market. It is anticipated to continue to grow by an average of 56% by 2040 (SJV Interregional Goods Movement Plan 2013). Tulare County is the number one producer of milk and dairy products in the Country. Tulare county also produces a large amount of citrus, nuts, berries, and other agricultural related products that are shipped across the country and to international markets. The region's agricultural businesses rely heavily on the transfer of goods along corridors and highways to make it from farm to market in a timely manner. This farm to market timeliness has significant economic implications.

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During the preparation of the 2022 RTP/SCS there was a major effort launched to extend public outreach to a greater constituency. This included new efforts to reach disadvantaged communities in ways that would be effective and helpful to them. This outreach included making presentations and soliciting feedback through an online survey. TCAG has learned from past efforts the most effective way to reach people in this region, especially those in disadvantaged communities, is to go where they already are. The events targeted in the previous RTP were not available this year due to Covid restrictions. However, through persistence, where doors were closed, TCAG found a way to open others. In the end, staff had done outreach in all eight cities, the county, the tribe, and 31 events in disadvantaged communities. The Tulare County Fair was also used to reach people. Social media helped reach thousands of new residents we didn't connect with before and a surprisingly high number of them were residents from disadvantaged communities that had a hard time participating in the physical events. More aspects of community collaboration projects are explored in the Outreach Section.

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Special attention was given to reaching out to and working collaboratively with the Tule River Tribe. TCAG developed a Tribal Outreach Plan early in the process and its adoption by the TCAG Board helped guide outreach efforts unique to fulfilling tribal needs and sensitivities. TCAG staff made a presentation to the Tribal Council to get their unique perspective and feedback on the direction of the plan and to make sure that the Tribe's voices were heard and recognized. Numerous efforts were made to contact Tribal leaders throughout the process of producing the plan. Special efforts were made with City Leaders at the City of Porterville to have them serve as intermediaries with TCAG and the Tribe to ensure that the best possible relationships could be built and maintained. TCAG launched an effort to create an Active Transportation Plan at the Tribe Reservation that is leading to additional outreach opportunities and has the potential to bring in more funding.

The Tulare County Resource Management Agency (RMA) is committed to fully integrated modal options in its General Plan and various Community Plans. This includes supporting projects that enhance active transportation infrastructure. To help accomplish this RMA has developed Complete Street Policies for its disadvantaged, unincorporated communities. These policies contain visions, priorities, goals, objectives, policies, analysis, and ultimately project lists and cost estimates. These align with the overall regional goals contained in this RTP/SCS and are incorporated into this document in the Appendix.

The Action Element provides a summary of existing and future conditions of the regional transportation system. Existing and future circulation issues and land use trends are also addressed. This analysis is intended to support improvements to the system to meet future travel needs.

According to the Action Element, the region is expected to experience a population growth rate of 0.71% annually (Action Element, Table A-1.1) and have a 0.60% average annual increase in vehicle miles traveled per day (SCS, Table 7.1) by the year 2046, the time horizon for this document.

The Action Element addresses a wide variety of transportation programs and issues and contains project tables and lists detailing project type, location, timing and funding.

The 2022 RTP is financially constrained. All projects listed in this document have been identified with funding sources that will help complete the project during the time horizon of this plan (to the year 2046). Financially unconstrained projects are listed for information purposes only. The sources of revenues versus expenditures are displayed on tables within the document. One of the tables summarizes the year of expenditure baselines and escalation factors per fund type. The projects in the 2022 RTP are consistent with the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP) and the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP).

The purpose of the Financial Element is to provide assumptions of the cost and revenues necessary to implement the RTP. The assumptions include revenue

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estimates for specific governmental funding programs (including the local sales tax measure, state and federal funds), local contributions, license and fuel taxes, and development fees.

Included in the RTP, and incorporated by reference in the Appendix, is the Tulare County Regional Active Transportation Plan (RATP), known more informally as Walk 'n Bike Tulare County. It was prepared in response to the growing interest among residents in active transportation and its contribution to a more diverse transportation system for the region.

Put simply, the objective of the plan is to make active transportation in the region safer and easier. Within this objective, the plan has two main purposes: (1) To provide a foundation for the active transportation component of the RTP and (2) to help position the high-priority projects to compete well for competitive funding.

Also included in the RTP is the Regional Long Range Transit Plan (LRTP) which aims to better enhance and coordinate regional transit, hoping to improve connectivity, increase levels of service and attract younger riders. The plan contains an analysis of customer information, fares, routes, schedules, land use, premium transit opportunities, customer amenities, intelligent transportation systems, operations, performance metrics and governance. It is incorporated into this RTP by reference and is included in the Appendix.