

April 18, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FRESNO COG “ONE VOICE” PROGRAM CELEBRATES ANOTHER VICTORY
WITH \$2.5 MILLION IN “BUY AMERICA” WAIVERS FOR SCHOOL BUSES**

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WHO: House Representative Jim Costa and Fresno Council of Governments
WHAT: “Buy America” waivers for \$2.5 million in clean-air school buses and other vehicles
WHEN: April 17, 2018
WHERE: Washington, D.C.
HOW: Fresno COG “One Voice D.C.” program

With the support of Congressman Jim Costa and his D.C. office staff, Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) has secured more than \$2.5 million in waivers for new, low-emission school buses that will help improve air quality in the Fresno County region.

Fresno COG sought the “Buy America” waivers for more than a year from the federal Department of Transportation (DOT). They provide dispensation from requirements that all equipment and parts purchased with federal funds be manufactured in America. Unfortunately, some parts for clean-air vehicles are simply not produced within the United States. The federal agency ultimately approved the requests on a finding of “non-availability” for these project and vehicle types.

The DOT decision enables Central, Fresno, Kings Canyon and Clovis Unified school districts, along with the Southwest Transportation Agency, to finally purchase 13 buses originally authorized in 2016. In addition, the City of Selma is now eligible to purchase a new, fuel-efficient, low-emissions street sweeper. Altogether, the 14 new vehicles are expected to remove more than 16.5 tons of pollutants from the Fresno County region annually. With local funding matches, the total combined value is \$2.8 million.

Rep. Costa and his staff engaged with DOT officials for more than a year to secure these waivers after Fresno COG sought his assistance during its annual One Voice trip to Washington, D.C. last year. Without his guidance throughout the process, the Fresno County region may have been forced to surrender the \$2.5 million back to the federal government.

“Improving air quality in the San Joaquin Valley has always been a challenge because we have a closed air basin that traps pollution from commuters traveling on I-5 and Highway 99,” said Congressman Jim Costa. “Years ago, I created the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to coordinate a long-term strategy for building a stronger and healthier Valley – one that weaves together federal, state, and local funding to maximize success. The Congestion Mitigation Air Quality program provides critical funds to help implement this strategy and improve air quality in our Valley.”

DOT's decision marks another victory for Fresno COG's 15-year-old "One Voice" program, which brings together a variety of elected and civic leaders from throughout the region to address Fresno's Congressional delegation in Washington D.C. on federal issues of concern to our communities. During this year's trip, from April 21-27, "One Voice" participants will seek federal investment for the new Veteran's Boulevard Interchange at Highway 99, along with funding to widen Millerton Road in Fresno County from two to four lanes to Table Mountain Casino.

The One Voice program will request additional federal investment in important "farm-to-market" routes, which suffer far greater wear-and-tear than the average county road. Other regional priorities include additional workforce development training in support of major infrastructure projects, such as the high-speed rail heavy-maintenance facility. The delegation will also request robust, continued investment in the federal Community Service Block Grant program, a critical resource for emergency, human service interventions, and economic development to our region's most vulnerable residents.

Other "One Voice" success stories include:

- Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) classification of two-seat, single-engine, electric aircraft as light sport planes, which will be flown among Reedley, Mendota and Fresno's Chandler Airport as training aircraft – the first of their kind in the nation. Fresno COG's "One Voice" delegation worked to help secure the policy change.
- Army Corps of Engineers' work on the Arroyo Pasajero Creek bridge along State Route 269 near Huron, which has suffered severe seasonal flooding, resulting in numerous safety issues and lost earnings for Huron residents.
- A \$558 million legislative package, known as the *Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act* (P.L. No: 114-322), which represents the most comprehensive reform to California water policy in more than 20 years. It enables Fresno and surrounding communities to receive greater allocations of water through more efficient and effective operations of the Central Valley Project and includes \$335 million in critical federal investments to help advance new storage projects, which could include Temperance Flat.

"The 'One Voice' program brings our region together like no other initiative," said San Joaquin Mayor and Fresno COG Chairman Amarpreet "Ruby" Dhaliwal. "We are much more effective when we can focus our energy on a small set of issues that everyone can agree are top priorities. That's what Washington wants to hear."

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