

“One Voice” efforts reap a considerable harvest

Fresno Council of Governments (Fresno COG) began its “One Voice” effort in 2003 to seek federal funding for projects of broad, community benefit to Fresno County. The public-private delegation selected prioritized projects and visited Congressional and federal departmental representatives in Washington, D.C. to pursue funding and grant opportunities. Fresno COG has engaged in similar, annual efforts in Sacramento.

Building on the broad-based coalition Fresno COG assembled, Congressional representatives and their staff have welcomed and encouraged the communications as a means of assisting federal representatives identify, prioritize and shepherd much-needed projects and programs through the federal budgetary process. “One Voice” focuses on a core group of regional projects and priorities around which the broadest group within the county can unite. The “One Voice” delegation advocates for funding programs crucial to regional projects that may collectively seek hundreds of millions of dollars through federal discretionary grant programs.

Each year, Fresno COG’s One Voice delegation seeks funding sources for projects that appeal to federal decision makers, and advocates for congressional and federal agency support during the competitive grant process. By advocating for policy and regulatory reform, Fresno COG “One Voice” has been responsible for legislation that today streamlines the way federal and state agencies work together. The program continues to help eliminate unnecessary procedures so that government agencies and the business community can work together seamlessly toward job creation for our communities.

The “fruits” of One Voice to-date include the following:

In 2015 Congress enacted transportation legislation that contained many of the policy positions advocated by “One Voice” in recent years, including:

- Passing a five-year surface transportation reauthorization bill, the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act)
- FAST Act establishes both formula and discretionary grant programs to fund critical transportation projects that would benefit freight movement
- FAST Act now authorizes funding for the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects (NSFHP) program at \$4.5 billion through 2020
- FAST Act makes approximately \$1.5 billion in discretionary funding available through Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grants in Fiscal Year 2018 for various transportation projects
- Department of Transportation (DOT) extended the Local Hire Initiative, which explores new ways to make it easier for states and cities to hire local residents for transportation projects. This pilot program allows recipients of highway and transit grants to use hiring programs in which preference is given to local residents, low-income workers, and veterans.

Both the House and Senate worked towards authorizing legislation to respond to the crisis resulting from the California drought, including:

- The House approved Rep. Valadao’s drought legislation, the Western Water and American Food Security Act of 2015 (H.R. 2898)
- Senator Dianne Feinstein introduced the California Emergency Drought Relief Act of 2015 (S.1894)
- The departments of Commerce and Interior exercised regulatory flexibility to increase pumping operations and water supplies during spring storms

Other Federal Priorities

Congress and the Administration continue to ensure that competitive discretionary grant programs are available throughout the legislative sessions, many of which continue to be high priorities during “One Voice” advocacy efforts. These include, but are not limited to:

- Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Department of Interior (DOI) Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT)
- Department of Commerce (DOC) Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant programs
- Department of Agriculture (USDA) Pest Prevention Program, Agriculture Canine Inspection, and the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP).

