CHAPTER 4:
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

El Dorado County is a growing, dynamic community. Population, housing, employment, and other key parameters all show continuous growth. This growth brings increasing demands on our transportation systems to maintain and enhance safety and efficiency. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the various transportation modes and their interrelationships, and to discuss the key regional transportation issues currently facing El Dorado County and the greater Sacramento metropolitan area. Subsequent chapters build on this information, identifying overall goals and objectives for the transportation system, addressing specific needs, and developing an action plan for each transportation mode.

RECREATIONAL TRAVEL

Increasingly, the transportation needs of the recreation and tourism industries are impacting the transportation infrastructure. The demands for recreation-oriented travel need to be accounted for in all transportation planning, and these demands are unique. There are peak seasons and times of day that are different from the typical commute patterns. One of the challenges is providing a public transportation system that is convenient, flexible, and reliable enough to encourage visitors to an area to leave their car behind and/or negate the need to rent a car. Linking different modes conveniently (air, bus, bicycles, shuttles) is also important in providing a seamless transportation system for tourists and visitors.

INTER-JURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION/ INTEGRATED LAND USE

Inter-jurisdictional coordination is a key component of an effective and efficient transportation system. Such coordination is first necessary to ensure connectivity of roads, transit, bicycle and pedestrian paths, and other transportation systems to provide continuity and access between communities. Coordination is also critical to addressing transportation-related regional impacts, such as air quality and congestion. In a time of scarce governmental resources, coordination is even more important to ensure that those funds that are available are spent in the most efficient and effective manner possible. Intergovernmental coordination furthers this goal by developing county-wide transportation priorities, implementing studies and projects in cooperation with other counties, facilitating joint transportation projects, and anticipating and mitigating impacts of governmental decisions of one jurisdiction onto another.

One of the prime motivations for the establishment of EDCTC in 1975 was to provide a forum for inter-jurisdictional coordination on county-wide issues. Therefore, a fundamental ongoing responsibility of EDCTC to continue to advance communication and coordination between jurisdictions on the variety of transportation-related issues facing the region.

Coordination both within El Dorado County and with neighboring jurisdictions in the Sacramento region is crucial in the effort to address transportation challenges along key corridors such as US 50 and State Route 49. Coordination among regional agencies such as Caltrans, the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG), Placer County Transportation Planning Agency, Amador County Transportation Commission, Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, El

Dorado County Air Quality Management District, Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD), and others also plays an important role.

Another aspect of coordination is that between transportation and land use planning. The planning agencies and jurisdictions can work together to support and encourage land use patterns that promote alternatives to driving alone. Land use decisions are made quickly – in contrast to transportation infrastructure that may take decades to fund, design, and construct. A continuous dialogue, interdisciplinary approach, and proactive strategy is needed to keep land use decision-making and transportation investment in sync.

CURRENT REGIONAL ISSUES

CONGESTION

As El Dorado County continues to grow, congestion on US 50 and local roads continues to increase. Commute times become longer, and the capacity of many roadways during peak periods is exceeded, bringing traffic to a crawl. This diverts auto and truck traffic to parallel roadways that are not equipped to handle the increase in traffic.

A mix of strategies is necessary to address these congestion and capacity issues:

- improving the availability, reliability, convenience, and frequency of public transportation;
- increasing the capacity of existing roadways and interchanges;
- promoting commute alternatives that remove vehicles from the road (e.g., telecommuting, bicycling, transit); and,
- providing connectivity between all transportation modes.

Successful implementation of these strategies requires significant additional funding, careful coordination with land use changes, and calculation of positive and negative impacts on air quality.

GROWTH

The El Dorado region continues to be faced with the pressures of urban growth. Between 1990 and 2000, the size of the Census-defined urbanized area grew significantly eastward from its previous terminus in Sacramento County to include El Dorado Hills. The total county-wide population, excluding the Tahoe Basin, is expected to grow at an average of approximately 1.75% annually, for an estimated overall growth of over 35 % between 2005 and 2025.

Housing units and employment are also expected to increase dramatically. Between 2005 and 2025, the number of housing units is expected to grow over 41% and employment is expected to rise more than 35%. Along with continuing commercial and industrial growth, these trends indicate that transportation within, into, and out of El Dorado County will be key issues.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Funding for transportation projects originates at federal, state, and local levels. Detailed descriptions of these funding sources are provided in the financial section of this RTP. At the federal level, the reauthorization of the Transportation Efficiency Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), signed by the President on August 10, 2005, will determine whether the trend of increasing levels of federal funding will continue. This six-year surface transportation bill is otherwise known as SAFETEA-LU.

The instability of state funding is summarized in this quotation from the California Transportation Commission's Annual Report to the Legislature, December, 2004:

> *California's transportation program is in crisis and on the verge of collapse. Where the state once had a transportation program funded almost exclusively from user fees protected by the California Constitution (gasoline taxes and weight fees), we now have a program dependent primarily on motor fuel sales taxes, without constitutional protection. For each of the last 4 years, transportation funds have been taken to close the General Fund deficit. For the last 2 years, the California Transportation Commission has been forced to stop making new allocations to projects from all three of the major components of the state transportation program, the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP), and the Traffic Congestion Relief Program (TCRP). Cities and counties have not been receiving the state subventions committed to them in statute for local road rehabilitation and repair and state transit assistance.*

At the local level, cities and counties may provide funds for transportation projects. These may include dedicated sales taxes, redevelopment funds, general funds, special grants, or other sources. Currently, El Dorado County has four separate mitigation or impact fee programs in place: the El Dorado Hills/Salmon Falls Road Impact Fee; the Traffic Impact Mitigation Fee; the State Highway Traffic Impact Mitigation Fee; and the Highway 50 Interim Variable Traffic Impact Mitigation Fee. The county anticipates replacing these four programs with a new, single traffic impact mitigation fee program during fiscal year 2005/2006.

In summary, there are many more transportation projects than there are funds available to implement them. Future funding sources for state and local projects will continue to be dependent on the condition of the state budget and the state legislature's development of statewide transportation funding programs. Innovative approaches to transportation funding and development of new funding sources will also be needed to provide for the multi-modal transportation needs of the residents and businesses of El Dorado County. Some of these approaches might include: dedicated sales tax, raising existing taxes such as the gasoline/fuel tax, implementing toll roads or user fees, and public/private partnerships.

PROPOSED INCORPORATION OF EL DORADO HILLS

The El Dorado Hills Incorporation Committee re-initiated incorporation efforts in October 2003. The Local Area formation Commission accepted the incorporation proposal for filing in May 2005. If passed by the voters, the effective date of incorporation is to be July 1, 2006.

The incorporation of El Dorado Hills will not result in changes to any revenue sources related to EDCTC programs and services, other than those allocated for transit services. EDCTC allocates federal and state funds based on a priority basis following an evaluation and ranking of project nominations in accordance with fund source requirements and established priorities. The impact of the incorporation of El Dorado Hills will be minimal if the newly incorporated City joins the El Dorado County Transit Authority (EDCTA). If El Dorado Hills does not join the EDCTA Joint Powers Authority, there will be a significant impact to the EDCTA revenues, but not a corresponding reduction of overhead costs to EDCTA. The projected loss of revenue will likely result in a substantial reduction in the number of routes, both within and without the El Dorado Hills area.

The composition of the Commission may be impacted by the proposed incorporation, as the newly incorporated city will be a "member agency" in accordance with Joint Powers Agreement which established the EDCTC on June 6, 1995.

AIR QUALITY

One of the primary sources of air pollution in California is vehicle exhaust. As a result, transportation and air quality are closely linked. In fact, the Sacramento region, including El Dorado County, has been designated as a non-attainment area for air quality standards, which are specified by the California Clean Air Act of 1988 and the federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1991. EDCTC works closely with SACOG and the El Dorado County Air Quality Management District to assess the impact of all transportation projects on air quality in the region.

SAFETY

Ensuring the safety of all travelers on all modes is a theme throughout all of the transportation projects in this plan. Safety issues are incorporated from the policy and standards level through to implementation of safety-improvement projects. Such projects might include addition of shoulders where little or none exist, bikeways, newly designed intersections and interchanges that reduce the potential for car/bicycle conflicts, pedestrian and bicycle bridges and walkways, airport improvements, interchange improvements/upgrades, additional transit shelters and benches, and signal additions and/or improvements.

State funding exists for safety improvement projects for highways and safe routes to schools; however, the need for safety improvement projects far outstrips the available funding. Other funding is available for bicycle and bridge projects. State funds are also available for airport upgrades and improvements that impact safety and for updating the comprehensive land use plan for local airports.

SHINGLE SPRINGS INTERCHANGE

In 2003, the County of El Dorado challenged the proposed Shingle Springs Interchange over the Department of Transportation's (Caltrans) approval of the environmental analysis. The project is currently in litigation and the status of the interchange is not clear at this time. The project is not included in the El Dorado County General Plan, adopted in July 2004, and is not included in the El Dorado County 2025 Regional Transportation Plan Regional Road Network Action Plan (Chapter 6). In addition, the project is not currently included in the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) Capital Improvement Program, which will form the SACOG project list for the 2005 Metropolitan Transportation Plan. Further, the Bureau of Indian Affairs Road Inventory, Phase 1, Road Systems Identification, Shingle Springs Rancheria, received by EDCTC on February 17, 2005 (Appendix E) does not include the Shingle Springs Interchange. At such time as the pending litigation and associated issues are resolved, the proposed Shingle Springs Interchange will be reviewed.

TRANSPORTATION MODES

HIGHWAYS/STREETS/REGIONAL ROADWAYS

MAINTENANCE AND REHABILITATION

As traffic increases, the issues of roadway rehabilitation and maintenance, including vegetation management, become increasingly important to ensure safe and effective travel. In particular, investing in the maintenance of the existing infrastructure is a focus of road projects during the planning period. Roadways, bridges, and the associated infrastructure have a useful life, and

funding must be available to maintain and, if needed, rehabilitate these facilities. In addition, rehabilitation projects may be needed to accommodate changes in travel patterns. Interchanges may need to be upgraded to accommodate more efficient movement of traffic. Additional paving work may be needed in response to the faster breakdown of pavement integrity resulting from increased truck traffic. Lanes may need to be added and shoulders may need to be widened or added.

Providing sufficient funding at the time it is needed to keep up with wear and tear and changes in traffic demands/patterns is crucial. A 1999 survey published by the California Transportation Commission, of the unfunded rehabilitation, maintenance, and operations needs of the existing system in El Dorado County, resulted in a twenty year cost estimate of over $232 million for state highway projects, $50 million for local arterial projects, and $17 million for bicycle facility projects (in 1999 constant dollars). The survey also included the unfunded rehabilitation, maintenance and operations needs of high-priority local arterial projects.

A report on the condition of the county-maintained road system, dated April 26, 2005, estimated $5.5 million dollars per year would be necessary just to keep even with the current maintenance-deferred backlog, and to rehabilitate/reconstruct four to five miles per year of existing failed roads, as measured utilizing the Pavement Condition Index. This would equal a total investment of $110 million in current dollars over the life of the RTP.

As maintenance and rehabilitation projects are undertaken, it is important to involve all modes in design decisions so that pedestrians, bicyclists, drivers, truckers, and transit can all move efficiently and safely. These improvements will necessarily be coordinated with land use and air quality decisions and considerations.

EXPANSION

At the same time that El Dorado County is experiencing significant growth, there has been an even greater growth in the number of registered cars and trucks and in the number of persons commuting in single occupant vehicles. In order to address transportation needs associated with existing and projected growth, EDCTC and local jurisdictions are planning for expansion of the existing roadway systems. These plans, which focus on regional connectors such as US 50 and State Route 49, are detailed in Chapter 6. New regional connectors linking El Dorado County to Rancho Cordova and Elk Grove are also addressed. These efforts involve regional partnerships with SACOG, Caltrans, the private and public sectors, local jurisdictions, and all users (now and in the future) of these roadways.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

El Dorado County ranges from sparsely populated rural areas to more densely populated urban areas. With the county's increasing population comes an increasing demand for transit service to more and larger areas. Over the past twenty year period, the number of persons using public transportation to commute to work has increased significantly. As the emphasis shifts from local bus service to regional services, the creation of multi-jurisdictional agreements for ongoing funding of transit will become even more important. The convenience and reliability of transit services plays a key role in encouraging transit use as opposed to drive-alone commuting. In particular, convenience can be provided by designing transit services that are as seamless as possible. Transit can also play a role in mitigating the jobs/housing imbalance by providing tailored commuter services. Light Rail and/or Bus Rapid Transit services along selected corridors may prove helpful in enhancing convenience and providing a viable alternative to driving.

Other more specific factors also contribute to the need for increased transit:

- The Americans with Disabilities Act requires the expansion of paratransit services to specific areas complementary to fixed-route service.
- Welfare-to-Work programs are expected to have a significant impact on local transit systems as the state enacts policies and programs to require more welfare recipients to get jobs.
- State and federal clean air legislation and transportation demand management principles call for the increased use of transit to offset and reduce automotive vehicle emissions.
- Commuter bus service to provide quick connections between El Dorado County and Downtown Sacramento has been a consistent need cited by El Dorado County citizens.
- The aging of the population also contributes to the demand for transit and paratransit services, as people become unable to drive themselves. This increased demand includes non-emergency medical transportation.
- As the entire Sacramento region grows, interregional connections between areas such as El Dorado County, South Placer and Rancho Cordova will become increasingly important.

AVIATION

EDCTC continues to support El Dorado County, which operates general aviation airports, in efforts to identify and utilize available funding at the state and federal level for airport infrastructure improvement and expansion as warranted. These projects are typically included in the airport capital improvement plans for each jurisdiction. It is anticipated that aviation will continue to play a key role in facilitating goods movement throughout the region.

GOODS MOVEMENT

As population increases along with traffic, the ability to move goods efficiently and safely within and through El Dorado County will be an ever-increasing challenge. Efficient goods movement is essential for the local and regional economy.

The majority of goods movement in El Dorado County is provided by truck transportation. US 50 is an important truck route within Northern California. Truck traffic, as a percentage of Average Annual Daily Traffic, ranged from 3.1% to 7% on US 50 and from 3% to 14.2% on State Route 49 in El Dorado County in 2002 (Caltrans traffic volumes website). It is important to consider the needs of all road users (e.g., residents, truckers, buses, bicyclists) when planning for goods movement.

Regional air freight, utilized extensively by manufacturers in El Dorado County, is handled either at Sacramento International Airport or at Mather Airport. Because air freight is market-driven, it is impossible to predict exactly what the demand for it will be in the future, which airport will be used, and to what extent.

NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION

As mentioned in the previous transportation mode discussions, bicyclists and pedestrians share the use of transportation facilities with motorized vehicles. Non-motorized transportation can provide a viable transportation choice if design of new and/or rehabilitated facilities consider the need for safe travel, direct routes, and off-road options when necessary. Non-motorized travel is also an arena where land use coordination can have an impact on people's choices of travel mode by connecting activity centers and providing safe routes to schools. To that end, this plan recommends inclusion of non-motorized travel needs in all phases of both land use and transportation planning and design.