

## Focus Group Sessions with Environmental Justice and Community Organizations

The State of California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Office of System, Freight and Rail Planning, is in the process of preparing the California Freight Mobility Plan (CFMP). The CFMP is a comprehensive, long-range freight plan encouraged by the federal transportation law, "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (MAP-21), Public Law 112-141.

### **Focus Group Sessions**

One of the major components of the planning process being used to help inform the development of the CFMP is receiving comment and input from four focus group sessions with environmental justice and community based organizations conducted in the following regions of the State:

- Central San Joaquin Valley
- Inland Empire (San Bernardino)
- Los Angeles
- San Francisco Bay Area

This public opinion research is one element of a broader public engagement effort. Results of the focus groups will help Caltrans identify significant freight system, environmental and health issues of concern to communities near major freight corridors and intermodal facilities to be addressed in the CFMP.

### **Summary of Results**

The polling and discussion questions posed at each of the four focus group sessions covered a wide variety of topics related to freight mobility. Participants were asked to provide their opinions regarding Caltrans' role, the public's role, public outreach, benefits, impacts, critical issues, and suggestions for improvement. The sessions produced several common themes among all focus group participants including the following:

- Focus group respondents agreed that outreach to the public is difficult, but it is essential to the planning process. There needs to be more collaboration between and among elected officials, government agencies, the freight industry, and the public.

- Effective public outreach throughout the State requires coordination with environmental justice representatives. This would entail a grassroots and targeted approach involving environmental justice organizations working with Caltrans, regional, and local agencies to inform and educate underrepresented communities about freight planning issues and solutions. Since respondents felt that environmental justice communities were most impacted by freight activities, it is essential that they be targeted in outreach efforts utilizing methods with the highest chance of success
- The respondents offered some suggestions to improving outreach with the public, and especially the underrepresented communities. They recommended that planning documents be prepared in a language that is short and to the point, and easily understood by the general public and environmental justice communities. The documents also need to be made easily accessible. Some respondents indicated that radio is the primary source of information to environmental justice communities and should be utilized in outreach efforts. While placing materials on the Caltrans website was also considered a favorable idea, respondents agreed that the website should be enhanced to include more information, and that the information provided should be made easier to understand
- Many focus group respondents mentioned the need for “green” technologies. Along with the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 375, “green” techniques and solutions should be considered in the state freight plan to address current and future freight impacts. The freight industry should consider new technologies and strategies to reduce impacts, specifically to environmental justice communities. Focus group respondents identified various impacts of the freight system, which include health, noise, air quality, traffic congestion, ground vibration, degradation to pavement, and diversion of resources and energy. All respondents agreed that communities and neighborhoods adjacent to freight facilities were most impacted, which typically include underrepresented groups and environmental justice communities
- The freight impact that respondents were most concerned about was health. Although long-term impacts such as environmental risks and health effects are difficult to determine, respondents felt that short- and long-term health goals should be developed and included in the state freight plan, to be implemented over time. Caltrans also needs to consider population growth and assess the risks of goods movement on future populations
- Several respondents suggested the need to provide a cost/benefit analysis in the state freight plan. They felt the cost/benefit analysis should be conducted as a part of the planning process to determine those modes and mobility improvements that would reduce health costs and enhance a healthy well-being