

Section 2.6 -Traffic and Circulation



Concerned Citizens of Calaveras County v. Board of Supervisors (1985) 166 Cal.App.3d 90

After defining “correlated,” the *Concerned Citizens* court described a situation where correlation does not exist:

“We conclude the [Calaveras County] general plan cannot identify substantial problems that will emerge with its state highway system, further report that no known funding sources are available for improvements necessary to remedy the problems, and archive statutorily mandated correlation with its land use element (which provides for substantial population increases) simply by stating that the county will solve its problems by asking other agencies of government for money. To sanction such a device would be to provide counties with an abracadabra by which all substance in (Code) 65302’s correlation requirement would be made to disappear.”

Quote from State of California General Plan Guidelines 2003, Chapter 4: Required Elements of the General Plan-Circulation, Page 56, published by the Governor’s Office of Planning and Research.

I. Background

We continue to start off our comments with the above statement because nothing has changed. This General Plan Draft continues to avoid acknowledgement of the County’s inability or unwillingness to effectively address funding for roads and disclosing the factual status of our road system. Development is slowly recovering after a ten year lull, but the data and needed analysis of the system are still not available. RIM Fees and Benefit Basin fees are inadequate and out of date. The roads are increasingly congested and unsafe. Here we are doing a General Plan to carry this county to 2035 using information from 1988, in some cases.

IF THE PLAN IS TO ALLOW FUTURE DEVELOPMENT TO UTILIZE THE GENERAL PLAN PROGRAM EIR TO EXPEDITE THEIR REVIEW PROCESS, HOW WILL THAT BE POSSIBLE WITH THE LACK OF DATA AND ANALYSIS THAT AFFLICTS THIS GENERAL PLAN?

*“The RTP recognizes that transportation needs exist beyond available revenues. These ‘unfunded’ projects reflect improvements and associated operations, maintenance, and rehabilitation that require funding outside anticipated revenues. These projects are included in Appendix 4M. **The total cost of these unfunded projects is approximately \$672 million.**”*

(Draft Regional Transportation Plan (2012), page 110, emphasis added.)

An updated 2017 RTP will be out this next spring or summer. There are no expectations for an improved situation.

CALAVERAS COUNTY HAS ALLOWED HEAVY DEVELOPMENT FOR MANY YEARS WITHOUT ANY FEES IN PLACE UNTIL CITIZENS LEGAL ACTION FORCED THE COUNTY TO FINALLY START COLLECTING RIM FEES, BEGINNING IN 2004. OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND CITIES COLLECT HIGHER RIM FEES, A VARIETY OF IMPACT FEES, SALES TAXES AND GAS TAXES FOR THE PURPOSE OF FUNDING INFRASTRUCTURE THAT IMPROVES THE SAFETY AND QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE INCREASING POPULATION IN AN AREA. THESE FEES AND TAXES ALSO ALLOW A COUNTY OR CITY TO KEEP THEIR FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE TO A LEVEL THAT ATTRACTS BUSINESSES AND JOBS.

The County had the 55th worst ranking out of the State’s counties in deaths due to motor vehicle crashes. The County had the 53rd worst ranking in alcohol involved fatal and injury motor vehicle crashes. (From 2005 MSR, Calaveras County LAFCO, Page III-2.) Calaveras County roads are very unforgiving and many are also no longer safe for the motorist or pedestrian or bicyclist. LOS figures do not reflect that danger. We may look like a rural county but along with a 45,000+ population we have a growing tourist industry which brings 10, 20 or maybe 30 thousand people on a weekend to travel these unsafe roads. Accident rates are a measure of the level of safety on county roads. We can no longer accept the failure to fund our roads.

II. Impacts and Mitigation

A) Vague policies do not mitigate impacts.

The analysis of general plan impacts is complicated by the vagueness of the project description. It is particularly disappointing that policies that otherwise could mitigate the impacts are too vague to do so.

C 1.5 Actively seek all possible financial assistance, including grant funds available from regional, state, and federal agencies, for street and highway improvements and other transportation projects when compatible with General Plan policies and long term local funding capabilities.

Please explain “long term local funding capabilities.” It could be helpful if the reference meant an increased TOT tax & a gas tax & a sales tax. Maybe then we could start paring down that \$672 million circulation backlog the RTP mentions. Of course, another option is to limit future development to the capacity of the roadways that are actually on the ground or funded, and to direct development to those locations.

C 1.7 Safety shall be the primary factor in prioritizing circulation system improvements and evaluating the ability of the County-maintained roadway system to accommodate traffic growth from new development.

When a segment of road is experiencing a significant accident rate any new project should be denied until mitigation can remedy the problem. If a developer chooses to pay for that mitigation, an agreement would allow that developer to recover any amount above his “fair share” as future development occurs. In addition, if a project lowers the safety level of a road segment, the project should be denied.

B) Evaluate Butte Fire Road Damage and its repair.

The Butte Fire and tree mortality issues have dramatically increased stress on a large area of county roads and state highways in the area. The recovery process may address these extraordinary maintenance issues, but if not, that will be very challenging for Calaveras County to absorb. Please address this cumulative impact in the General Plan Draft EIR. How will this impact the overall road maintenance program in the County in the future?

C) Evaluate the new access road for Pardee Reservoir.

Residents of Valley Springs have expressed concern about large tanker trucks traveling down Daphne Street and traveling out to Paloma Road, delivering water treatment related chemicals to Pardee Reservoir. The fumes/emissions and noise are their concern. There has been some discussion at the County about a new access road, west of Castle Rock Mobile Home Park from Hwy 12/26, left for about 1 mile to Paloma Road, thus avoiding the residential area. This road, as any new road planned, should be evaluated in the General Plan EIR. The noise analysis section of the EIR should address the mitigation of these noise concerns as well.

D) Relieve heavy truck traffic in residential neighborhoods.

Another point of concern is the Hogan Quarry traffic on Silver Rapids Road, traveling to Hwy 26. The issues are time-of-day of traffic, noise (truck, jake brakes), and emissions from trucks. To mitigate these impacts in those neighborhoods where they will occur, consider policies that would allow specific

neighborhoods to reduce the impact of future truck traffic. The noise section of the EIR should address these concerns.

E) Valley Springs Bypass

The community of Valley Springs has known of a prospective bypass for over 42 years. We are glad to see that noted in the General Plan Draft.

F) Effective Evacuation Routes

During an emergency, such as to Pattison Fire (2004 ?), it becomes very apparent that we have a problem: a lack of connector roads. That fire came from West of Valley Springs, crossed Hwy 12 into Quail Oaks subdivision and burned all the way to Olive Orchard Road. At the same time a transformer exploded about a half mile East of Valley Springs adjacent to Hwy 12/26. People were stuck in town, some for the night. Some longtime residents were able to move around in a limited fashion because of their knowledge of back roads. Any visitors had no choice but to stay where they were until Hwy 12/26 opened again. These incidents show us the importance of evacuation routes and having the public informed. These routes need to be marked so visitors can effectively utilize them.

The Pattison happened on a very hot windy September day. It moved a mile in under 10 minutes. The Butte fire was totally different in scope.

To mitigate the impacts of the increased population on emergency evacuations, the General Plan EIR should identify means to improve our road system to help the residents and emergency responders of this county to survive, and to save as much value as possible.

G) Directing growth in the amounts and to the locations where the roads are.

Calaveras County has used State Highways as county roads for over 40 years. Caltrans has continually told county representatives how unproductive this is. The population went from 15,000 to 45,000 in that time frame. Two lane county roads with no shoulders or drainage and with limited safety features are no longer adequate. To successfully attract more businesses and jobs, we need to direct new growth to areas where road infrastructure is in place or is funded.

H) Each of the unique small towns has their own unique issues.

1) San Andreas

San Andreas has significant traffic congestion issues, pedestrian safety issues, vehicle emission issues, parking and connectivity issues. As the County Seat, San Andreas has the traffic and pedestrian traffic of county government, CHP, Cal Fire, several schools, a significant amount of commercial traffic traveling to the east and timber trucks moving west. They have an un-adopted mobility plan that could begin to improve conditions. Please consider adopting the mobility plan as a means to mitigate the impacts of future traffic from buildout of the general plan.

2) The Highway 4 corridor

The Highway 4 corridor is made up of several small towns that experience the winter recreation traffic and tourist recreation for the other three seasons. They also live with logging truck traffic and all the traffic associated with their communities. Many residences are vacation homes and/or used as rentals. This area is also in a high fire danger area. The General Plan EIR should include mitigation measures to ensure that with future growth there will be well-maintained roads, adequate pull-outs to accommodate traffic flow, and well identified evacuation routes from the subdivisions and other development in this mountainous region.

3) The D2 area

The D2 is made up of scattered towns and subdivisions in another mountainous area and was the primary site of the Butte Fire. Highway 26 traverses some of this district but the remaining roads are county or privately maintained. Fire hazard is very high here. Evacuation routes are critical. People who live here are used to coping but we have many tourists frequenting the county for fishing, hunting, camping, and hiking. In General Plan EIR, please identify mitigation measures so that, despite future growth, this area will have effective evacuation routes, safe roads, and more pull-out and turn lanes where needed to manage traffic flow and safety.

4) Copperopolis

Copperopolis is projected to experience a significant amount of growth from the subdivision permitted but unbuilt, and from several that are planned for the future and designated on the General Plan Update land use map. There are already serious congestion and safety issues with the existing circulation and these conditions have existed for many years. Cumulative impacts on regional roads were not properly mitigated as projects were being approved. Additional road funding only started happening after several lawsuits emanating from citizens were successful. In the General Plan EIR, identify the major collectors in Copperopolis that must be expanded to accommodate the additional development. New development must not be allowed to degrade the quality of the roads.

I) Transit

The residents of Calaveras County are very fortunate to have their transit system. This service has struggled against many odds and some Supervisors. There is a continuous effort to evolve the transit system and adapt to challenges and new needs. Depending on its density and location, new growth under the general plan may help to better fund the transit system, or it may degrade the systems effectiveness. In the General Plan EIR please explain what mitigation efforts decision-makers can do to continue to evolve the system. Please be open to unique possibilities and solutions.

Students from the Earth Club at Calaveras High School suggested that there is a need for early and late busses to the high school to help students participate more fully in after school activities, organizations and opportunities which help them achieve their long term goals. This need will increase as the student population increases from new development under the General Plan Update. Their request is that the transit service consider this possibility. Please consider this as a transit impact mitigation measure in the General Plan EIR.