

# Mono County Local Transportation Commission

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## SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

August 8, 2016  
(Adopted October 3, 2016)

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**COUNTY COMMISSIONERS:** Tim Fesko, Larry Johnston. **ABSENT:** Fred Stump, Shields Richardson

**TOWN COMMISSIONERS:** Sandy Hogan, John Wentworth, Dan Holler for Shields Richardson

**COUNTY STAFF:** Scott Burns, Gerry Le Francois, Megan Mahaffey, CD Ritter

**TOWN STAFF:** Grady Dutton, Haislip Hayes

**CALTRANS:** Brent Green, Ryan Dermody, Cory Freeman, Brandon Fitt, Mark Heckman

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**1. CALL TO ORDER & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Vice-Chair Tim Fesko called the meeting to order at 9:08 a.m. at the Board of Supervisors meeting room, Sierra Center Mall, Mammoth Lakes, and attendees recited pledge of allegiance to the flag.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT:** None

**3. MINUTES:** Delay approval of minutes of June 13, 2016 (no July meeting) to Sept. 12.

**4. COMMISSIONER REPORTS:** None except Holler, who mentioned a meeting on Paradise fire.

**5. EASTERN SIERRA WILDLIFE COLLISION REDUCTION STUDY:** Ryan Dermody stated Caltrans is good at planning and engineering, but can't do it alone. Need CDFW. Open discussion after study.

**Tim Taylor**, California Department of Fish & Wildlife, has been in his role 18 years, in Eastern Sierra 33 years. Familiar with wildlife issues in county and roadkill on 395 study area involving large and meso-carnivores as well as mule deer. No project yet.

Road ecology: Potential impacts, changes in quality of or loss of habitat. Two-lane sections of 395 will be expanded, so incorporate wildlife mitigation. Costly to add any type of crossing. Reduced habitat quality: road noise affects sage grouse and other birds. Improved habitat with bitterbrush attracts deer. Impacts to landscape: animals moving across highway, trying to figure out mitigation measures. Landscape connectivity is needed. Barrier effects for amphibians, less-mobile species like badgers. Direct mortality. Barn owls hunt along road margins. Mortality occurs when eagles, bears, coyotes, and bobcats scavenge carcasses along roadway.

Mono deer herd is most conspicuous. Six herds, population ~ 10,000. Five herds come into contact with highway, winter in Nevada, back west in spring on Sierra slopes. Deer spend lots of time in spring/summer in holding areas after months of losing fat. Migration corridors are numerous, covering large expanses (20 mi wide). Deer walk same routes year after year, fawns taught by does. All routes bisect highway.

Sierra offers lush, green habitat best for fawning. The 1,667 fatalities go unreported by as much as 80%. Carcasses are scavenged by bears, people. Road kills disappear. Sierra has great summer range near Mammoth. Deer cross highways multiple times. Road kill occurs in two-lane sections of 395.

White Mountain herd moves up and down, does not migrate. Round Valley herd winters outside Bishop in Sherwin holding area for 6-7 weeks, then migrate to west side. Some travel 100 mi one way to have babies. Lots of energy is used to get where they're going. One deer went clear over to Oakhurst. Deer settle into Sherwin holding area, eating good food to put on fat to cross Sierra passes. Forage heavily till reach adequate weight, then off to summer ranges. Holding area overlaps highway. McGee is hot spot for fatalities, as deer living as residents cross back/forth across highway. They arrive early to mid-April to get resources they need.

Highway mitigation for wildlife mortality: Deer whistles, reflectors show no consistent success. Signs seem not to work. Crossing structures seem to work: under, over, culverts. Need deer-proof fencing to funnel deer. Habitat modification. Road kill data suggest getting deer off roadway. Multiple species use project area. Bobcats

and raccoons need to cross highway too. Need open space both sides in perpetuity. Some is LADWP land, some Caltrans.

Disadvantages: Cost of new structures. Flat land, so no drainage. Long distance between crossing structures, need to be closer together. People out in Long Valley doing stuff could affect wildlife. Consider wide range of species: Sage grouse can't get over 10' fence. Mountain lions follow deer, move across highway. Good for deer maybe not good for other species. Have good road kill data. Need track ~~mounts~~ counts, video surveillance. Set up cameras where animals cross roadways. Go out daily to record wildlife kill. Caltrans can't always be there. GPS data collars are installed by CDFW. Airport fence creates a real challenge to get to crossings. Convict Creek, Industrial park areas. Lack of topography. Balance biodiversity benefits. How to get best project at best cost to allow safe passage of deer. Agencies can spend a lot of money, so make sure it's going to work. How impact human activity?

**Cory Freeman**, Caltrans, noted conflicts mentioned on social media and information releases. Mammoth Creek undercrossing has deer fence on both sides of highway. Seasonal signage with flashing beacons. Deer mortality was focus, but considered all wildlife. Most conflicts occur on US 395 from Morrison to Benton Crossing Road, where six hot spots stood out. Crowley Lake Drive to SR 203 has clusters of road kill. Lack of terrain features, airport, width of facility. Variation of crossing structures: Funnel wildlife to get there. Colorized fencing, 8' tall. Scenic highway sensitivity.

Freeman outlined six concepts. Portable signage is used during migrations when conflicts are highest, but people grow accustomed, then ignore. Clashing beacons get attention at first. Summary of costs. Deer whistles don't work. Doppler/IR technology is very sensitive setup. People ignore just like static signs. Fencing: Electric fencing short in height, with less visibility, less aesthetic impact. Reflectors/mirrors do not get good results.

Numerous states have 150'-wide crossing structures. Willows at Mammoth Creek reduce visibility for deer.

**Question/Answer:** Johnston noted that issues have been discussed by LTC/Caltrans a long time. Project at Sonora Junction after studies showed hot spot seems to have disappeared off radar. Lots of money spent. Dermody cited environmental issues and insurmountable hurdles. Now, it's wrong location, not good use. Culverts were sent to another project.

Freeman stated undercrossing below highway itself is large, expensive solution. Lots of snow fencing, but need more in high blizzard area. Use snow fencing structures as [wildlife] fencing. Metal, green color. Costs mitigated by snow fence/deer fence on one side of highway. Aesthetics of fence hardly noticeable. Most people don't recognize Hwy 580 in Reno area as deer fence. Overcrossings are most visible, unlike fences. Airport does not have as many hot spots.

Freeman noted vertical relief north of industrial park, but over vs under still have 120' to cross. Overcrossings need fill material, whereas undercrossings can flood in springtime. Check water tables. Johnston mentioned well data on water depth at industrial park.

Freeman stated undercrossings are less expensive. Airport staff met with facilities staff, planned project in summer 2017. Difficult to do overcrossing due to 1.7 miles of airport fence.

Snow fence? Taylor stated potentially could work, but gaps exist and deer crawl beneath. Freeman suggested looking at it in further study.

Working with USFS? Freeman: Yes, on board with fencing.

Hogan suggested integrating projects.

Taylor recalled fence was established first, with unknown effects. Deer hit fence, cross back onto roadway. Maybe another fence. Tough issue. Two miles is long way to get species to undercrossing. No more than a mile is preferred. Not want to make it worse for wildlife than it already is. CDFW agreed to lead study, gather data, analyze where crossings are, and help plan projects. Hogan suggested phases for data collection, joint planning both sides of highway. Dermody stated feasibility study eventually may be a project.

Wentworth saw funding in both agencies. Airport ready for significant amounts of money. Town staff is coordinating good flow of information. Freeman met with Town in February.

NEPA process for airport? Done. Studies are undermining what already was decided. Wentworth stated ESCOG (Eastern Sierra Council of Governments) meeting had FAA reps look at collaboration between counties. Variety of grants available may provide funding. Effects at airport might intersect study.

Holler stated drivers are desensitized to signs. Taylor noted nothing constructed for long time. Try something innovative, eye-catching. But, liability issues arise if car hits deer beyond designated area.

Freeman opined that CMS (Changeable Message Signs) have more impact than static signs. Holler suggested portable sign without massive study.

Hogan thought static signs are not noticed. Studies take time, can't throw money and make it happen. What about Mammoth Creek?

Taylor blamed poor fencing, largely unsuccessful. People and dogs walk through there. Deer less apt to use at night. Need to identify species using, how using, where trails come through. CDFW agreed to be lead, but needs funding. Maybe 395/203 highway stewardship program with agencies, foundations, land trusts, etc. Takes time despite in-house expertise. Taylor identified need for more than one crossing.

Hogan saw long-term programs, but short-term fixes. Try fixes that don't need studies.

**PUBLIC COMMENT: Lynn Boulton**, Lee Vining, stated Banff area has overpasses. Some animals work better with underpasses, as secretive animals go under. She recommended "Wildlife Corridors."

**Liz O'Sullivan**, Paradise Estates, commended Caltrans for the study. She was amazed to hear how long it's going to take. In traveling [Eastern Sierra] since 1992, problem has gotten worse. Not even a project yet, may take years. Fence at airport could make it worse. How many more deaths and injuries? It's been a problem for quite a while. Alarmed at 10-yr deer study, not much out of it. Animals are dying constantly, creating damage to vehicles. Move forward as quickly as possible.

**Karen Ferrell-Ingram**, Swall Meadows, has followed this issue for years. Move forward with all haste. Animals killed, public safety risk. Urgency, offered help. Lower speed limit around hot spots? Facility maintenance by Caltrans? Cutting willows is no easy task. Fund long-term maintenance.

Freeman noted fluctuation, lots of variables such as snowpack. Deer seek opportunity to cross highway.

Taylor stated holding area extends clear to Mammoth meadow. In snowy years deer spend more time near roadway. In light snow years, more widely dispersed. Increasing number of summer-resident animals; 75% would go to west side, but not now as forage is not as good.

**John Peters**, Bridgeport, who was unable to view PowerPoint, asked about herds north of Conway Summit.

Dermody stated if stewardship group finds grant programs, could provide mechanism for Caltrans. Maintenance folks are so busy, lots of unknowns. Freeman thought CMS (Changeable Message Sign) system could slow speeds.

Hogan saw signage as first project. Look at Mammoth Creek because airport fence is going in, and could funnel deer back onto highway.

Fesko saw this meeting as step one. People have been talking about it long time. Continue dialog.

--- Break: 10:45-11:00 ---

## 6. LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

**A. RSTP (Regional Surface Transportation Program):** Megan Mahaffey mentioned use of funds for striping, etc.

Hogan suggested "money from heaven" could be used on signs and fencing. Mahaffey indicated money could be used for wildlife mitigation. Bring back later. Holler thought another issue might come up, so look at larger scope of projects.

**MOTION:** Accept 2015-16 RSTP allocation & authorize LTC director's signature. (Johnston/Hogan. Ayes: 5-0. Absent: Stump.)

**B. Triennial audit:** Copies of triennial audit were distributed. No findings or recommendations were found as part of the audit. The only recommendation for improvement as part of the functional review was for the LTC to review financial statements quarterly.

**C. Reds Meadow Road:** Haislip Hayes noted goal of FLAP (Federal Lands Access Program) application in January, long-term maintenance, Work with USFS on cooperative road agreements.

Presentation to Town Council? Wentworth wanted to thoroughly vet it, bring back to LTC. Looking through sustainable recreation lens.

Hayes is asking for agreements well in advance. Madera County will be part of conversation.

## 7. TRANSIT

**A. ESTA (Eastern Sierra Transit Authority):** Jill Batchelder was not able to attend, so move to next meeting. Holler indicated ESTA may extend Reds-DEPO service in fall. Fesko noted numbers are up 20% on highway. Wentworth confirmed unprecedented visitation levels, testing holding capacity of area.

**B: YARTS (Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System):** AAC (Authority Advisory Committee) met July 13, JPA (Joint Powers Authority) followed later. July 4 saw total gridlock. Fresno trying to get its act together, stretch money out to summer only.

Hogan stated politics are involved. When have something successful, money comes. Fresno was pilot project.

Burns noted YARTS thought had big player for short-range transit plan.

Hogan: Cindy was hired to do Fresno job, unsure how to fund her half year. Dick Whittington approaches retirement, scramble to find grant funds.

## 8. CALTRANS

**A. SR 167 TCR (Transportation Concept Report):** Mark Heckman presented TCR for SR 167. Possible development out there. Only real improvements are widen shoulder to minimum 5', pave driveway aprons. Comment deadline: Aug. 22.

Johnston proclaimed SR 167 as the longest, straightest road in California. Fesko drives SR 167 four to five times a year. Not many cyclists, but noticed lack of shoulders.

**B. Marina Fire:** Brent Green stated guard rail completed, some excavation for potential mudflows, rock fencing south and north of marina. Completion set for Aug. 19. Waiting for contractor information on next project: 10'-13' fence to stop rockfall, mudflow. Maintaining integrity of K-rail is important. USFS assessment team noted concerns. No determination on source of fire.

**C. CTP (California Transportation Plan) 2040:** Mark Heckman noted CTP will be updated every five years for next 25 years. First to talk of multi-modal, clean fuels, future technologies. Goal is to work with transportation agency through OWP (Overall Work Plan).

Heckman noted funding through CTC looking for GHG (Greenhouse Gas) strategies, multi-modal. Is Town improving these areas? Big document out of SB 391. Wentworth mentioned parking in Mammoth Lakes, feet first, and road striping to integrate bicycle movement.

Johnston noted deer fencing project was based on climate change and safety, environmental stewardship. Funding could come from cap and trade, not Caltrans.

**D. Activities in Mono County & pertinent statewide information:** Ryan Dermody described first two weeks in August as busiest of year. Green cited Bridgeport project impacts. Walker not likely for construction this year. Same contractor. Dermody noted traffic control in Mono, construction season.

Dermody indicated ruck traffic RFP (Request for Proposals), contractor on board in February, need a year to study, so 2018.

Wentworth wanted Digital 395 incorporated.

Fesko thought Tesla factory would impact US 6, which would be big corridor in years to come.

Dermody mentioned connecting 580 to 50.

Pedestrian fatality on SR 203? Holler stated investigation is under way.

## 9. Informational: No items

## 10. Upcoming agenda items: None. Adjourn at 11:30 a.m. Maybe cancel September meeting.

*Prepared by CD Ritter, LTC secretary*