

KERN COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

Pursuant to California Penal Code 925.a and 933 the Cities and Joint Powers Committee of the 2004-2005 Kern County Grand Jury visited Kern Council of Governments (Kern COG) to update the public on the overall workings of Kern COG and to update the public on the importance of the upcoming ½ cent sales tax initiative soon to be put forth on a ballot.

PROCESS:

The Cities and Joint Powers Committee met with the Executive Director of Kern COG. The Director brought the Committee up to date on all of the latest projects in the works and how the long process for transportation needs impact the City and the County. The Committee reviewed all past reports, met with Council people and Supervisors, and covered new information given to put together the following report.

BACKGROUND:

Kern COG has been in operation for 35 years come November of this year. Kern COG started because of a need for a regional planning agency to be put in place. A Joint Powers agency called Kern Regional Planning Advisory Commission (KERPAC) was the result. The Agency included all eleven incorporated cities within Kern County. In 1970 a different Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) was set in place and today is known as the Kern Council of Governments or Kern COG.

Kern COG employs sixteen staff members including two clerical positions and one intern position. The intern position is normally filled by a Cal State Bakersfield student working on a Masters Degree in Business or Accounting. With the Director, Kern COG is seventeen strong. Most of the staff was born or raised right here in Kern County giving them a definite toe hold on the ongoing transportation and road needs of the City and County of Kern.

While making annual visits to the eleven incorporated cities in the County the Committee found positive feedback whenever Kern COG was mentioned. Now the Committee and the Grand Jury want to make sure the public is better informed as to why a ½ cent sales tax is important to all County citizens and where the monies will be spent. Both City and County are working towards the same positive outcome regarding the sales tax initiative.

FINDINGS:

- ◆ Kern COG is here for the people. Data from Kern COG is free to the public; if research is required there would be a small fee.

- ◆ The City and County are currently losing twelve to fifteen million dollars a year from available State funds earmarked for roads because a ½ cent sales tax is not set in place for local road funds in Kern County. Kern County is the largest populated County without a ½ cent sales tax in place.
- ◆ Developers pay \$5,300 per unit in metro Bakersfield for road construction.
- ◆ Kern COG has three priorities for roads: The Westside Parkway (Rosedale alternative), the Cross Town Freeway, and Mojave's Route 14.
- ◆ Kern County has a Safe Roads Committee now in place.
- ◆ Growth for cities and counties has grown at a rate of 50% over the past years yet the drivers drive 100% more than before, which is why adequate roads and necessary upkeep are so important.
- ◆ Kern COG works well with the cities in Kern County.
- ◆ Eighty five percent of the State's residents are now paying a ½ cent sales tax aimed to improve roads. Kern County's adoption of a ½ cent sales tax would move the State to 95% in using specified sales tax to fund roads.

COMMENTS:

Because the lack of funds and State budget cuts have put Kern County, and the cities within, in a bad situation for catching up with needed funds for adequate roads, it would behoove the citizens to educate themselves on how to achieve more funding, including the ½ cent sales tax initiative coming before voters soon.

The 2004-2005 Grand Jury commends Kern COG on all the efforts to use funds available in the best possible way.

A committee called Kern County Citizens for Quality Transportation working closely with Kern COG is planning to hold a number of workshops throughout the County during the next year (27 at least). The **PUBLIC IS INVITED** to the workshops in order to learn first hand the needs of the County and the solutions being set forth.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The 2004-2005 Kern County Grand Jury recommends that Kern COG continue on the track set out at this time.

The 2004-2005 Kern County Grand Jury **STRONGLY** recommends that an all out campaign continues to be set forth to insure the ½ cent sales tax initiative with all its pluses and minuses is brought before the public. It is necessary for the initiative to be

understood in order for Kern County to have adequate road funds to start addressing deplorable road conditions in Kern County.

Kern COG should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public reviewing.

Note: Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed at the Kern County Library and/or the Kern County Grand Jury web-site: www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury

NO RESPONSE REQUIRED