

CITY OF MERCED
Planning Department

TO: Bicycle Advisory Commission
FROM: Bill King, Principal Planner
DATE: April 28, 2015
SUBJECT: Draft "Active Transportation Planning" Grant

BACKGROUND

The *Active Transportation Program* is a two-year old State program that combines prior state and federal funding programs including Bicycle Transportation Account (BTA) funds and Safe Routes to School (SRTS) funds, among others. The City Planning Department and UC Merced student intern Gustavo Cruz, is preparing a grant application to prepare an Active Transportation Plan/Safe Routes to School Plan (ATP/SRTS Plan) for the City of Merced. No applications for bikeway or pedestrian improvements are being prepared.

PLAN OVERVIEW

The Purpose of this project is to create an Active Transportation Plan/Safe Routes to School Plan (ATP/SRTS Plan) for the City of Merced, with a focus on Central and South Merced. The focus on these areas of the City is due to: 1) its large population of disadvantaged communities (DC); 2) Merced's future high-speed rail (HSR) station and need to boost multi-modal transportation connections; and, 3) the presence of job-based land uses and opportunities for and ATP-based transportation connections to outlying residential areas. The City's *2013 Bicycle Transportation Plan* will be updated and folded into the City of Merced ATP/SRTS Plan.

The Central Core of Merced (which corresponds to the focus area of the proposed plan), contains a mix of land use types that support successful implementation of ATP. The transportation system is challenged, however, due to the existence of several connectivity barriers (freeways, railroads, and creek) to nearby neighborhoods. A central feature of the Plan will be a barrier assessment with a deliverable outcome defining the location and type of ATP infrastructure that is needed to connect homes to schools and work, and the HSR station.

SCOPE OF PLAN

The *City of Merced ATP/SRTS Plan* will be crafted in a strategic manner to assure that these disadvantaged communities (DC) will receive direct and meaningful benefits. These benefits will be achieved by a two-pronged plan development approach, including a rigorous project selection process involving a comprehensive project readiness assessment, and plan follow-through guided by a Maintenance/Implementation Chapter, both of which will include participation by Merced's DC communities. Key objectives and deliverables of each prong include:

Project Identification and Selection

- Devise an Outreach Plan with the target participation objective in workshops, community meetings, advisory committee, and surveys by members of the DC to be at least 75%. This

means an extensive and sustained outreach effort to solicit input from those who historically have been left out of the planning process. The potential list of ATP/SRTS would be based on public input, assuring future installation of meaningful projects.

- Perform an Engineering Feasibility Assessment of Potential ATP projects.
- To assure direct benefits, create an ATP/SRTS Project Mix based primarily on DC geographic areas: 30% of projects with direct benefit to schools; 35% of projects to benefit downtown and the HSR (DC Core Area); and 30% of projects to benefit “Home to Work” commuter pedestrian or bicycling connections in DC areas. 5% of projects may be located outside DC areas.
- Prioritization Factors: 1) cost-benefit analysis (new ATP/SRTS trips per dollar spent); 2) while at least 95% of the projects (based on cost) will be located in DC communities, the highest priority projects will be in the “DC Core Area;” and, 3) High Project Readiness Score.
- At least 50% of the projects will have achieved CEQA clearance as part of the ATP/SRTS Plan.

Plan Maintenance and Implementation

- Draft an Implementation Chapter that describes plan update and monitoring functions. This chapter would also include a finance plan, a description for each project, and a recommended funding strategy and timeline.
- Form a permanent ATP Working Group headed by the City Engineer with representatives from: the City Police Department; the City Public Works Department; the local Council of Governments; the local school districts, and up to three citizen representatives, one of whom would be a Bicycle Advisory Commission member. This group would be formally established upon adoption of the ATP/SRTS. The ATP working group would meet at least twice annually to match plan projects with the project funding sources such as the City’s CIP and grant fund opportunities.

The plan will advance projects that will remove barriers and create safe spaces to bike or walk because there will be infrastructure in place for Merced’s DC’s to do that. Implementation of the plan will provide DC’s with direct access to pedestrian and bicycle routes to the center of downtown where many jobs, events, and transit connections (Greyhound, Amtrak, public transit, and future HSR) exist. Public parks, grocery stores, schools, and community centers will be more accessible by providing new routes and paths connecting large sections of the community to downtown and local schools.

PROJECT SCHEDULE

Applications are due in early June 2015. Caltrans will award projects in August 2015. If awarded, a contract to accept the funds will be brought to the City Council for consideration.

ACTION

None: Information item only.