The Mission at San Diego

The Environmental Analysis in Transportation (ADC10)
2015 Summer Workshop
Photos by Martin Palmer
In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo became the first European to sail into San Diego Bay. However, it was 200 years later before the first settlers came to the area. By 1769, both a fort and a mission had been established. Under Spanish then later Mexican rule, a permanent settlement was established and continued to expand.

Today, San Diego is a thriving city of 1.4 million people. It is the second largest city in California and the eighth largest city in the United States.

San Diego was also home to our committee’s 35th consecutive mid-year workshop. Our theme this year was Better Transportation and Environmental Outcomes Through Effective Partnerships. Caltrans and the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) were our hosts. The workshop, our latest ever in the calendar year, took place on September 20-23. We were last in San Diego in 2004.

True to southern California, the weather was near perfect everyday and there was plenty to do.
"It was the right mix of business and pleasure."
Monday

Bruce April, Deputy District Director of the Environmental Division in District 11 of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and Muggs Stoll, Director of Land Use and Transportation Planning at the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) started off the workshop talking about their agencies’ partnership. Caltrans, District 11 and SANDAG have a very long and innovative partnership which is unique among State DOTs and Regional MPO’s within California and the nation. The relationship was developed decades ago as the San Diego region worked to address many transportation issues as the Interstate development and construction era was winding down. Funding for regional transportation was at a crisis level for a state and a region that were growing rapidly in the 1980’s. San Diego joined several other counties across California in passing sales tax measures to address chronic regional transportation needs. While SANDAG’s role as the MPO was to administer the local sales tax funds, along with other state and federal funding, Caltrans continued its project development role for the regional highway improvements to support the Interstate system. As the first 20-year sales tax measure was winding down in 2004, the measure was extended another 40 years and the region put into place a unique arrangement whereby Caltrans employees fill the role of a number of Corridor Directors for key transportation corridors, while SANDAG funds the incremental pay differential for the positions. These positions have been instrumental in delivering a multi-billion dollar program of highly complex projects for the region through all phases of development, from planning, to environmental analysis/permitting, to final design and construction.
Our keynote speaker was Mr. Michael Beck, Founder and Director, Endangered Habitats League (EHL). The EHL is a regional (southern California) conservation organization working to preserve the globally significant biodiversity of the region through land use, transportation planning, regional economics, and regional conservation planning such as the San Diego Multiple Species Conservation Program. EHL also is engaged in federal and state environmental policy. The Endangered Habitats League formed a sister organization, the Endangered Habitats Conservancy (EHC) in 2005 to work on land acquisition, stewardship, and resource monitoring.

Mr. Beck serves as President of EHC. Mr. Beck founded Lakeside’s Riverpark Conservancy and co-founded the San Diego River Park Foundation where he serves as Chairman. Mr. Beck is a board member of the California Oak Foundation, and the Earth Discovery Institute. Mr. Beck has received recognition for his planning and conservation work including Planning Commissioner of the Year for the State of California, the National Alexander Calder Award, San Diego Mediation Center’s Peacemaker Award, and LEAD San Diego Visionary Award among others.
Monday afternoon started out with a unique session: *The Who, What, Where, When, Why and How of Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration, Strategy and Data Capture for Monitoring and Evaluating the Health Outcomes of a Proposed Transportation Project*. The session emphasized the need for practical solutions achieved through effective two-way communication, capacity building, data sources and navigating existing networks. The intended result is a cultural shift in transportation project design and planning based on a systematic evidence-based method with each member of the team contributing their discipline specific skill-set necessary to effectively evaluate the sociopolitical, economic and environmental impacts of a transportation project.
In her session, Back to the Future – Learning From Past NEPA/404 Integration to Inform Future Partnerships, Connell Dunning, Transportation Team Supervisor with US EPA’s Region 9 Environmental Review Office provided a retrospective of the integration of NEPA and the Clean Water Act Section 404 permitting process with case studies and perspectives from the past twenty years of integrating NEPA and CWA Section 404 in the Pacific Southwest Region (California, Arizona, Nevada, and Hawaii), including examples of successful partnerships from high-speed rail, transit, and highways.

Stephanie Blanco highlighted one particular project that had successful partnerships—SR 91 CIP Design Build: Permitting with agencies that have minimal experience in Design Build Environmental Compliance.

“...It was standing room only in the session: Successful Projects, Successful Partnerships....”
The first presentation provided an overview of the CREATE Program, the background and context behind the development of the public-private partnership, the structure of the partnership and distinctive aspects of the Program including the program-specific environmental review strategy. The second of two presentations focused on the development and implementation of the CREATE Program’s environmental justice policy.

The Monday afternoon session on Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency (CREATE) Program came off without a hitch. CREATE is a nationally-prominent rail infrastructure program, managed by the unique partnership of U.S. DOT, State of Illinois, City of Chicago, Metra, Amtrak, and the Association of American Railroads acting on behalf of six of the nation’s Class I freight railroads, as well as Amtrak and Northeast Illinois Commuter Rail System (Metra). The total cost of the CREATE program is estimated to be $3.8 billion in 2013 dollars, with $1.2 billion received and programmed to date. The benefits of the full CREATE Program are estimated at $28.3 billion over 30 years after all of the component projects are operational.
Mike Davis, Senior Vice President at ICF International moderated the session: *Reaching People, Successful Involvement Strategies*. The session spoke to noteworthy collaborative and cooperative efforts that occurred in three very distinct arenas. Nancy Pfeffer spoke about The Gateway Cities of Southeastern Los Angeles County. Home to two million ethnically diverse and challenged residents the region’s largest seaport and burdened with congestion, air pollution, noise and blight. The presented described the collaborative effort among government agencies, community representatives, and the private sector that have underpinned these successful planning efforts for a quarter century. Jason Smith with Jacobs described how federal, state and local officials came together with residents to rebuild and help a community heal in the wake of the deadly Oso slide in Washington state which killed 42 people and left the town in ruin.
Dale Jones with Caltrans HQ Environmental office both moderated and presented at the session: NEPA Assignment. Section 6005 of the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA:LU), codified at 23 USC 327, established a pilot program allowing the Secretary of Transportation to assign and for certain States to assume NEPA responsibilities for highway projects. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) was assigned NEPA responsibilities for highway projects on July 1, 2007.

Section 1313 of the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (MAP-21), converted the pilot program into a permanent program, allowed any State to apply for the program, created an renewal process, and expanded the scope of the Secretary’s responsibilities that may be assigned and assumed to include railroad, public transportation, and multimodal projects, in addition to highway projects. The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) was assigned NEPA responsibilities for highway projects on December 14, 2014.

Gerry Solomon, Carlos Swonke, and Dale Jones gave perspectives from FHWA, TxDOT and Caltrans about the permanent program: from the application process, monitoring performance, the day-to-day challenges of assigning and assuming Federal responsibilities.
Sandra Hertz, Deputy Director for the Maryland Department of Transportation, State Highway Administration presented on the Watershed Resources Registry (WRR). The WRR represents a partnership of agencies that developed a framework for integrated watershed management. The GIS based targeting tool was developed to analyze watersheds and identify the best opportunities for the protection of high quality resources, restoration of impaired resources, resource conservation and environmental resource planning, and improvement of stormwater management. The WRR is intended to integrate the Clean Water Act (CWA) authorities by facilitating implementation of sections of the CWA.

“The session on Ecological really made sense of long-term mitigation strategies.”

Carolyn Washburn of CH2M coordinated the well-received session: Ecological at Work in Long-term Mitigation.
Recently the Federal Highways Agency (FHWA) advanced implementation of Eco-Logical, specifically the application of the Integrated Ecological Framework (IEF; Crist et al. 2014). The IEF is a process to assess the cumulative effects of all anticipated transportation projects (in combination with other actions) over the course of a Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and develop advance mitigation to accommodate the desired system improvements. One component of the IEF is integration of a regional advance mitigation plan (RAMP). Although the concept and benefits of RAMPs are broadly accepted, there are few examples and little guidance in their development (but see Huber et al. 2010, NCHRP 25-25-67 2011). This project used the Pikes Peak Area Council of Government (PPACG) LRTP as the vehicle to develop a methodology and case study in RAMP development that is extensible to other regions in the U.S. and beyond.

Conducting RAMP should no longer be an R&D effort limited to a handful of locations but is now ready for incorporation into standard transportation planning processes. Complexity and difficulties remain in the long-term implementation of actual mitigation projects. Some of these issues include data sensitivity and access, completing the field validation-database updating loop, and long term maintenance of the database over the long transportation implementation life-cycle.

The Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments (OKI), an urban-area MPO in the Cincinnati metropolitan area, has the responsibility for framing and prioritizing for delivery the area’s transportation plan and program. OKI utilizes the Eco-Logical framework as a mechanism to bring landscape-scale environmental considerations into key steps in the planning and prioritization steps of transportation delivery. The NHD is one aspect of a series data informing the OKI Environmental Consultations process, a mechanism used to inform the region’s long range transportation plan. This mechanism, in addition to data compilation and mapping tools, includes a multi-stakeholder consultation process that identifies environmental risks, concerns, opportunities and impact mitigation expectations among various actions within the MPO’s eight-county area.

Kim Smith with Caltrans co-moderated the session: Ecological at Work in Long-Term Mitigation with Keith Greer of SANDAG. Both gave a presentation on how Ecological principles are used for long-range planning in their respective agencies and when working on joint endeavors.

Rich Muzzy with the Pikes Peak Area Council of Governments tag-teamed with Craig Casper (right) ramp the presentation on the regional advance mitigation plan (RAMP).
The Tuesday Tour

Bruce April with Caltrans provides us an overview of the work his agency has done to restore the lagoons while enhancing the nearby Highway and related transportation systems.

A ranger gives us an overview of the trails and environmental features of the park.

With box lunches in hand we set for the interpretive center,
We left the bus and headed down to the beach. It was a warm day but the cool ocean breeze made conditions perfect for a stroll on the sand.

On the tour we learned about the ocean environment along with the instability of the nearby cliffs. Some clever participants made a jump rope out of seaweed found on the beach.

Many people opted to put their feet in the cool ocean water.

Mike Davis (R) with ICF International and a committee member is speaking with one of many people who came on today’s tour.

“A perfect day to be at the beach”
With some of the best views of downtown San Diego and the harbor, Coronado Island and Peohe’s Restaurant offered the perfect setting for the evening repast. A ten minute ride aboard a walk-on ferry brought us to the Coronado Ferry Landing and easy walking distance to the restaurant which featured Polynesian cuisine.

Tuesday Night Committee and Friends Dinner
Susan Jones a Civil Engineer with FHWA and ADC10 committee member led the Wednesday morning session: FHWA Project Development and Planning Update: Progress in Process, Programs, and Research. The session provided an update on various key FHWA activities. Presenters gave a summary of current FHWA research activities related to accelerating project delivery, enhancement of community and social benefits of highway transportation, and improvements to the quality of the natural environment. They also highlighted Environmental Justice and Public Involvement, Transportation Planning Capacity Building program, SELOM, and Health Impacts.

**Wednesday**

“There was a lot of ground to cover.”
Bruce April (left) and Muggs Stoll (right) closed out the workshop by summarizing what we have learned, gains made, and their final thoughts on what true partnerships really mean.

“There were plenty of networking opportunities.”

David McCray of Beveridge and Diamond PC and Jennifer Martinez an Environmental Program Manager with Parsons take a time out to network during a break on the final day of the workshop.
In all, over the three and a half days we had about 95 attendees, nearly 40 speakers and presenters, 13 sessions, a half day tour, committee and friends dinner, and a keynote luncheon.

Our sincere thanks to our hosts—Caltrans and SANDAG for hosting a great workshop—one that we will remember for a long time.

Also, our sincere thanks to the Westgate Hotel. Their sincere hospitality and flexibility made it an easy workshop.

Last, but not least, our thanks to our generous sponsors that truly made the workshop possible.

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**Special Thanks**

We want to give a special thanks given to both Bruce April (Caltrans) and Muggs Stoll (SANDAG) for their time and effort in making this event possible. We also want to thank their organizations for hosting our committee.