

**MONDAY MORNING GROUP OF WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNTY
ANNUAL ADVOCACY TRIP – WASHINGTON, DC
APRIL 7 – 10, 2025**

I-15 EXPRESS LANES PROJECT SOUTHERN EXTENSION

ISSUE: In response to rapid population and goods movement growth, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) is prioritizing the advancement of the I-15 Express Lanes Project Southern Extension on Interstate 15 (I-15) between the cities of Corona and Lake Elsinore. Addressing congestion on I-15 is critical for existing residents as well as families relocating to Riverside County for its economic opportunities, affordability, available housing, quality schools, sense of community, and access to open space.

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group urges Congress to advocate to the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) in support of RCTC's application for \$25 million in Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grant funding for the I-15 Express Lanes Project Southern Extension, Segment 1.

BACKGROUND: RCTC applied for the federal BUILD grant to fund Segment 1 of the project, from El Cerrito Road in Corona to Indian Truck Trail in Temescal Valley. Once completed, both Segment 1 of the project through Temescal Valley and the entire project through Lake Elsinore will enhance the flow of traffic, facilitate the movement of goods, and promote safety. Since 2000, Riverside County has added one million residents and is growing at a rapid rate as it continues to attract families from other parts of the state thanks to the opportunities and amenities local communities offer. In anticipation of this growth residents voted to renew Measure A, a countywide half-cent transportation sales tax that included a commitment to add lanes to I-15. RCTC opened the I-15 Express Lanes in 2021, which added two new lanes on I-15 from the cities of Eastvale and Jurupa Valley, south through the city of Corona.

RCTC continues to advance the I-15 Express Lanes Project Southern Extension to complete the vision identified by voters over two decades ago. This improvement was again affirmed by the public as a priority through substantial community outreach RCTC conducted to identify the transportation needs of Riverside County families. Residents not only support the extension of I-15 Express Lanes to fulfill a longstanding need, but to also prepare for the more than 500,000 residents expected to be added to the County population in the next 25 years.

The full scope of the project would extend the existing I-15 Express Lanes by an additional 15.8 miles southward by adding tolled express lanes in both directions in the existing median and maintaining the number of existing general-purpose lanes for travelers who opt to not use the express lanes. This stretch of I-15 experiences increasing congestion northbound in the morning and significant congestion southbound in the afternoons. Residents who opt to travel in the extended express lanes will reduce the impact on general-purpose lanes for other vehicles including trucks. This operational improvement is critical to the region's economic vitality, due to I-15's role in carrying commuters, freight, and regional tourists. Forty percent of the nation's goods travel from the ports and through the Inland Southern California region along rail and highways to reach their destination. As of 2015, the I-15 moved more than 46,000,000 vehicles annually, including two million tons of freight valued at \$108 billion (FAF04, 2015). Today, those figures are undoubtedly much higher.

The project will improve safety by providing greater separation between passenger vehicles and trucks, expand mobility choice, and increase travel time reliability. Recognizing the significant benefits the project affords to communities in southwest Riverside County, Representative Ken Calvert successfully advanced two Community Project Funding requests for the project in federal FYs 2024 and 2025.

In 2024 RCTC released the draft Environmental Impact Report and Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) for public review and comment. The preliminary engineering and environmental process began in May 2019 and is anticipated to conclude in 2025. RCTC is utilizing the progressive design-build procurement method to advance the project. This procurement method enables RCTC to construct Segment 1 of the project and other segments as funding becomes available. If sufficient funding is secured, RCTC anticipates construction to commence in 2027. RCTC applied for Round 2 of the BUILD Grant administered by USDOT and anticipates award announcements no later than June 28, 2025.

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RESTORE FUNDING FOR LEO GRANTS AND CANINE-TEAM REIMBURSEMENTS

ISSUE: House and Senate Appropriations Committees are finalizing FY 2025 spending bills for the federal government. Over the last several years, funding cuts continue to be made eliminating funding for Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Law Enforcement (LEO) reimbursement programs and the officer's stipend for state and local-led canine teams, shifting these costs to airport operators.

ACTION: The Monday Morning Group urges federal elected leaders and officials to advocate for the restoration of funding for TSA staffing of exit lanes (\$110,990,000), the LEO Reimbursement program (\$45,059,000), and State and local LEO-handled canine teams (\$34,100,000), as called for in the House DHS appropriations bill for FY 2025.

BACKGROUND: Ongoing efforts aim to reach an agreement on overall FY 2025 spending levels, allowing for decisions on individual programs, including those within the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Department of Homeland Security (DHS), TSA, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). With historic cuts to funding, airports have been forced to divert resources from other security purposes to pay officer salaries. Additionally, some airports have had to reduce the number of canine teams operating in their facilities, reducing visible deterrence measures.

The elimination of funding for TSA's LEO reimbursement program in the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024 (FY 2024 Appropriations) resulted in a \$321,200 annual impact to Ontario International Airport's (ONT) law enforcement capabilities. These grants partially reimburse LEOs who respond to possible threats, like firearms or fentanyl, during the checkpoint screening process at ONT as TSA screeners do not have the authority to detain or make arrests.

The House-passed and Senate-introduced bills propose \$45.6 million for LEO reimbursement grants and restore funding for the state and local-led canine team reimbursements. The Monday Morning Group urges Congress to fully restore funding for these two critical programs in FY 2025.

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SURFACE TRANSPORTATION REAUTHORIZATION

ISSUE: The Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act (IIJA) currently funds surface transportation programs and other investments in the nation’s infrastructure through September 2026. While IIJA funding levels are significant, its overreliance on competitive grant funding placed regions such as Riverside County at a disadvantage. Transportation infrastructure in Riverside County is outdated and cannot keep up with the influx of families moving to the region from other parts of California. More federal investment in Riverside County’s transportation infrastructure is needed to support regional families and businesses.

ACTION: In the next surface transportation reauthorization bill, the Monday Morning Group urges Congress and the Administration to:

- Maintain top-line transportation funding levels of the IIJA;
- Prioritize increased investments in formula funding programs over discretionary funding programs; and
- Rewrite competitive grant funding programs to prioritize geographically large, high-population growth regions such as Riverside County. This builds on the Administration’s efforts to reevaluate and maximize regional transportation investments across the country.

Riverside County families and businesses need increased federal funding and partnership to support our transportation system and increase highway and road capacity.

BACKGROUND: Every five years, Congress drafts and passes surface transportation reauthorization legislation to authorize and fund transportation funding programs for vital transportation agencies across the country, including the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC). Congress is beginning to hold conversations and hearings regarding surface transportation reauthorization to ensure continuity of transportation funding beyond the IIJA. Formula funding programs such as the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) program provide fair and reliable, population-based funding to states that agencies like RCTC can count on to support the transportation needs of its families and businesses. Imbalanced support for discretionary funding in the IIJA has not met the needs of families in rapidly growing regions like Riverside County as well as increased formula funding would have.

That said, competitive grant programs are an important piece to the federal government’s support of transportation infrastructure. Since the establishment of the IIJA, the cost of raw materials, labor, and the land on which transportation projects are developed have increased dramatically. Riverside County continues to attract families from across the state thanks to the opportunities and amenities local communities offer. Additionally, more than 40% of the nation’s goods travel through inland southern California by truck and train. As Riverside County continues to attract more industries that take part in the goods movement, there is a growing need for reliable roads and highways to ensure those goods are safely and reliably delivered. At the same time, hardworking residents should not be expected to compete with semi-trucks on congested highways and freight trains at at-grade crossings to get to and from work each day to support their families. Riverside County’s transportation infrastructure needs are significant, as RCTC identified over \$30 billion in needed mobility improvements over the next 30 years in its 2024 Traffic Relief Plan.

Riverside County is the fourth-most populous county in California and 10th-most populous in the United States. Rapid growth is expected to continue, reaching 3 million residents by 2050, up from 2.5 million in 2022. Other models suggest that western Riverside County’s population could grow by as much as 800,000 within that same period. To house these new residents and families, Riverside County has been tasked with planning for more than 167,000 new housing units by 2030. These trends showcase the overwhelming need to direct additional funding – in particular formula funding – to on-the-ground agencies such as RCTC with the know-how to quickly and cost-effectively deliver transportation solutions.

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