



Memorandum

TO: BUILDING BETTER
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

FROM: James R. Helmer
Sara L. Hensley

**SUBJECT: REGIONAL AND LOCAL
LITTER REDUCTION PROGRAMS**

DATE: 01-30-06

Approved

Date

RECOMMENDATION

Receive status report on regional and local litter reduction programs.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, significant community and policymaker concerns have been raised regarding the increasing amounts of litter and other debris accumulating along the local freeway network. In addition, it has been noted that freeway landscape maintenance, including planting and weed abatement, has substantially degraded and demands attention.

Since 2004, City of San José Department of Transportation (DOT) staff, along with staff from the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services (PRNS), have been working with representatives from the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), and the California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to develop strategies to address litter removal from local Freeway segments and interchanges. The effort has focused upon assessing the current state of maintenance on local freeways, how the maintenance level compares to other regions throughout California, and what strategies can be applied to improve the appearance of these facilities. This effort has resulted in the “Litter Control and Landscape Maintenance Study” produced by VTA, in cooperation with the County, and each City.

ANALYSIS

The necessity to expand maintenance services along local freeways stems, in large part, from the significant reduction in funding for Caltrans maintenance activities. These reductions have led to a decline in the frequency of freeway sweeping and other maintenance activities, which has led to a noticeable increase in the visibility of roadside debris.

The primary goal of the VTA study was to focus Caltrans’ efforts to maintain the appearance of local freeways and improve the overall aesthetics of state-maintained roadways within Santa

Clara County. The clean-up effort intends to utilize existing resources while seeking grant funds and other personnel to expand the program over time.

The current economic climate has created significant challenges for Caltrans. Budget cuts, staff reductions, and a slow recovery have combined to force a depletion of Caltrans resources, particularly those devoted to freeway maintenance and clean-up in Caltrans District 4.

The VTA Study has identified a comprehensive clean-up strategy that incorporates the following elements:

- Identification of specific areas that include significant levels of litter and debris.
- Establishment of a regular schedule for maintaining targeted areas.
- Increased utilization of Adopt-a-Highway volunteers.
- Meaningful performance measures and a method to report progress.
- Determination of priority areas designated for regular joint maintenance efforts.

Gateway/Corridor Selection

The study has determined that a reasonable goal for any expanded clean-up program, given existing financial resources, would be to identify specific “gateways” and hotspots throughout the freeway system in Santa Clara County upon which to focus clean-up efforts. These locations would generally be entrance points into area cities, e.g., the Route 87 corridor near Mineta San José International Airport or freeway interchanges, and access points to major employment and commercial centers. The VTA study has identified the US 101 and I-880 corridors, from Route 85 to Highway 237, to initiate a targeted six-month pilot program.

LOCAL CLEAN-UP EFFORTS

It is important to note that local litter clean-up efforts managed by DOT and Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services (PRNS) continue to be strong. Under the Anti-Graffiti and Litter Program, over 800,000 bags of litter were picked up in San José by all participating Pick Up San José organizations, agencies, and volunteers.

DOT continues to respond to approximately 4,500 public right-of-way complaints involving illegal dumping, roadway debris, or litter conditions, and street landscaping crews spend approximately 10,000 hours each year removing litter from street medians and roadside properties. In addition, DOT utilized its Alternate Work Program (AWP) to clean-up litter and debris from undeveloped roadside areas, alleyways, and City-owned lots on a proactive basis.

Joint Maintenance Efforts

In an effort to support activities to comprehensively address the freeway litter and landscaping issues that have been identified in the VTA Study, preliminary discussions have occurred among

stakeholder agencies regarding highway litter cleanup options at freeway on-ramp locations. PRNS has developed three options for consideration by the Mayor and City Council, these include:

1. A six-month pilot program to reassign Anti-Graffiti and Litter Program maintenance staff to lead an AWP team. This pilot would focus on Highway 101, cleaning all of the 36 ramps in the corridor to assess the impact of the program on highway litter.
2. Research potential grant funding options to provide financial support for Option 1 above. The Anti-Graffiti and Litter Program staff would perform the research with the goal of fully funding litter pickup at all San Jose freeway ramps.
3. Hire Adopt-A-Highway contractors to perform freeway ramp cleanups.

Regularly Scheduled Clean-Up

Once the priority sites for the VTA pilot program (Route 101 and I-880) have been adopted, City, VTA, and Caltrans staff will work to develop a schedule of regular maintenance activities for the targeted locations. Specific maintenance activities and timeframes will vary from monthly to quarterly as determined necessary. It is noted that a near term impact of this strategy will be that non-targeted locations in the region will likely go unattended for longer periods of time as a result of the current limited staff and limited state and local resources.

Performance Measures

The pilot program will apply performance measures that are identified in the VTA study and currently utilized in the evaluation of landscape and litter conditions along local roadways as a starting point for evaluating the cleanliness of these priority locations. These measures will be regularly collected and evaluated to assess progress. At these regular intervals, staff will review the targeted locations and identify any modifications that may be necessary. At the end of the six-month pilot program, VTA, DOT and Caltrans staff will evaluate the effectiveness of the program and identify opportunities for expansion or modification.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

This item will seek to coordinate efforts with volunteers in the communities surrounding targeted clean-up locations.

COORDINATION

This item has been coordinated with the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) and the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

COST IMPLICATIONS

The activities recommended in these efforts are expected to be completed using existing resources.

JAMES R. HELMER
Director of Transportation

SARA L. HENSLEY
Director of Parks, Recreation and
Neighborhood Services