

THE NORTH STATE SUPER REGION



June 2010

Introduction

Infrastructure investment and transportation funding are identified as some of the most difficult policy issues facing California today. New funding for transportation is focused on portions of the state with the most population and economic viability. Therefore, rural counties struggle to fund necessary transportation improvements in economically depressed and often geographically challenging areas. Rural local governments lack funding for basic requirements, and while transportation is important, it doesn't always fare well.

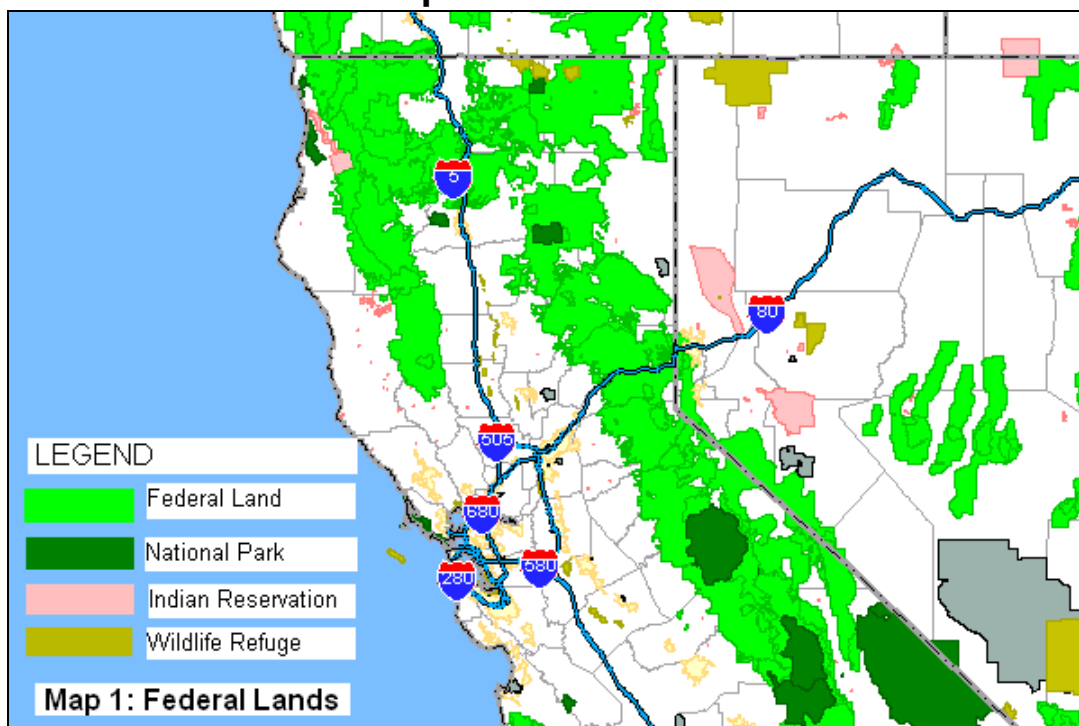
Through the creation of an alliance, North State counties have joined together to communicate their needs and direct change. These groups share similar issues, such as transportation needs, population growth, and land use changes affecting sensitive habitats.

Background and Statistics

In 2007, an informal partnership of county Regional Transportation Planning Agencies (RTPAs) was developed in far-northern California. Other RTPA coalitions have also formed within sub-areas, such as the North Sacramento Valley and the North Coast. More recently, a total of fifteen North State counties collaborated on a jointly-signed project endorsement letter for a federal stimulus transportation grant.

The North State Super Region contains 26% of California's land area and 37% of California's state and federal roads. Map I demonstrates the abundance of federal lands in the North State, emphasizing its rural nature and extensive system of rural roads. The total land area of the Super Region is 42,620 square miles.

Map I Federal Lands



The total population of the Super Region is 1,044,002 persons (Table I), half of which reside in the Sacramento Valley sub-area. In the long-term, the Super Region counties will continue to be attractive for new growth. Much of the growth will be focused in the North Sacramento Valley which is also a service hub to most of the surrounding counties. There are two federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) within the Super Region: Shasta County, with the City of Redding serving as a “regional” center in the northern end of the valley, and Butte County, with the City of Chico serving as a “regional” center in the southern part of the valley.

Table I
Super Region County Populations (2008)

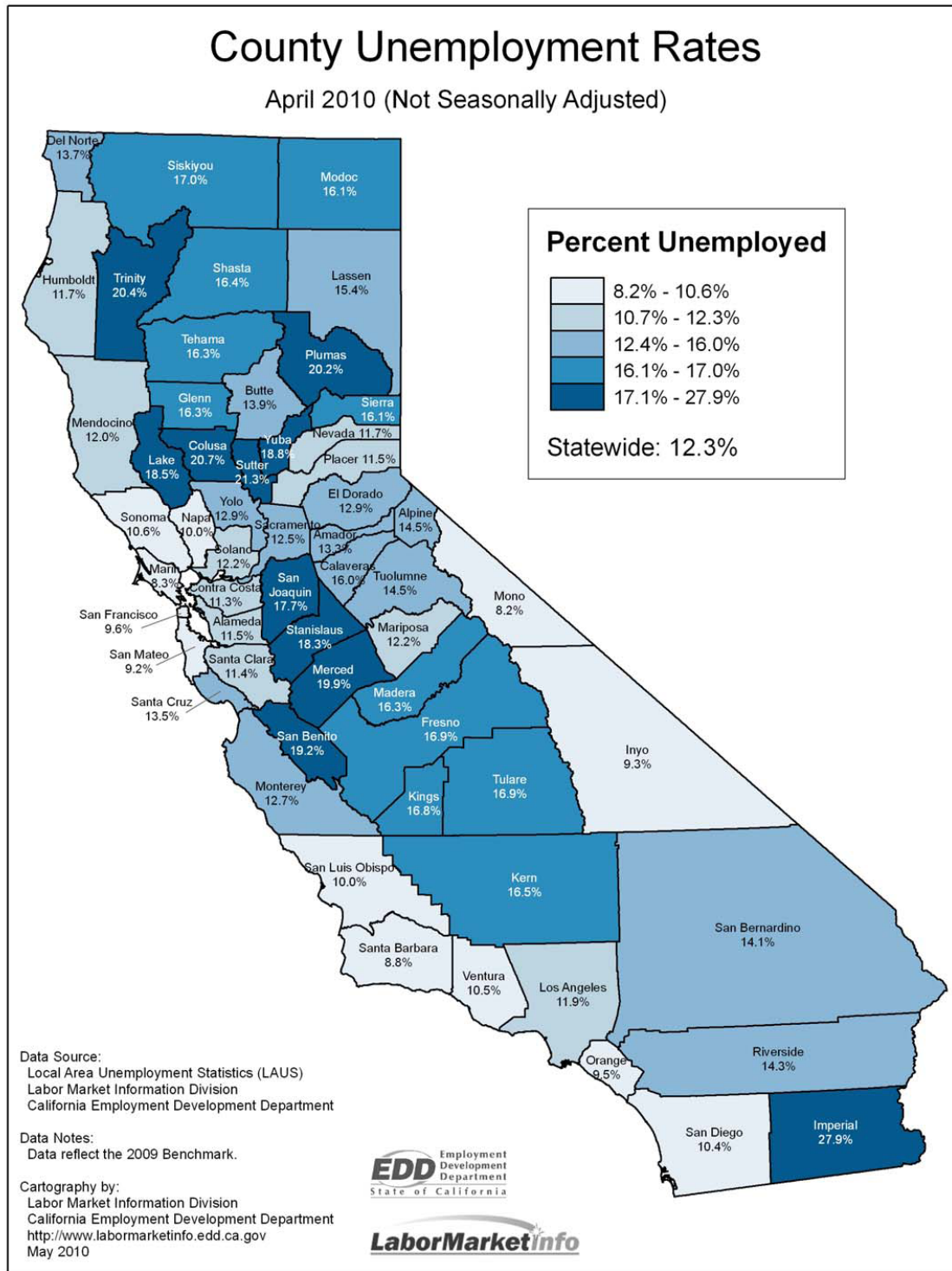
Source: US Census, Population Division

Coastal Area		Sacramento Valley		Mountain Area	
Del Norte	29,100	Butte	220,337	Sierra	3,263
Humboldt	129,000	Shasta	180,214	Siskiyou	44,542
Mendocino	86,221	Tehama	61,550	Plumas	20,275
Lake	64,866	Glenn	28,237	Modoc	9,184
Trinity	14,317	Colusa	21,204	Lassen	34,574
				Nevada	97,118
Total	323,504	Total	511,542	Total	208,956
Grand Total:					1,044,002

Legislative districts that represent the Super Region are shown on Maps 2 through 4 in the Appendix.

The April 2010 unemployment statistics (Figure 2 on the following page) display the unemployment rates in California. Unemployment in the Super Region is high, ranging from 11.7% to 20.7%, an average of 16.2% compared to a statewide average of 12.3%.

Figure 2 April 2010 Unemployment



The Super Region RTPAs share similar issues, such as under-investment by the state on transportation infrastructure, a hard-hit resource-based economy, and projected population growth which is encroaching on prime agricultural land and sensitive environmental habitat.

While the Super Region RTPAs share similar issues and needs, they have not consistently collaborated and worked together to resolve their common needs and issues like other areas of the state, such as the San Joaquin Valley and the multi-county Councils of Government (SACOG, MTC, SCAG, etc).

Lessons Learned

The San Joaquin Valley presents a good example of what can happen if counties do not adequately plan and prepare for a growing population.

Growth within the San Joaquin Valley over the past two decades has changed the landscape and quality of life for the eight valley counties (San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Merced, Madera, Tulare, Fresno, Kings and Kern). What was once considered the “nation’s salad bowl” is now a valley struggling with the impacts from two decades of population growth that has left the valley with significant traffic congestion, safety issues with at-grade railroad crossings, urbanization that has sprawled into once prime agricultural land, and a distinction with Los Angeles of having the worst air quality in the nation.

The San Joaquin Valley’s plight has led Governor Schwarzenegger to establish a partnership between the eight San Joaquin Valley counties and several state agencies. The intent of this partnership is to provide a collaborative forum between the counties and state to improve planning and coordination and revitalize the valley.

The increased attention to the San Joaquin Valley by the Governor and the efforts directed by the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley has already produced positive results including:

- Accelerated funding by the California Transportation Commission (CTC) for highway projects along SR 205 and SR 99 in the valley
- Caltrans’ development of a \$6 billion business plan for improving SR 99
- Designation of three enterprise zones for Fresno and Merced County
- Receiving earmarks of \$1.5 million for economic development activities
- A specific \$1 billion fund within Proposition 1B for the SR 99 corridor

Opportunities to Collaborate

The San Joaquin Valley Partnership and other collaborations were based more on fear than hope. They are often a reaction to a negative condition or regulatory action that is eminent or has already occurred.

The Super Region RTPAs are in a unique position to ensure that the North State does not follow the same course as did the San Joaquin Valley. If 20 years ago the San Joaquin Valley had the resources and tools, such as blueprint planning and regional collaboration, it is probable that the San Joaquin Valley would look very different than it does today.

It would be a failure on the part of the Super Region if we did not learn from the past experience of the San Joaquin Valley and our large urban cousins to the south, as to what can happen without sensible planning for growth. Unlike the San Joaquin Valley of twenty years ago, the north state has modern tools, resources, and motivation to better plan and collaborate. Moreover, state and federal agencies are currently much more supportive of this approach.

Statewide Coalitions

Statewide, other coalitions have been established to address the needs of underrepresented groups that individually do not have the impact of a collective group. Following are a selection of transportation-related coalitions and their intended purpose:

- The Rural Counties Task Force was formed in 1988 as a joint effort between the CTC and 26 rural RTPAs (those with a population of 250,000 or less with no urbanized area greater than 50,000) to represent the needs of rural counties in developing and funding transportation projects.
- The Self-Help Counties Coalition, as of 2007, is a group of 19 counties that have passed special transportation sales taxes for additional funding.
- The California RTPA Task Force discusses CTC meeting agenda items and other issues of statewide significance.
- The California Association of Councils of Governments (CalCOG) was formed in 1977 and represents the interests of 35 regional planning agencies.
- The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) provides governmental relations and advocacy to state and federal government offices, as well as other services to the counties of California.
- The League of Cities is an association of California city officials that exchange information and combine resources to influence policy decisions that affect cities.
- The Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC) represents member counties in state and federal advocacy, program development and outreach.

Past Collaboration within the Super Region

As previously stated, the counties of the Super Region have collaborated on several projects that benefit the region. The counties have also come together to prioritize and endorse projects of regional significance. In other cases, smaller collaborative efforts occur within sub-areas of the Super Region. Following are recent multi-agency collaborations typical of the envisioned purpose of this group:

- CMIA joint project nominations to the CTC
- TIGER grant joint nominations to the CTC
- The Fix 5 Partnership effort for transportation improvements to Interstate 5
- The District 2 RTPA Task Force was assembled as a group to represent the needs of RTPAs in Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama, and Trinity counties

- The Tri-County Economic Forecast Conference (Butte, Tehama and Glenn) provides insight to economic trends to allow community leaders to plan for future needs
- The Great Valley Center is a nonprofit organization supporting activities that benefit the economic, social and environmental condition of the central valley
- Blueprint grant support
- Interstate 5 projects endorsement
- California Oregon Advanced Transportation Systems (COATS) effort
- Google Transit

Prospective Super Region Collaboration

There is a tremendous opportunity to work together to address common needs while also retaining autonomy. A collaborative approach in the North State could provide numerous opportunities including:

- Generation of joint grants and letters of grant support
- Blueprint technical tools and planning coordination
- Joint endorsement of key officials appointed by state and federal government, including the CTC and related work groups and committees
- Letters to elected representatives regarding federal and state policy
- Partnerships with companies and non-profit organizations for joint projects
- A joint legislative platform
- Pooled financing for NEPA resource agency support
- Regional mitigation banks
- Air Quality regulation (e.g., new ozone standards) response and coordination
- AB 32 and SB 375 development
- Sharing information, technical capabilities and training opportunities
- A shared and maintained GIS platform
- Habitat management planning and mitigation

By coordinating and partnering on these efforts, the Super Region will cultivate a growth and economic development vision. Existing blueprint plans developed by Butte, Shasta, and Tehama counties can be coordinated to complement surrounding counties and each other. Many resources of value to each county, such as air quality, habitat, water, rivers, can be overseen more efficiently and thoroughly through a collaboration of effort.

Key Topics for Consideration and Discussion

As with the creation of any group, its character and function must be well thought-out. A framework to operate will make the group more effective in accomplishing its goals.

Geographic configuration

The geographic configuration of a coalition speaks of the reasons and issues that unite them. Their size is a reflection of their power and voice, yet by splitting off into subgroups with more closely matched issues, they become more cohesive and passionate in expressing their needs.

The Super Region as a coalition of 16 North State counties is better recognized and politically has more influence. These entities can easily agree and support issues nonspecific to their county. Subgroups may be formed when areas are bound together by a specific purpose and need.

This flexible configuration is valuable to secure support from colleagues with common specific subgroup issues, as well as a larger united front for tackling issues common to the entire region.

Organization Structure

The structure of the coalition is an essential component determined by its members. Meeting frequency, representation and funding are important fundamentals discussed below:

Meeting frequency The group will meet twice per year, with one meeting in the spring and another in the fall. Additional meetings can be scheduled as needed. The location of the meetings should be easily accessible, with enough meeting time allocated to make the journey worthwhile.

Formation and representation Formation of the group will occur through RTPA action submitted to their respective Boards in support of its formation. The Super Region members are represented by RTPA staff. Elected officials may also attend.

Conduct of the meeting An operating document, which describes the participants and goals of the coalition, will be executed to formally unite the group. A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) provides structure, yet does not imply legal commitment by the parties. It is a guiding document with flexibility in its goals and direction.

Financing Representatives, technical staff, and any moderator will have to spend time preparing agendas, responding to action items and other activities. It is not anticipated that a significant amount of time will be required, and can be absorbed into existing member agency budgets. A number of sources including grants, or funding through another organization may be explored if needed.

Key Guiding Principles

A common philosophy is needed to guide the group. Following are suggested principles relative to purpose, ground rules and roles:

1. Start with simple agendas and recognize that this work is in addition to regular workloads. Limit staff time and cost.
2. Items discussed must be unique to the Super Region. Avoid duplication of the efforts of other groups (ie. CalCOG, Rural Counties Task Force, etc.). Support of the work of another group, however, may be appropriate at times.
3. Utilize expertise, leadership, and information from outside groups including federal agencies, Caltrans, CTC and other state agencies, universities, private and non-profit groups.
4. Regional transportation planning agency priorities should be the focus of the group. The needs of the regions should be explored and priorities of the group established.
 - a. Discussion of water, timber, and other individual priorities that are not directly related to regional transportation planning may create an unworkable scope.
 - b. Individual city or county priorities, that are not necessarily regional RTPA priorities, should be avoided.
5. Positions of the Super Region may require concurrence from RTPA Boards as determined by each Executive Director.

Next Steps

This document and MOA will be presented to each RTPA Board or Commission by staff report, resolution, or another method preferred by the Executive Director. Upon approval by each board, the member entities will by signature commit to collaborate and support the Super Region and the activities agreed upon by the group.

In the Super Regions fall meeting, the RTPAs will report the status of their Boards approval. A final document and MOA will be provided and executed by the members.

APPENDIX

Map 2 US Congressional Districts



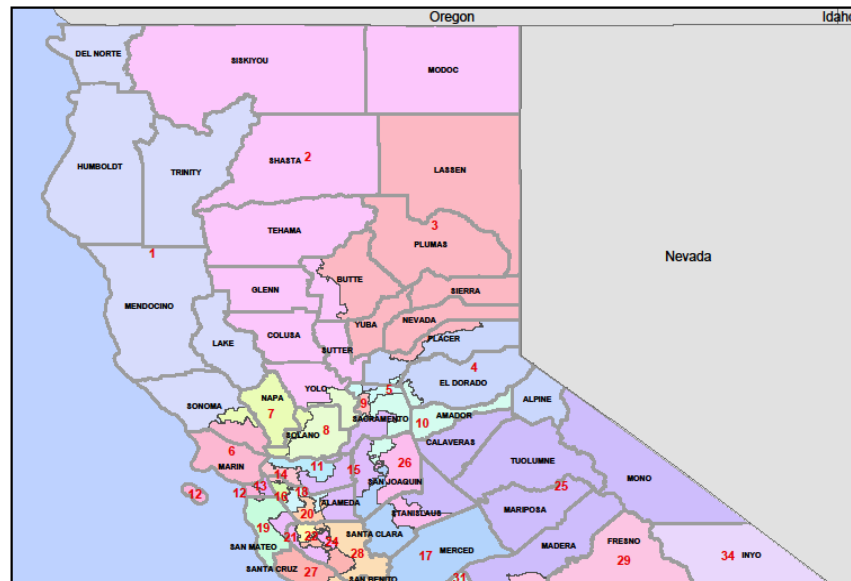
District 01 representative: Mike Thompson
District 02 representative: Wally Herger
District 04 representative: Tom McClintock

MAP 3 California Senate Districts



Senate District 01 representative: Dave Cox
Senate District 02 representative: Pat Wiggins
Senate District 04 representative: Sam Aanestad

Map 4 California Assembly Districts



State Assembly District 01 representative: Wes Chesbro

State Assembly District 02 representative: Jim Nielsen

State Assembly District 03 representative: Dan Logue