



CHAPTER 1 *About the Plan*

Fresno COG's 2026 Regional Transportation Plan comprehensively assesses all forms of transportation available in Fresno County as well as travel and goods movement needs through 2050.

The 2026 RTP is financially feasible, achieves health standards for clean air, and addresses climate goals set by the state. Importantly, the plan does not discriminate or deny equal access to benefits to anyone based on race, national origin, citizenship status, ethnic group identification, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, color, or disability. Furthermore, it seeks to avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionate impacts on communities of color or low-income populations and ensure fair public participation opportunities for all.

Fresno COG's first RTP was adopted in 1975. Updated editions have been published every four years per federal statutes refinements, making this the 20th edition. Federal and state legislation mandates that these long-range transportation plans extend at least 20 years into the future.

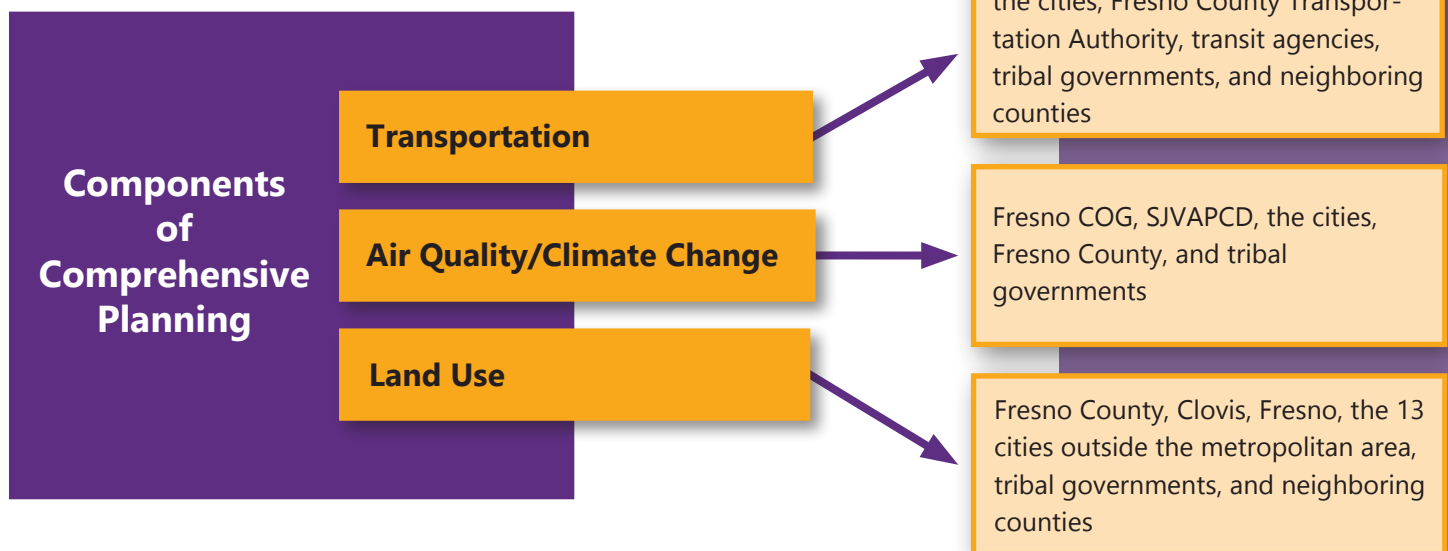
As the federally designated metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and state-designated regional transportation planning agency, Fresno COG has developed the 2026 RTP update through a continuous, comprehensive, and cooperative framework. This process has involved the region's 15 cities, the County of Fresno, transportation providers such as urban and rural transit agencies, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD), Caltrans, multiple other state, and federal agencies and, most importantly, the public.

Working with technical advisory committees, interested citizens, community-based organizations and other government agencies, Fresno COG has coordinated a planning approach to develop a multimodal regional transportation system plan for Fresno County.

Coordinated Regional Planning

The region continues to grow, albeit more slowly than in past decades, amid the realities of new air quality requirements, rapidly evolving transportation choices and new technologies. Local agencies continue to coordinate within Fresno COG's traditional framework. Past Fresno COG efforts have focused primarily on the interactions between transportation and air quality. While Fresno COG has no land use planning authority – and fully supports independent decision-making by elected officials in their own communities – under recent federal and state requirements, this and future RTPs will necessitate a stronger level of coordination, communication, and cooperation to achieve air quality conformity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet other local, state, and federal goals.

Continuously coordinating with multiple independent agencies, Fresno COG addresses three components of comprehensive planning in the 2026 RTP/SCS.



Fresno COG, along with the other seven MPOs in the San Joaquin Valley (SJV), is party to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the SJV Air Pollution Control District. This MOU defines a coordinated and cooperative process aimed at maximum efficacy and compatibility with air quality and transportation plans. In 2006, the eight Valley MPOs established the SJV Regional Policy Council, which includes two elected officials from each of the eight MPOs, plus representatives from the SJV Air Pollution Control District and the SJV Regional Rail Commission/Joint Powers Authority to craft formal positions on issues where Valleywide consensus exists.



**Figure 1-1:
Components of
Comprehensive
Planning**

Air Quality Planning

In 1991, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD or “Air District”) was formed. It covers the eight-county San Joaquin Valley region (San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare, and the San Joaquin Valley portion of Kern) shown in Figure 1-2 at right.

Due to the federal government’s approach to keeping the nation’s air clean, and the Valley air basin’s non-attainment status, the Air District and local agencies are working together even more closely on various traffic management systems specified in federal legislation. The RTP’s major air quality task demonstrates that its projects collectively help attain and maintain federal air quality standards. Failure to do so risks losing federal transportation funding.

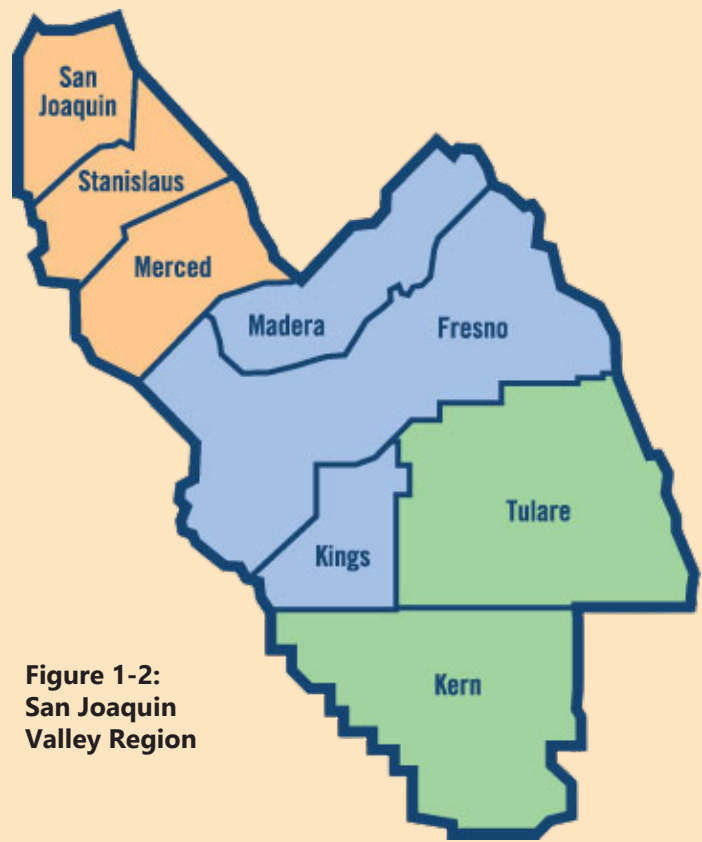


Figure 1-2:
San Joaquin
Valley Region

Scope of the Plan

The RTP contains four main required elements that are discussed below. However, Fresno COG’s RTP includes additional elements, chapters, and appendices regarding its regional context:

- Accomplishments
- Fresno Today
- Public Participation
- Environmental Justice Analysis
- Transportation Performance Management

The **Implementing the Plan** chapter is a combined Policy-Action Element. The **Policy Element** sets forth Fresno COG’s transportation goals, objectives, and policies for each transportation mode. The **Action Element** introduces the multimodal system by transportation mode. Each section describes the existing system, discusses recent accomplishments, provides a needs assessment, and proposes short-term and long-term actions for both planning and actual project improvements.

The **Sustainable Communities Strategy** chapter integrates land-use and transportation planning efforts to meet Fresno region’s greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. The 2026 RTP is the fourth plan to

contain a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) as required by California’s Senate Bill 375. Enacted in 2008, SB 375 requires that each MPO includes an SCS that provides an integrated land-use and transportation plan for meeting the California Air Resources Board’s (CARB) greenhouse gas emission reduction targets. The RTP/SCS land-use forecast identifies general locations for different land uses, residential densities, employment intensities, and natural resource areas. Knowing what shape our future land-use pattern will take is critical to planning for future transportation needs, improving our air quality, and meeting climate change goals.

The **Financial Element** chapter identifies both existing and anticipated revenue sources as well as the financing techniques available for the region’s planned transportation investments, ongoing operations and maintenance. It also lists approximately 3,000 financially constrained RTP projects, along with the programs for which funding has been identified or is reasonably expected to be available within the RTP planning horizon. Appendix B includes a comprehensive list of member agency-identified candidate projects.

2022 RTP/SCS General Assumptions

Fresno COG developed its 2026 RTP/SCS using the following assumptions:

- Development policies will continue to be directed toward using the region's resources in long-term, beneficial ways that protect public health, safety and welfare as population growth pressures increase.
- Protecting productive agricultural land from urban encroachment to maintain the region's agriculture-based economy remains a high priority.
- Continuing policies that encourage urban development in existing cities and communities and limiting urban growth in areas of prime agricultural land.
- Local Agency Formation Commission goals will continue to support logical boundaries for urban service delivery.
- Achieving clean air goals and resource conservation will continue to influence federal, state, and local policy decisions.
- Society will continue to value development alternatives that maximize energy conservation and promote clean air.
- Recent state legislation related to climate change will continue to influence planning policy at the local and regional levels.



Land Use Projections for Traffic and Air Quality Modeling

Given federal and state requirements, Fresno COG is using the best available information to describe growth scenarios in the metropolitan area and throughout the County. These projected land use patterns form the database, which is input to the regional traffic model. The growth scenarios are consistent with each of the local jurisdictions' general plans.

By using future population growth and socioeconomic information, Fresno COG's regional traffic model can forecast traffic conditions on the regional transportation system at a given future time, which provides a good basis for assessing future transportation needs. This information is essential to the transportation planning process. Adopted local planning documents such as the general plans, specific plans, zoning ordinances etc. provide critical input for the regional traffic model.

Federal Directives - Funding

The 2026 RTP reflects the federal directives embodied in both the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act (FAST Act), the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1991. These acts require that projects in RTPs be "constrained" to only those that can be fully funded and delivered within the planning horizon, and that those projects help attain and maintain air quality standards. President Biden signed the \$1.2 billion IIJA, on Nov. 15, 2021, which included a variety of familiar and new programs covering: roads, bridges, rail, public transportation, ports, airports, the electric grid, water systems and broadband internet service. Federal agencies developed guidelines for these programs to succeed the FAST Act and introduced new policy priorities, such as providing infrastructure for a low-carbon economy to reduce air pollution, greenhouse gases and improve water quality. The 2026 RTP/SCS and its projects will align with those priorities.

The plan's financial element advocates for a stable and equitable approach to statewide funding, so that the entire San Joaquin Valley can respond appropriately to a growing population, environmental quality, and continuing innovations.

Computer Modeling

This plan specifies projects and programs to be funded throughout the RTP's planning horizon and evaluated using computer modeling to determine their impact on traffic condition, air quality, climate goals, etc. This process demonstrates "conformity" with adopted budgets for various criteria pollutants. Projects will only be evaluated for conformity if they are on the fiscally constrained list of projects that are projected to be funded by the plan's horizon year. See Chapter 5 and Appendix C for more details on the computer modeling.

Improved Analytical Tools

In the four years since the 2022 RTP/SCS, Fresno COG has refined its activity-based model to help refine its planning processes and more precisely evaluate different growth scenarios and potential outcomes for the transportation network. The Fresno activity-based model system uses micro-zones, which are based on census blocks, as the fundamental spatial unit for generating travel demand. Micro-zones improve the model's sensitivity to land use, fine-grained urban form, and accessibility attributes. The new model is capable of addressing policies such as compact and mixed-use development, active transportation, transit, and pricing. The model is credible for forecasting demand for highway alternatives, such as new river crossings and corridor improvements, and appropriately sensitive to land-use changes, such as new planned developments, and provides useful information for traffic impact studies.

Intergovernmental Cooperation on Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality and Climate Change Planning

Ultimately, local agencies need to find ways to work together to solve air quality and congestion problems inherent in growth, especially in the urban area. To improve air quality and achieve climate goals, local agencies will need to institute transportation and land-use strategies as described in the Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) chapter. The Regional Transportation Plan process itself requires prioritizing projects for funding on an ongoing basis. The region stands to suffer devastating funding reductions for transit and transportation corridors, and additional air district constraints on building a healthy economy, attracting industry, and developing jobs if it is unable to achieve air quality conformity. Millions of dollars in highway funding may be at risk if Valleywide should air quality sanctions go into effect.

There is a continuing need to find creative ways to work jointly on areas that have been decided independently or on an incremental basis in the past. Ultimately, there may be a desire to create some structured arrangement to work together on issues that would benefit by shared analysis and decision-making.

Approaches that could assist include the following four items:

- **Available transportation and air quality modeling tools by land use agencies for general plan development.** Information developed



for this and future RTPs is available to member agencies to clarify the ramifications of plan alternatives. Improved interactivity between Fresno COG's models and local GIS capabilities could be used at both project and general plan levels.

- **Integrated staff work groups to frame the questions that need to be addressed.** An integrated team of local agency staff could assist the decision-making process through the following:
 - 1) Listing consensus-building goals;
 - 2) Framing the questions that need to be addressed and articulating individual agency positions in a neutral manner;
 - 3) Making recommendations as to what constitutes the issues (inter-jurisdictional facilities, resources such as air and water, economic development) that would benefit from regional planning and decision-making;
 - 4) Working through a proposal for structured agreements, such as an MOUs or equally effective mechanisms.
- **Setting up an educational process for staff, the public, and elected and appointive officials.** We all need to better understand the linkages between land use, transportation, and air quality. Interactive institutional arrangements and policies may need to be established among planning commissions, LAFCO, the air district and local agencies.
- **Technical assistance from the air district and statewide design and environmental groups.** The San Joaquin Valley's problems are gaining wider appreciation and analysis as the state considers its underserved and disadvantaged populations. Local agencies could be proactive in asking for assistance in working through land use/transportation/air quality relationships with the air district, Caltrans, and other resource agencies.

***“Working together
on shared issues that
benefit from shared
analysis and
decision-making”***



Regional Planning Process

Regional transportation planning is a dynamic process requiring periodic refinement, monitoring, and updating.

The planning program for the next four-year period will include extensively evaluating the plan itself and each respective transportation mode's elements. Each component will be studied and modified consistently with plan priorities to achieve an integrated multimodal system.

Current Practices Fresno COG is a federally designated MPO and a state-designated RTPA for Fresno County. These designations formally establish the Fresno COG's role in transportation planning.

The Fresno COG Policy Board comprises mayors from the region's 15 incorporated cities and the Fresno County Board of Supervisors' chair.

Two committees serve as basic support to the Policy Board:

- **Policy Advisory Committee (PAC)** comprises city managers, the county administrator and Caltrans
- **Transportation Technical Committee (TTC)** comprises technical staff from member agencies, other interested agencies, public members, and Caltrans

Several subcommittees also exist to evaluate and offer recommendations to the TTC on specific, regionally significant issues and projects.

Public participation is encouraged at every stage of the planning process and all meetings are open to the public. Major planning documents receive public hearings prior to adoption. Fresno COG's citizen involvement centers on public information, education, and citizen participation in advisory and decision-making processes. Efforts include advertising via social media, flyers, Fresno COG's websites, workshops, community events, emails, newsletters, speeches, press releases and interviews, and public hearings. Workshops and conferences are held jointly and coordinated with public and quasi-public agencies as opportunities present themselves. Fresno COG adapted and broadened its public participation process for the 2026 RTP/SCS to include multiple web-based video conference/ webinars – as well as advertising and live workshops on social media – in conjunction with more traditional strategies, to better solicit public input.

Fresno COG continues to focus on strengthening its government-to-government relationships with federally recognized native American tribes and makes every effort to regularly and meaningfully consult and coordinate on matters that significantly affect their communities. Fresno COG staff have received training on California's SB 18 requirements that mandate cities and counties contact and consult with California Native American Tribes before adopting or amending a General Plan or when designating land as open space.

Committee reports ensure that the Fresno COG Policy Board consider all members' viewpoints. Citizens are encouraged to participate in whatever capacity may be appropriate to their cause.



Currently, community members sit on the following Fresno COG committees:

Transportation Technical Committee

Social Services Transportation Advisory Council

RTP Roundtable Committee

Environmental Justice Subcommittee

Measure C Citizen Oversight Committee

Fresno County Airport Land Use Commission

Fresno COG's RTP Public Outreach Process

Fresno COG developed and implemented a comprehensive, inclusive public outreach program that spanned a two-year period covering early 2025 RTP preparation, planning and SCS development -- including final adoption -- in early fall 2026.

Fresno COG staff gathered data and feedback from multiple community-based organizations, stakeholders, partnering agencies, non-profit organizations and the public for the Policy Board and advisory committees to consider during RTP development and when selecting a preferred Sustainable Communities Strategy. From planning to implementation, this chapter outlines Fresno COG's public participation efforts.

Fresno COG's Public Participation Plan

The RTP public participation process began with updating the Fresno COG Public Participation Plan (PPP), which the Policy Board adopted on July 25, 2024. The PPP provided direction for all public participation activities, containing the participation requirements, procedures, strategies and techniques that Fresno COG's standing committees and staff used for public outreach and participation.

The approved PPP also included Appendix A: Fresno COG's Regional Transportation Plan Public Outreach Strategy update, a plan specifically detailing the strategies used to enlist public participation. The RTP Public Outreach Strategy outlined the goals, strategies and methods that guided Fresno COG's efforts to build RTP awareness with particular emphasis on the Sustainable Communities Strategy. The outreach strategy specifically outlined tactics for reaching out to nontraditional as well as traditional audiences to include them in the transportation planning process. It was designed to help ensure that environmental justice issues were addressed and that interested parties had ample opportunities to understand and provide meaningful input while the RTP was in its early stages and throughout the planning process.

Fresno COG's community engagement included the following outreach, discussed in more detail in the following chapters:

1. **RTP/SCS Public Outreach Plan adopted June 2024**
2. **RTP Roundtable established June 2024**
3. **Environmental Justice Advisory Subcommittee established July 2024**
4. **RTP Public Opinion Survey, June/July 2024**
5. **Three rounds of focused outreach using virtual meetings and workshops, four social media platforms, dedicated RTP website, PublicInput.com, and RTP mini-grants to community organizations:**
 - o **Fall 2024 RTP Transportation Needs, September/October 2024**
 - o **Sustainable Communities Strategy Indicators and Strategies Outreach, May-October 2025**
 - o **Sustainable Communities Strategy Scenario Outreach, February/March 2026**





Fresno COG's RTP Committee Process

Fresno COG's Regional Transportation Plan Roundtable

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) update process was formally launched in June 2024 with the first Fresno COG RTP Roundtable meeting. The Roundtable supported Fresno COG staff and its standing committees in preparing the 2026 RTP/SCS, considering issues that supported development, providing comments, and community-based consensus. The Roundtable comprised 39 seats – 16 held by member agency staff, six modal representatives, 14 seats open to a variety of stakeholder groups, as well as three public-at-large seats. The RTP Roundtable membership listing is on page 10 of the introduction chapter.

39 Roundtable Members	
16 <i>Member Agencies</i>	6 <i>Modal Advocates</i>
14 <i>Stakeholder Groups</i>	3 <i>Public-at-Large</i>

The RTP Roundtable members participated in monthly meetings through March 11, 2026, guiding RTP/SCS development and acting in an advisory capacity to Fresno COG's Transportation Technical Committee, Policy Advisory Committee and Policy Board. Minutes and agenda packets from all the RTP Roundtable meetings are available on Fresno COG's agenda website.

Environmental Justice Subcommittee

For help in defining Fresno County's Environmental Justice communities, Fresno COG called upon the Environmental Justice Subcommittee. The Environmental Justice Subcommittee serves under Fresno COG's Transportation Technical Committee (TTC), enjoying the benefits of a formalized process as it feeds into Fresno COG's structured, standard committee process. The subcommittee generally meets when Fresno COG staff, the TTC, the Policy Advisory Committee or the Fresno COG Policy Board request recommendations on issues involving EJ populations. Subcommittee members report all advisory actions to the TTC through an EJ representative. Then the TTC's recommendations are referred to the Policy Advisory Committee and Fresno COG Policy Board as needed. The subcommittee also reports to the RTP Roundtable through the Subcommittee Chair, who holds a seat on the Roundtable.

The Environmental Justice Subcommittee comprises 13 seats to provide full, diverse and equitable representation from designated EJ populations. The Subcommittee met six times, helping to shape the Environmental Justice & Equity Analysis by determining the EJ population thresholds and Sustainable Communities Strategy EJ indicator.

Consultation and Coordination

Transportation planning is a collaborative process that includes visioning, forecasting population/employment, projecting future land use in conjunction with local jurisdictions, assessing needs, developing capital and operating strategies to move people and goods, and developing a financial plan. Consistent with SB 375 and Title 23 CFR Part 450.316, Fresno COG's planning processes are designed to foster involvement by all interested

parties, such as: walking and bicycling representatives, transportation providers, appropriate federal, state, and local agencies, public health departments and advocates, housing advocates, community groups, environmental advocates, building industry representatives, broad-based business organizations, landowners, the Native American community, neighboring MPOs, and the general public, through a proactive public participation process.

The 2024 Regional Transportation Plan Guidelines for MPOs state that "coordination is the cooperative development of plans, programs and schedules among agencies and entities with legal standing to achieve general consistency. Consultation means that one or more parties confer with other identified parties in accordance with the established process and, prior to taking action(s), considers the views of the other parties and periodically informs them about action(s) taken. It is very important for the development of the RTP to be conducted both in coordination and consultation with interested parties."

The following sections provide details on consultation activities leading up to and during the development of the 2026 RTP/SCS.

Federal Land Management Agencies

Fresno COG staff reached out to FHWA Federal Lands staff to coordinate on the connections between major state and county routes in Fresno County that access Federal lands. FHWA staff provided a map (Figure 1-3) of state and local routes that provide primary access to the Federal Lands Transportation Program (FLTP) and are eligible to receive funding through the Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP). The latest addition is that Millerton Road from Friant to Auberry Road is also eligible.

As demand for open space access continues to grow, planning the access to Federal Lands and publicly owned land will require an ever-increasing amount of interagency coordination and collaboration. Managers of public lands at every level of government (Federal, State, and local) are confronted with seasonal overcrowding in popular locations with a lack of infrastructural capacity, which may lead to degraded visitor experience and resource conditions caused by congestion, undesignated parking, and trail crowding. Many of the solutions to these common problems are better achieved when agencies work collaboratively outside of their jurisdictional boundaries.

Public agencies need to think regionally across the broad landscape and look for creative ways to communicate and coordinate across their boundaries by leveraging partnerships towards common solutions. Innovative finance options need to be developed that can introduce new revenue streams into

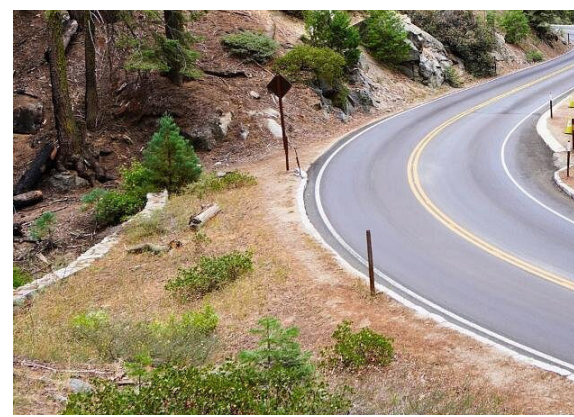
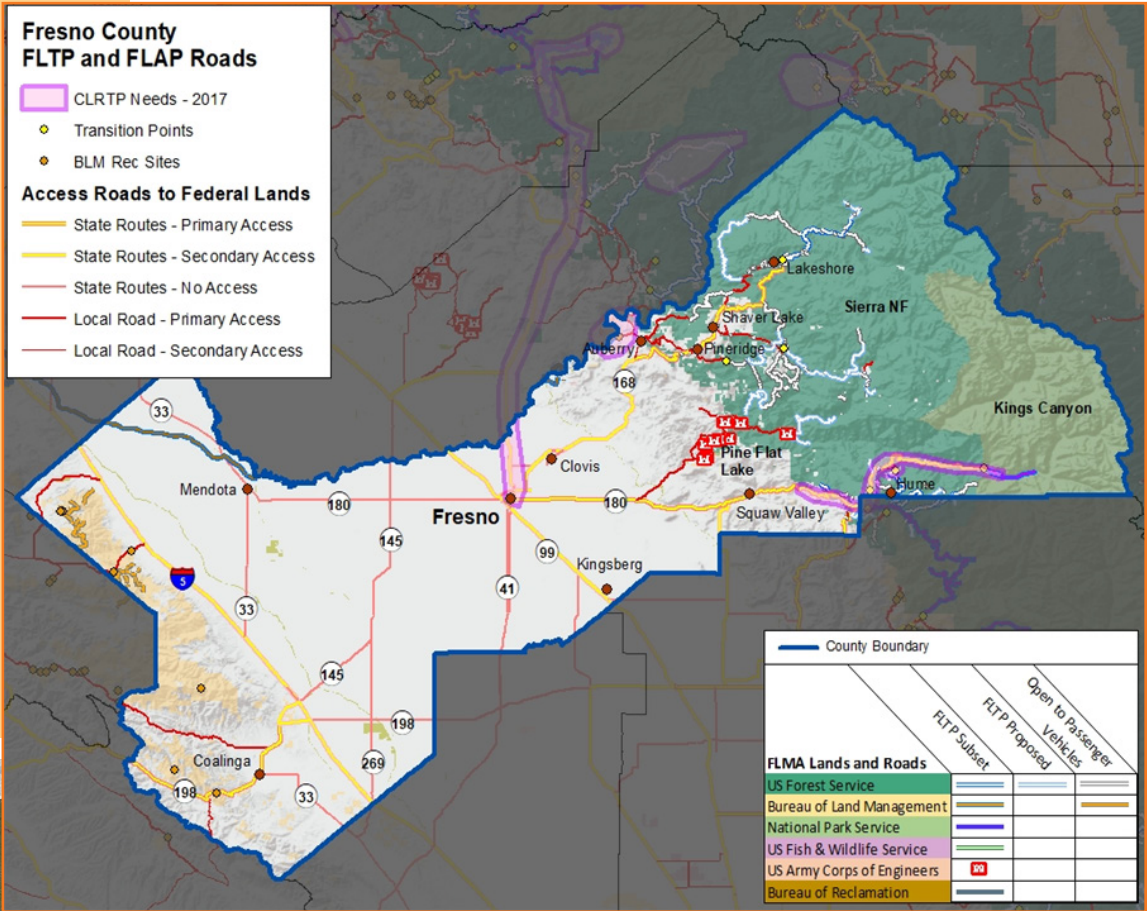


Figure 1-3:
Fresno County FLTP and FLAP Roads



the planning process and provide new opportunities to better leverage existing federal transportation funding programs. Using the established forums and other engagement opportunities built into the transportation process, Fresno COG will partner with FHWA, Caltrans and Federal lands managers to incorporate Federal land management agencies (FLMA) project needs and FLTP and FLAP eligible routes into the State and local planning processes.

Native American Tribes

Fresno COG routinely consults with Native American tribal governments on activities that may impact their communities. The U.S. DOT defines consultation as “when one or more parties confer with other identified parties in accordance with an established process and, prior to taking action(s), considers the views of the other parties and periodically informs them about action(s) taken.” Some areas of consultation could include: transportation, land use, employment, economic development, housing, community development and environmental issues.

State and Federal regulations require Fresno COG to conduct government-to-government consultation regarding its planning and programming activities with tribal governments of Federally-recognized Native American tribes. Additionally, Assembly Bill 52 (Gatto, Statutes of 2014) requires that State and local agencies analyze the impacts to Native American cultural resources under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Lead agencies under CEQA must work with tribal governments to avoid or mitigate the impacts to cultural resources.

Federal recognition is a legal distinction that applies to a tribe's right to a government-to-government relationship with the Federal government and eligibility for Federal programs. All California Native American tribes are distinct and independent governmental entities with specific cultural beliefs and traditions and unique connections to areas of California that are their ancestral homelands.

The the Native American Heritage Commission maintains a contact list of both Federally and non-Federally recognized California Native American tribes. The three Federally recognized tribes in Fresno County are Big Sandy Rancheria of California, Cold Springs Rancheria of Mono Indians of California, and Table Mountain Rancheria of California. Although consultation is not mandated for non-Federally recognized tribes, this does not preclude Fresno COG from consultation when plans or activities might impact cultural values or the community.

Fresno COG's member agencies are represented on its Policy Board by the mayor of each incorporated city, and the chairman of the County Board of Supervisors, or designated representatives. The Policy Board is a governing body that establishes policy and guides work activities. It is assisted in making decisions by the Policy Advisory Committee (PAC), comprising the Chief Administrative Officer of each member agency, or their designated representatives. Staff from member agencies, tribal governments, interest groups and industry stakeholders comprise the Transportation Technical Committee (TTC), which also assists in the decision-making process.

Native American Indians of California and other tribal governments are also invited to participate in the monthly Transportation Technical Committee (TTC) and Environmental Justice Subcommittee meetings. The TTC reviews staff work pursuant to the Overall Work Program, advises the Policy Board and PAC on transportation issues and makes recommendations to the Policy Board on planning and programming actions. The TTC review is generally focused on the technical merits of various transportation issues coming before the Policy Board. The Environmental Justice Subcommittee under the TTC meets when necessary to review items involving Environmental Justice populations and provide recommendations to the TTC. Additionally, the subcommittee is instrumental in assisting Fresno COG staff in setting definition and thresholds for environmental justice populations for the Environmental Justice Report within Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

Federal and State law require local agencies to consult with Federally recognized tribal governments prior to making transportation decisions, taking actions, or implementing programs that may impact their communities. This activity is separate from, and precedes, the public participation process.

Protocols should be flexible and dynamic with respect to communication and discussion formats. More than one tribe may have an affiliation with the area of consideration. Individual consultation may be necessary if a combined consultation format is not preferred by the tribal government. Determining the degree and adequacy of consultation will vary depending on several factors,





including the scope of proposed activities, whether the activity is short-term or long-term, the cultural or political sensitivity of the issue at hand, and the number of potential stakeholders. Fresno COG intends to consult with Native American tribal governments on activities that may impact their communities. The agency consults with tribal governments on an ongoing basis, not only on individual projects. Fresno COG strives to keep open communication with tribes to facilitate better relationships and better reflect tribes' viewpoints and needs in regional planning documents and projects.

The Native American tribes in Fresno County receive the following information by telephone, mail, email, or in-person visits:

Fresno County Transportation Guide

- Regional Directory
- Newsletters
- Workshop invitations
- Grant notices
- Requests to participate in program guidelines development
- Working groups
- Scoring committees

A memorandum of understanding between Fresno COG and the Big Sandy Rancheria that provides for a mutually beneficial protocol for the tribe and Fresno COG to jointly identify, communicate, and coordinate actions of common concern relating to transportation plans and programs serves as one success story.

Environmental Impact Report Notification

Fresno COG notifies appropriate federal, state, local agencies, and native American tribes regarding the preparation and draft release of the environmental impact report for the RTP/SCS. All public notices issued regarding the development of the EIR are included in the Draft EIR in Appendix A.