

Notes

Welcome

Mr. Mark Pestrella, Director of LA County Public Works, welcomed everyone to the call. Mr. Pestrella reminded all partners of our shared goal for Infrastructure LA to serve as an information-sharing forum for regional collaboration, and a tool to leverage each other's resources.

LA County Public Works COVID-19 Update

Mr. Mark Pestrella provided LA County Public Works' COVID-19 update. He noted that there are over 39,000 positive cases in LA County, including 1913 deaths. Mr. Pestrella expressed condolences for those who have lost their lives to this pandemic. He acknowledged that all partners are playing a role in combating the virus and the resulting fiscal crisis with respect to infrastructure. Everyone continues to deliver essential services and maintain business continuity. LA County Public Works has relaunched sediment cleanup activities at Devil's Gate Reservoir – a \$75 million endeavor. LA County Public Works also continues to move forward with over \$1 billion in vertical development and intends to continue procuring and delivering services related to capital improvement plans. Capital improvement projects remain a priority with LA County and the Board of Supervisors, and we expect continued support as we look at long-term financing. While the construction industry is exempt from Safer at Home orders, we are required to practice the appropriate safety precautions, which we all continue to do.

There have been nine positive cases of COVID-19 at LA County Public Works. Those employees have taken time off for recovery, and many have already fully recovered and returned to work. LA County Public Works is developing guidelines for phased workplace re-occupancy. We are setting design standards for workplace repopulation. This plan and guidelines can be shared with our Infrastructure LA partners when they are complete.

LA County is expecting a \$2 billion revenue shortfall, while California estimates a \$54.3 billion loss statewide. In Fiscal Year 2020-21, we anticipate a reduction of up to \$244 million, a third of which is from a reduction in gas tax. LA County has formed an Economic Resiliency Task Force that meets weekly to help the County improve the economy, create jobs, and return to full employment. Mr. Pestrella noted that the infrastructure and construction sector will be relied upon to combat the impacts of COVID-19 and keep the economy going. Anything we can do collectively to support each other and leverage our resources, is something this group is interested in. Solutions like cost sharing, P3 scenarios, and bond financing – anything that can put people to work and keep the dollar rolling – are great things to consider. Our industry will be heavily highlighted during COVID-19 recovery to keep LA going.

Road to Recovery Panel

Mr. Phil Doudar, Assistant Director of LA County Public Works, introduced the panelists:

- **Robert Ferrante**, General Manager at LA County Sanitation Districts
- **Maria Meleandez**, Deputy Executive Office of Next Generation Workforce Programs at LA Metro
- **Rossana D'Antonio**, Deputy Director at LA County Public Works

Infrastructure LA Task Force Teleconference

May 20, 2020, 2:30 – 3:30pm

- **Sinan Khan**, Associate Director of Response at LA County Chief Executive Office – Office of Emergency Management
- **John Hakel**, Executive Director at Southern California Partnership for Jobs

Mr. Doudar invited Mr. Robert Ferrante to share LA County Sanitation Districts' recovery efforts.

Mr. Ferrante shared that LA County Sanitation Districts manage wastewater treatment plants, produce recycled water, manage solid waste recycling, and landfills. LA County Sanitation Districts have 2,000 employees – 40% are office staff, and the remaining 60% are field staff. When COVID-19 first hit, the Sanitation Districts took some short-term actions to reduce the risk of an outbreak at one of their facilities and to keep everything in operation. The Sanitation Districts formed rotating teams of frontline field workers and had a reserve of operators and maintenance staff staying home. Having rotating teams helped maintain physical distancing between employees. Higher risk employees over the age of 65 or with underlying conditions could work from home if possible. Those who were unable to work from home were offered paid administrative leave. All office staff was sent home and telework has been going well with 35-38% of the workforce working from home. Planning for the long term, the Sanitation Districts planned to bring operations and maintenance staff back to full capacity by utilizing face coverings, other safety protocols, and self-screening checks. All worksites are safe, and reserve employees are now back to staff. Employees that are 65+ and/or with underlying conditions are allowed to come back to the office but can take time off if they prefer not to come in. Mr. Ferrante noted that this may be new norm as our region continues to deal with the virus. LA County Sanitation Districts' capital projects are still moving forward.

Mr. Doudar invited Ms. Maria Meleandez to share LA METRO's recovery efforts.

Ms. Meleandez shared that LA Metro has a roadmap to recovery with both short- and long-term goals. In mid-March, LA Metro redirected staff to voluntary telecommuting while continuing to engage and empower staff through this time. LA Metro partnered with Microsoft to provide training. With 70% of staff in the field, LA Metro needed to provide extra support to help the workforce leverage virtual tools. In the last 8 weeks, LA Metro offered employees LinkedIn Learning (used over 1000 hours) and continued communicating with staff through virtual tools. The path forward for LA Metro Headquarters is to align with state and local guidelines through a three-phase process. In Phase 1, through June, LA Metro will review the current situation and continue to offer voluntary telecommuting. LA Metro will also conduct customized needs assessments based on each department's business needs to determine who can continue telecommuting and who will need to return to the office. In Phase 2, LA Metro will evaluate cleaning protocols, elevator use, and foot traffic to predict needs moving forward. In Phase 2, LA metro will gradually reintroduce staff to headquarters, encourage personal protective behaviors, and conduct a welcome orientation to empower employees to keep each other safe. LA Metro leaders are focused on collaboration and are looking at how to lead effectively with some staff at home and some in the office. LA Metro is also participating in study to understand the effectiveness of telecommuting. In Phase 3, LA Metro will collect information and best practices from various task forces to build the new normal for the organization. The focus in the third phase is to make data-driven decisions and avoid making rushed decisions. LA Metro wants to make sure people feel safe to come back to an environment where they feel most productive.

Mr. Doudar invited Ms. Rossana D’Antonio to share more about LA County Public Works’ recovery efforts.

Ms. D’Antonio noted that LA County Public Works is on a similar journey to its partners. In March, all County buildings were closed to slow the spread of COVID-19. Public Works continued operating under an established Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP), in order to continue to provide uninterrupted essential services. In the early days, LA County Public Works had to modify COOP to adapt to a pandemic and establish which services could continue to be delivered from alternate work locations. Technological resources were made available to telecommuters, which thinned out our facilities for people who could not telework. The County is now in the recovery process and has established seven workgroups to assess different aspects of recovery. One of these workgroups is developing guidelines for the new normal. The group has developed operational guidelines for phased workplace occupancy which is applicable to publicly- and privately-owned buildings and businesses. The guidelines emphasize maintaining physical distancing and infection control. The report includes maximum occupant load guidelines based on building occupancy codes and guidance on cleaning protocols. With this tool, building owners should be able to develop a facility-specific reoccupation plan. LA County Public Works is getting ready to start implementing these guidelines, which should be available in the next 10 days. Once available, we will post the guidelines on our website.

Mr. Doudar invited Mr. Sinan Khan to share LA County’s recovery efforts.

Mr. Khan shared that the County is developing a reconstitution framework to outline how to safely open-up the County. The development of this framework is strictly overseen by LA County’s Department of Public Health. The County has also formed an Economic Resiliency Task Force, which will help the County Board of Supervisors ensure that the major sectors that support LA County are safely reopened – infrastructure is one of these major sectors. The Economic Resiliency Task Force is developing plans for each sector including recommendations for short-, medium-, and long-term economic recovery. LA County is also developing plans for services reconstitution to reopen County services according to Public Health guidelines. This may include new assignments for employees that are unable to go back to work. LA County is also looking at asset management and how to maintain a safe work environment. Lastly, LA County is looking at finances and information technology to determine the County’s IT needs to support long term work-from-home.

Mr. Doudar invited Mr. John Hakel to share updates from Southern California Partnership for Jobs (SoCal Works).

Mr. Hakel shared that SoCal Works represents 2,750 contractors and 90,000 union workers. SoCal Works is focused on educating elected officials and decision makers on the importance of continued funding for critical infrastructure projects. Mr. Hakel commended local agencies and contractors on their implementation of safety precautions while still delivering projects on time and on budget. Mr. Hakel expressed his thanks to LA County Public Works for helping to fast track many of their projects. Mr Hakel noted that historically, the construction industry has been the kick starter for economic recovery, providing at \$3 return for every \$1 invested. SoCal Works has developed advertisements to thank the union workforce and first responders. Mr. Hakel acknowledged the importance of looking at finances but

noted that building infrastructure projects will benefit the public. SoCal Works stands ready and willing to support infrastructure development.

Questions

Mr. Phil Doudar opened the meeting for questions.

Q: Mr. Doudar asked Mr. Robert Ferrante: How are LA County Sanitation Districts engaging with employees regarding the path forward and how are you reverting to normal processes for solid waste management?

A: Mr. Ferrante responded that they have 24 boards with 98 directors – so it has been challenging to get them all together. So far, they have been using teleconferencing but will transition to more of a Zoom-type platform going forward. Teleconferencing has worked out fine but does reduce discussion and is time consuming when roll call votes need to be taken for everything. Mr. Ferrante noted that it is a learning process, and the meetings have been improving every day. For solid waste management, they had to implement additional safety precautions at recyclables sorting lines and weigh scales. Recyclables sorting lines have lots of automation, like optical sensors, to separate materials, but do require some hand sorting. Initially, that line was shut down. It has since been opened with additional safeguards: slower throughput of the line, hand cleaning stations, frequent cleaning protocols, and face masks. Weigh scales are cash registers, so additional safeguards were also included here: gloves, shields to separate operators from each other, and utilizing rotating teams. Solid waste and recycling facilities are now fully operating, but tonnage is down by 15-20%, which results in economic impacts.

Q: Mr. Doudar asked Ms. Maria Meleandez: How does LA Metro keep the workforce motivated and committed when teleworking?

A: Ms. Meleandez responded that LA Metro created toolkits to guide departments on employee engagement. They have had conversations with employees to determine what has been working and what can be done to improve. LA Metro is considering implementing staggered schedules (intermittent telecommuting) to provide flexibility to allow people to have face-to-face connections. At this stage, LA Metro is asking for feedback and collecting information. LA Metro collaborates at the leadership level to ensure that employees receive one consistent message. LA Metro gives employees a voice to share ideas in a safe space. They continue to engage with emails and surveys. Returning to the office has been voluntary so far – LA Metro understands that employees may still have children at home and unable to return to “normal”. They are committed to understanding with compassion that employees may not be back to normal yet and giving them the support and tools needed to continue working from home.

Q: Mr. Charles Herbertson, Director of Public Works of Culver City asked: Mark Pestrella mentioned a 1/3 gas tax revenue reduction. In FY20-21, should local agencies factor the same for gas tax revenue reduction? What is the assumed reduction for the rest of the year?

A: Mr. Phil Doudar answered that the estimates are sourced from the California State Association of Counties and the Department of Finance. The assumption for Fiscal Year 20-21 is a projection of the gas tax revenue reductions we have experienced in Fiscal Year 19-20. The general takeaway is that gas tax revenues do not look good. This is a reduction on top of the reductions we already started seeing last year. As we get more information and projections from these agencies, we will share them with the group.

Q: Mr. William Taylor, Granite Construction Inc., asked: Is the reduction in gas tax revenues expected to have long term effects beyond Fiscal Year 20-21?

A: Mr. Phil Doudar responded that the impacts of reduced gas tax revenues will probably extend beyond Fiscal Year 20-21. He noted that revenues are all linked to economic recovery. If overall economic recovery is slow, we can expect less traffic, which results in less gas tax revenue.

Q: Mr. Andy Lipkis, Accelerate Resilience Los Angeles, asked: before COVID-19, the County Board of Supervisors was looking at utilizing major funding initiatives (Measures W, H, A & M). Is WHAM a way to jumpstart infrastructure renewal utilizing green infrastructure and climate resilience funding?

A: Mr. Mark Pestrella responded that Infrastructure LA is our response to the Board's WHAM working group request. This is a platform to integrate resources and prioritize together to leverage state and federal dollars for infrastructure investment. All entities involved in WHAM are participants on Infrastructure LA where we can leverage each other's resources to streamline delivery of priority projects.

Q: Mr. Charles Herbertson, Director of Public Works of Culver City asked: are there any projections for the impact of COVID-19 on the cost of public works construction?

A: Mr. Mark Pestrella responded that that is a budget decision in terms of what will be cut due to COVID-19. At the County level, capital projects continue to be a priority for the CEO. We recommend no reduction in capital projects investment at this time. LA County Public Works will make adjustments to the workforce and reduce in-house contracting. We are looking at financial schemes to get us through this period and welcome any ideas for extending ourselves further. For the time being, the County is not considering a reduction in Public Works construction, though reduced gas tax revenues may delay some road projects to later years.

Adjourn

Mr. Phil Doudar shared with the group that Infrastructure LA wants to hear from everyone. We have 4 subcommittees, and he encouraged everyone to be active in those groups. Mr. Doudar reminded attendees that we have a platform to discuss legislative issues to influence decision makers in Sacramento and D.C. We all want to see funds from Washington in the next stimulus bill, which we can only achieve in collaboration. Mr. Doudar thanked everyone for participating and adjourned the meeting.