

Environmental Justice: Context-Sensitive Planning Grants

Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Tribe Tribal Transportation Plan Phase I: Community Outreach and Education

- **Grant Amount:** \$85,500
- **Grant Recipient:** Torres Martinez
Desert Cahuilla Indians
- **County:** Riverside and Imperial

Project Area – The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Reservation is located in the unincorporated area(s) of Thermal, CA and is part of the greater Palm Springs/Coachella Valley area.

Project Focus – Current development in the Coachella Valley require Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) decision-makers to appropriate monies to projects that are experiencing the highest level of development. CVAG is reacting to development and not proactively planning for development. The Torres Martinez Indian Reservation and the surrounding areas that are experiencing impacts from these development, but are not currently experiencing these developments, are at a loss in securing transportation funds to mitigate these development activities.

Project Goals – Given CVAG’s attention to the more populated and developmentally active areas, little data and information have been generated for the Reservation and surrounding areas. The objective is to design a transportation plan that will fit the needs of local residents in terms of access to healthcare and educational facilities as well as job centers. This Tribal Transportation Plan will then be incorporated into regional plans developed by CVAG and the Southern California Association of Governments.

Community Outreach – Community meetings and surveys (Exhibit D of final product) were the core activities of Outreach and Education. Participation was higher when venues where people were already there at some type of event or work were used. Consistent with the Environmental Justice framework, it was determined that meetings should seek out opportunities to interact with individuals at venues where people were already in attendance on reservation lands.

Environmental Justice Community Involvement – The Community Outreach and Education activities consisted of informational pamphlets, mailings, a survey completed by 108 people, interviews and a series of four open houses. As part of the outreach education, pamphlets were prepared that illustrated the type of transportation issues that effect people’s lives. Pamphlets were prepared in both English and Spanish and were mailed out to the Tribal General Membership and distributed throughout the Tribal Campus.

Project Outcome – This transportation planning initiative completes the first phase of what will eventually be a Comprehensive Long Range Tribal Transportation Plan. The first phase of the plan focused on Community Outreach and Education. A Traffic Count Assessment was included to provide context for the Community Outreach and Education activities. Transportation planning elements such as land use analysis, origin and destination studies, transportation modeling, alternative transportation modal analysis, determination of future improvements and any goals, policies or implementation measures tied to future growth, were specifically excluded from this phase.

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Challenges

- The Coachella Valley Association of Governments noted that the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian Tribe (TMDCI) has not participated in the regional committees or meetings for several years. Without a seat at the table, it is difficult for the TMDCI to be in the regional planning loop.
- The cities of La Quinta, Indio and Coachella had very little to say about the TMDCI reservation. All three cities commented that they had little interaction with the TMDCI with regard to transportation issues.

Successes

- A total of 108 surveys were completed. More than half of the surveys are believed to have been filled out by Tribal members. With a total of approximately 400 adult Tribal members, the response rate of over 25% is significant.