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STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Highway 154 Truck Safety

MEETING DATE: January 19, 2011

AGENDA ITEM: 14

STAFF CONTACT: Gregg Hart, Jim Kemp

RECOMMENDATION:

- A. Request that Assemblymember Williams introduce an Assembly Resolution supporting measures to improve safety on State Route 154.
- B. Authorize chair to sign letter to Caltrans District Director Rich Krumholz requesting that Route 154 be designated as part of the California Truck Advisory Network and not recommended for trucks.

SUMMARY:

In 2010 the SBCAG Board established the Highway 154 Truck Safety Committee to lead a multi-agency effort to improve safety on Highway 154. The committee met a number of times in 2011 and has made a great deal of progress toward improving safety on the highway. Some of these efforts include

- California Highway Patrol (CHP) has contacted major GPS mapping services to advise them that 101 is a better route for trucks than 154.
- Caltrans completed a median rumble strip project to reduce crossover collisions.
- SBCAG initiated the CHP administrative process for a ban on the transport of hazardous materials on Highway 154 (the transport of hazardous waste is currently prohibited).
- \$30 million in local Measure D safety improvements have been completed on 154 including new interchanges with 101 at both ends, passing lanes, turning lanes, shoulder widening.
- Signage installed to encourage use of 101 for trucking as an alternate route to 154.
- CHP has obtained Office of Traffic Safety grants for enhanced enforcement and truck inspections to reduce accidents caused by DUI, speeding, and trucking violations.
- CHP partnering with local truckers to reduce violations.
- Working with Assemblymember Williams to explore legislative solutions.

Staff is recommending the SBCAG Board request Assemblymember Williams introduce an Assembly Resolution supporting measures to improve safety on Highway 154 and authorize the

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chair to send a letter to Caltrans District Director Rich Krumholz requesting that Route 154 be designated as part of the California Truck Advisory Network. This designation would allow Caltrans to install enhanced signage advising against use of 154 for trucks and add the highway to a statewide list of advisory routes that is used by truckers and dispatchers.

DISCUSSION:

In the aftermath of the tragic accident involving an out of control gravel truck that killed a family of three at the intersection of Highway 154 and State Street, representatives from Caltrans District 5 and the California Highway Patrol provided a presentation on Highway 154 truck safety to the SBCAG Board. Following the SBCAG Board discussion, the board unanimously approved a motion by Supervisor Farr to support initiating the California Highway Patrol's administrative process for banning trucks transporting hazardous materials on Highway 154, to initiate a legislative effort to prohibit trucks over a certain size and weight from using Highway 154 and to form an ad-hoc Highway 154 Truck Safety Committee. Members Farr, Wolf, Aceves and Pointer agreed to serve on the committee. Mayor Richardson agreed in December to serve in place of Mayor Pointer who had left the SBCAG Board.

The ad hoc committee held two meetings in early 2011 with representatives from the CHP, Caltrans and SBCAG's state lobbyist joining in the discussion. The committee supported the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors efforts to initiate the California Highway Patrol's administrative process for banning the transportation of hazardous materials on Highway 154. Following the CHP protocol, letters were sent by all the local agencies in Santa Barbara County adjacent to 154 affirming their concurrence with this effort. The CHP has been working with its headquarters to enact the administrative ban and it will be in place shortly.

Over the summer and fall of 2011, the CHP significantly increased its enforcement efforts on Highway 154 focusing on truck safety violations. Citations to truckers for overweight vehicles, improperly filled out manifests, speeding and other moving violations increased significantly and according to the CHP officers in the field resulted in fewer trucks using Highway 154. Late in 2011 the local CHP division received an Office of Traffic Safety grant to continue increased enforcement on Highway 154 specifically focused on DUI enforcement. The CHP has also contacted the major companies that provide GPS mapping services to motorists to advise them that Highway 154 is not an appropriate shortcut to Highway 101 because of safety concerns.

Caltrans has assisted in this multiagency effort to improve safety on Highway 154 by installing a new median rumble safety strip on Highway 154 from the 101 north to Highway 246 which physically alerts motorists when they have crossed the highway center dividing line and is much more visible at night and in low visibility situations. Caltrans has also installed new advisory truck signage at both ends of Highway 154 notifying trucks that Highway 101 is the preferred route for truck traffic rather than Highway 154.

After a public hearing in January of last year where the SBCAG Board took public testimony on the need for a truck ban on Highway 154, the SBCAG Board voted to request that Assemblymember Das Williams carry state legislation that would ban non-local delivery trucks of a certain size from traveling on Highway 154. Assemblymember Williams agreed to this request and introduced AB 537 which, at the recommendation of Assembly Transportation Committee staff, was made a two year bill in order to have time to report on the outcomes of the suite of efforts to improve safety on Highway 154 that were underway at the time.

Late in 2011 the committee met with Assemblymember Williams to discuss the status of AB 537 as the new legislative session was quickly approaching. Assemblymember Williams recommended discussing the prospects for the bill with Janet Dawson, the chief consultant to the Assembly Transportation Committee. Ms. Dawson subsequently informed the committee via a conference call that the accident statistics from Highway 154 do not support a truck ban at this time as the accident rate is below the statewide average and the Highway is engineered properly to accommodate trucks. She explained that to support a ban, the Assembly Transportation Committee would need to see a stronger nexus between the problem and the proposed solution. There are a small number of legislative bans on truck in place and it would be difficult to garner Transportation Committee support for AB 537 because of the precedent it would set imposing a truck ban without sufficient evidence that it is necessary.

In light of the committee staff's opposition and that of the California Trucking Association, the SBCAG ad hoc committee is now recommending that the board support a request that Assemblymember Williams introduce a state resolution to encourage trucks to use Highway 101 rather than Highway 154 because of the unique circumstances that exist on this scenic highway that make it inappropriate for through truck traffic. The proposed resolution is not regulatory (ie., it would not ban trucks from using 154), but would raise the profile of this issue and state a legislative intent to improve safety on 154 through various measures. Staff recommends the SBCAG Board support the recommendation of the Highway 154 Truck Safety Committee and request that Assemblymember Williams introduce an Assembly Resolution supporting measures to improve safety on State Route 154. If authorized by the board, the 154 committee would work with Assemblymember Williams office, the County, CHP, Caltrans and our Sacramento lobbyists to draft the resolution.

Finally, in December of 2011 Caltrans staff indicated the Department maintains a California Truck Advisory Network list of state highways that are not recommended for trucks. Highway 154 is a viable candidate to be included on this list and Caltrans has requested the SBCAG Chair send a letter to Caltrans District Director Rich Krumholz requesting Route 154 be designated as part of the California Truck Advisory Network and not recommended for trucks. SBCAG staff is working with Caltrans staff to draft this letter and provide the appropriate supporting documentation.

The Highway 154 Truck Safety Committee has accomplished a great deal over the past year to improve safety for motorists traveling on Highway 154. This effort will continue in 2012 and members of the public can be assured all of the agencies involved in this effort are working collaboratively to improve safety on Highway 154.