

## **Transportation Recommendations from the Mendocino County Climate Action Advisory Committee (MCCAAC) to the Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG)**

### Introduction

The MCCAAC was formed in 2019. Our purpose is to address the crisis of climate change and implement policies and actions to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, increase carbon storage and prepare County residents to deal with local climate caused disasters. An all-volunteer board with a tiny budget, we have been meeting monthly and working hard to meet this ambitious agenda. We believe that with increased awareness and concern, it is incumbent on government agencies to treat climate change as the emergency that it is.

Given this extreme situation, the MCCAAC urges MCOG to prioritize GHG reduction and elevate those policies and projects that achieve this goal.

The following is a list of transportation-related recommendations we feel would go a long way towards improving air quality, maximizing safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and increasing awareness of what County residents can do to reduce the risk of climate change. Some of these recommendations are inexpensive and easily achieved while others can be considered a “wish list” requiring significant funding. We would be delighted to speak with your staff or board members in more detail about any or all of our recommendations.

#### 1. Encourage More Extensive Walking and Bicycling

Organizations like Walk & Bike Mendocino have been doing great work encouraging children and adults to walk and ride their bikes more. Venues like the Great Redwood Trail have afforded opportunities to ride without encountering motor vehicles. But our downtown cities can be dangerous for bike riders, particularly children. Bike lanes are few and far between and some (e.g., Gobbi Street in Ukiah) are not wide enough. More safe bike lanes on busy streets would go a long way towards encouraging residents to bike instead of drive. Grant funding through the State Department of Transportation could be sought for more bike and pedestrian paths.

Several years ago, the Mendocino County Department of Public Health sponsored “Safe Routes to Schools” workshops that offered instruction to children regarding best bicycle practices, gave out bicycle helmets at no charge and encouraged bicycling as a fun, safe and healthy alternative to children being transported to school by the family vehicle. We would like to see more of those adequately funded partnerships with County agencies to improve our bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

While the County of Mendocino appears to understand the need for non-motorized and Safe Routes to School infrastructure improvements, its Department of Transportation is understaffed and faces challenges in taking on these projects. In order to accomplish important planning projects in support of active transportation, it’s clear help is needed to apply for grant funding and oversee project implementation.

Carpooling or bicycle riding to work or school could be encouraged by offering prizes and incentives. For many years, Low Gap Road in Ukiah at school drop-off and pick-up times has been a mess of a traffic jam with most drivers transporting only one child. Those (few) students who walk or ride their bicycles often arrive at school faster than those sitting in a very slow-moving vehicle. Arranging carpools for students and employees who must drive from outlying areas will certainly require some planning and flexibility but can be done!

Bike sharing or rental racks in downtown areas would offer employees and visitors to our cities who do not have bicycles with them the opportunity to park their cars and get around via bicycle to do errands or explore. Bike sharing facilities could also be provided at electric-vehicle charging stations.

#### Active Transportation Objective & Policy Recommendations:

Encourage Healthier Lifestyles - Continue to partner with government, non-profit, and community groups to apply for and oversee grants to continue Safe Routes to Schools non-infrastructure projects throughout Mendocino County;

We also recommend that MCOG work with the cities, counties, and public land owners to increase street trees that provide shade to make walking a more comfortable choice;

Increase funding for active transportation - Increase percentage of Local Transportation funds for bike and ped projects;

Financial Policies – secure grant funding - Consider acting as implementation agency, when no other agency is able to act as such, for projects that will result in increased opportunities for active transportation and/or decreased GHG emissions.

## 2. Encourage Cleaner Driving

Our County is in desperate need of more Level 3 electric vehicle fast charging stations. We understand that has become a priority for MCOG. In addition to encouraging and accommodating owners of EV's, we need those fast-charging stations so we do not continue to lose precious tourist dollars from EV owners traveling through our cities. Unfortunately, the Level 2 chargers are so slow that most travelers do not have the time to wait over 7 hours for a charge. We also recommend exploring possible partnerships to develop shade structures topped with photovoltaics to assure that the increased demand for electricity for e-vehicles is paired with renewable energy generation.

Unfortunately, we see widespread vehicle idling, i.e., drivers sitting in their vehicles with the engines running while parked. This causes foolish and wholly unnecessary carbon dioxide emissions, a leading contributor of climate change. It also emits harmful chemicals into the air we breathe. Due to advances in technology, letting a vehicle idle for more than 10 seconds burns more fuel than turning it off and restarting. Particularly troubling is that many loving parents and guardians engage in this dangerous practice

when picking up their children from schools. An education campaign in the schools and in workplaces could go a long way towards ending this unfortunate practice.

Similarly, we have many drive-thru businesses in the County – fast food, coffee, pharmacies, banks, etc. Except for people with mobility challenges, it is not necessary for able-bodied folks to sit in their idling vehicles instead of going inside a business. Now that the pandemic is winding down, there is often no reason for consumers to use drive-thrus other than for personal convenience. We would like to see a moratorium on approval of more drive-thrus and encouragement of consumers to no longer idle in their vehicles while awaiting a service.

On that same note, we often see idling vehicles at Cal Trans construction sites. Signage asking motorists to turn off their cars while waiting at these sites would be a great step.

### 3. Make Public Transportation Cleaner and More Accessible to Outlying Areas

We are aware the following recommendations have been extensively discussed and explored: Mendocino Transit Authority (MTA) utilizes many large, fossil fuel dependent busses often with far less than a full load of passengers. Switching those busses to smaller, electric vehicles would be a wonderful step towards the creation of a cleaner and more efficient public transit fleet. Since many of MTA's routes do not require more than 200 miles of travel per day, electric busses could be re-charged each day. Moreover, electrically powered vehicles would not negatively impact the residential neighborhoods and business districts along their routes with greenhouse gas carbon emissions. We are aware of one gas-powered bus that has been replaced by an EV. More extensive replacement must be explored.

We are also aware that some outlying rural areas of our County, such as Comptche and Covelo are not served by MTA. This presents a significant hardship to residents of those communities; expansion of service to rural areas needs to be addressed.

We would also like to see free week-end electric bus service within Mendocino County municipalities. This would reduce personal vehicle traffic for shopping and recreational activities, provide a clean transportation option and educate residents about the benefits of non-fossil fuel vehicles.

MCCAAC encourages MCOG to continue to work with MTA to diversify fleet size and fuels for transit fleet including working toward an all-electric fleet, and increase solar powered canopies at transit stations.

4. Coordination and Outreach with Other Agencies and Organizations

We live in a County with many active and well-informed residents very concerned about the specter of climate change. These group members are anxious to share their views. Local organizations such as the MCCAAC, Climate Action Mendocino (CAM), a Ukiah-based grassroots group, and the Municipal Advisory Councils (MACs) throughout the County would welcome discussion with MCOG. As a policy of objective, the MCCAAC invites MCOG to work with our group to identify and implement projects that will have high impact on GHG reductions.

5. Encourage More Virtual Meetings to Reduce Vehicle Travel

While we are undoubtedly excited to begin meeting in-person post-pandemic, one of the unexpected “gifts” of our time of staying at home was a marked reduction in vehicle travel. Certainly, Zoom meetings get tiresome but they have given us the ability to reduce our carbon footprints by driving less. These plans for the future require thoughtful discussion regarding balancing our need for human contact with our responsibility to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions.

6. Goods and Passenger Transport – Rebuilding Rail Lines to Mendocino County

Due to funding constraints, it does not seem likely that either passenger or freight rail service through Mendocino County can become a reality in the next 20 years. Looking at the big picture, however, we would be wise to imagine long-term ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by gas powered freight trucks on our roads. Replacement of four big rig trucks by one freight car could result in significant GHG reductions. We must be mindful, however of the air and noise pollution from gas powered trains traveling on existing rails that go through often low-income residential neighborhoods in Ukiah. For this reason, we recommend such rails not extend beyond the south end of Ukiah so as not to go through residential neighborhoods. Rather, a transportation hub could be established to transport goods from freight cars to trucks for delivery of goods. At the same time, we hope that the movement to transition big rig trucks away from fossil fuels to clean energy continues to gain momentum.

7. Land Use - Jobs-Housing Balance Policy Recommendation to Reduce Unnecessary Travel

Use information around transportation trends to identify specific communities within the Mendocino County unincorporated areas where Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) should be designated to help address housing shortages that may be resulting in increased travel due to housing shortages.