



Staff Report

File #: 24-0642

REQUEST FOR CITY COUNCIL ACTION

DATE: 08/21/2024

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: Public Works Department

SUBJECT:

COUNCIL MEMBER SPEAKE REQUESTED THE FORMATION OF A LOBBYING GROUP OF CITIES TO SUPPORT IMPROVEMENTS ON INTERSTATE 15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report asks the City Council to provide feedback on the proposed format of an Interstate 15 (I-15) corridor lobbying group or direct staff to no longer pursue this request. During its Fall Policy Workshop on October 12, 2023, the City Council directed staff to pursue the development of an I-15 Lobbying Group and bring back to Council what that would look like.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

That the City Council provide feedback and direction on the proposed format of the I-15 lobbying group.

BACKGROUND & HISTORY:

Council Member Speake submitted a Future Agenda Item Request Form, asking staff to develop an I-15 lobbying group for cities to support improvements on Interstate 15. The group's formation would get Caltrans to formally recognize the effort and initiate projects along the I-15, advocate for regional, State, and federal funding, and complete the projects that would have been initiated. At its Fall Policy Workshop on October 12, 2023, the City Council directed staff to pursue the development of an I-15 lobbying group and bring back to Council what it would look like.

ANALYSIS:

The City's strategic plan, legislative platform, and annual financial priorities are the tools that help facilitate the City's advocacy to seek outside funding and bring transportation projects of significant impact to the City of Corona and surrounding areas. These documents clearly define these objectives and provide staff or City officials direction to apply for grants and outside funding from other agencies to fund local and regional projects within and near City limits.

Since January 2021, and with significant efforts from staff and city representatives, the City has received almost \$80 million in new competitive grants. Projects funded by these new grants include storm drain improvements, alley and roadway improvements for beautification and safety, and bicycle, roadway safety, and bridge preventative maintenance plans.

The City continues to partner with the Riverside Transportation Commission (RCTC) and Western Regional Council of Government (WRCOG) to find sources of funding to keep up with the rising cost of construction of the McKinley Gade Separation project as prices of construction continue to increase with unanticipated inflation costs and material & supply chain issues. RCTC awarded almost \$20 million and WRCOG over \$11 million to cover the shortfall in costs as the project continues through construction.

City staff and Council members also advocate for transportation projects with our region's elected officials. With the help of Councilmember Speake and Assemblyman Bill Essayli, Caltrans initiated a southbound deceleration lane project on the I-15 from Old Temescal Canyon Road to the Ontario Avenue interchange. The project cost estimate is \$7.6 million, with construction to begin in the fall of 2026. Other Caltrans projects include a northbound auxiliary lane from Magnolia Avenue to State Route (SR) 91 with a project cost estimate of \$10.2 million and construction anticipated to begin in spring 2027. The restriping of the southbound lane to eliminate the lane drop at Cajalco, Caltrans project number EA 1N690, is currently on schedule to begin this fall of 2024.

RCTC's investment in the I-15 includes the Interim Corridor Operations Projects, a project to temporarily use the southbound shoulder lane as an auxiliary lane from the Cajalco to Weirick interchange. This project was completed within 1 year from its inception to its opening in 2022 at a price tag of \$5 million. The project will be followed by the Corridor Operations Project in the amount of \$21 million, which will construct the permanent features of this segment in 2027. RCTC also completed and opened the I-15/SR 91 Express Lane Connector project to traffic in 2023, connecting southbound I-15 express lane commuters to the westbound SR 91 and inversely. RCTC continues its planning and design for the I-5 Express Lane Southern Extension between Cajalco and SR-74 and includes long-range projects such as extending that express lane from SR-74 to the San Diego County line, a feasibility study of a smart freeway pilot project and consideration of an I-15 rail project in its approved Traffic Relief Plan.

Of the \$80 million in new money received since January 2021, \$28 million was awarded between now and the last presentation of the I-15 lobbying group last year in October. Other City officials have noticed the significant amount of funding diverted to the City and had brought up their projects and funding shortfalls.

Therefore, City staff is requesting that the City Council provide the following options based upon the Pros and Cons described below:

Option 1: Direct staff to continue to form an I-15 lobbying group with the following agencies: Temecula, Lake Elsinore, Murrieta, Wildomar, Riverside County, Norco, Eastvale, and Jurupa Valley.

Pros:

- City of Corona can lead the discussion.
- Influence Caltrans and RCTC to take initiatives on I-15 improvements.

Cons:

- A significant amount of staff time and effort to form the lobbying group.
- May be difficult to get commitment or consensus from other agencies.
- Other agencies may not have the resources (staff, funds, etc.) to participate.
- Funding could go to other cities or areas instead of Corona.

If the City Council selects this option, staff will schedule a meeting with elected representatives of the listed agencies. The meeting will discuss projects and funding needs for projects on the I-15 corridor, and a joint letter will be written to State and federal elected representatives to lobby for future projects and funding opportunities for the I-15 corridor.

Option 2: Continue to advocate for Corona via State and federal lobbyists, annual meetings with federal/state representatives, and partnerships with Caltrans, RCTC, and WRCOG.

Pros:

- Continued partnership and advocacy with Caltrans, RCTC, and WRCOG.
- RCTC accelerated construction of I-15 SB auxiliary lane from Cajalco to Weirick
- Caltrans initiated three (3) projects on I-15: removal of a southbound lane drop, a deceleration lane, and an auxiliary lane.

Cons:

- There is less strength in numbers for legislative or grant requests.

If the City Council selects this option, staff will not continue forming an I-15 lobbying group and will continue its successful efforts to advocate for Corona via state and federal lobbyist, annual meetings with federal/state representatives, and partner with Caltrans, RCTC, and WRCOG to advocate and initiate projects using outside funding sources.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

This action is exempt pursuant to Section 15061(b)(3) of the Guidelines for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which states that a project is exempt from CEQA if the activity is covered by the general rule that CEQA applies only to projects that have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment. Where it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the activity in question may have a significant effect on the environment, the activity is not subject to CEQA. This action seeks Council direction on the formation of a lobbying group. Since there is no possibility that this action will have a significant effect on the environment, no environmental analysis is required.

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PREPARED BY: SAVAT KHAMPHOU, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

Attachments:

1. Exhibit 1 - Presentation