

2004 Western COGs Conference
October 21-24, 2004
San Diego, California

Summary Report

Traditionally, the annual Western COGs Conference alternates between Washington, California and Oregon for its summer gatherings. This year's Conference was hosted by the regional councils association in California, CALCOG, at the Shelter Pointe Hotel and Marina in San Diego. The tasks of facilitating these conferences are shared between the regional council associations in the three states, and this year the Washington group handled the agenda, speakers, etc., while Oregon took charge of the registration, promotion and banking responsibilities.

The very well-structured conference was attended by elected and appointed participants from regional councils throughout the West. LCOG's delegation was comprised of Cottage Grove Mayor Gary Williams, Springfield School District board member Al King, and Executive Director George Kloeppe. Also participating were the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), the Cascadia Program of the Discovery Institute, the Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations (AMPO) and several state department of transportation officials.

A major focus of the conference was trade and transportation within the West Coast Corridor. The work of the West Coast Corridor Coalition, which LCOG and other regional councils/MPOs has endorsed, was discussed extensively. Notably, a proposal to more formally establish the Coalition as an advocacy group was explored. The primary objective of such a move was seen as enhanced recognition of the national value and import of the corridor in the federal reauthorization process. Beyond regional councils, participants in the Coalition effort include business and industry, shippers, truckers, and ports from Canada to Mexico. The efficiency of boarder crossings, both north and south was also discussed.

Glenn Pascall, economist and former senior state official in Washington, presented a valuable profile of the economy of the West Coast with an emphasis on the interrelationships with trading partners of the Pacific Rim, international neighbors north and south, and other regions of the country.

Representatives of the two major national associations provided conference attendees with reports on pending legislative and administrative actions, including the reauthorization of federal transportation legislation, reauthorization of the

federal Economic Development Administration and Homeland Security issues and funding.

Another Conference session focused on the urban-rural relationship in transportation policy making. Representatives from the three states described the approaches being taken to integrate land use and transportation planning in regions that are both rural and urban. Benton County Commissioner, Linda Modrell, was the principal spokesperson for Oregon's approach. Commissioner Modrell is the chair of the Cascades West Area Commission on Transportation (ACT) and also chair of the newly established MPO serving the Corvallis area.

One of the most interesting components of this year's Conference was an orientation and tour of the U.S.-Mexico Port of Entry. CalTrans District Director, Pedro Orso-Delgado, provided a fascinating and informative summary of the transportation issues surrounding Ports of Entry (POE); and federal agents guided the group through two of San Diego's POEs at San Ysidro and Otay Mesa. To say that these international boarder facilities are major operations is an understatement; and the tour provided an extremely "up close and personal" view of the challenges confronting U.S. boarder protection personnel dealing with both passengers and freight. Clearly, security issues have assumed an elevated priority in these facilities. But the long-standing objectives of intercepting attempted smugglers of both people and drugs are also major elements of the job.

The individual state associations met on Friday. Oregon's discussion focused primarily on the proposed West Coast Coalition and how our state can be best represented within the policy structure. There was a general consensus—among all three states—that next year's Western COGs Conference could profitably be combined with a meeting of the Coalition. That meeting is expected to be held next summer in Washington, perhaps in the Seattle area. It was also suggested that some exposure to the Coalition concept be provided at next month's Oregon MPO Summit (October 15) in Eugene.

Lest the impression be left that the content of the Conference was limited to the fodder of policy wonks, it should be reported that LCOG's delegation joined with other Conference attendees at Wednesday night's Padre-Dodger game at Petco Stadium. The home team prevailed, 4-0, and the seating area occupied by the COG folks turned out to be a significant target for batters from both teams.

San Diego was an attractive and welcoming venue for this year's Conference and the hosts, notably the San Diego Association of Governments, and Conference planners were suitably thanked and congratulated for a job well done.