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Economy & Efficiency Commission Presentation

Editorial Note: Although every effort has been made to insure the accuracy of the material in this presentation, the scope of the material covered and the discussions undertaken lends itself to the possibility of minor transcription misinterpretations.

**PRESENTATION BY
Mr. Donald Wolfe, Director
Department of Public Works, Los Angeles County**

Topic: An Overview of the Department of Public Works

September 1, 2005

Chairman Philibosian introduced Mr. Donald Wolfe and welcomed him to the Commission.

Mr. Wolfe began his presentation with a video which summarized the scope and functions of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works.

Video Presentation The Department of Public Works (DPW)

Headquartered in Alhambra, with 77 field facilities and an annual budget of over \$1 billion, DPW is responsible for the design, construction and maintenance of much of the County's infrastructure. These items include roads, bridges, flood control channels, water conservation facilities, water distribution systems, and sewage disposal systems. Additionally, it enforces building codes, manages waste disposal contracts for over 350,000 customers, provides water to over 200,000 customers and administers the operation of 5 general aviation airports. DPW has approximately 3500 employees in more than 450 job classifications.

Flood Control, Water Conservation and Quality

A key DPW responsibility is the maintenance of a flood control system with over 15 major dams, 2600 miles of underground storm drains, and 450 miles of flood control channels. Water conservation is achieved through 27 "spreading grounds" which are holding areas that allow storm runoff to seep into underground aquifers for storage.

To help protect groundwater, DPW operates 3 seawater barriers which ensure that fresh water is not contaminated with sea water. Additionally, DPW has implemented the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) to monitor, assess and protect water quality in rivers, streams, lakes, and the ocean.

Roads and Traffic

With responsibility for 3100 miles of roads in the unincorporated areas and 1700 miles of roads for "contract

cities”, DPW maintains bridges, traffic signals, street lights, street signs, pavement markings, painted curbs and beautification projects like median landscaping along County streets. In addition, it provides services including street sweeping, and pothole repair. The Department also has an ongoing program to synchronize traffic signals.

Future plans include the implementation of intelligent transportation system technologies which will enable DPW to monitor and control traffic signal operations in a future Traffic Management Center. The goal of this project is to enable better response to traffic signal maintenance issues and to provide motorists real-time information concerning traffic conditions.

Additionally, to reduce congestion, DPW provides alternatives like Dial-a-Ride, commuter bus services, and shuttles like the popular Hollywood Bowl shuttle and beach busses.

Waste Management

As lead agency on waste management issues, DPW is the regional leader in protecting the environment, providing the 88 cities and the unincorporated areas with disposal planning and management of residual waste. The Department is responsible for over 5000 miles of sewers, performs inspection on 5000 industrial waste permits annually, and manages garbage collection contracts for more than 350,000 customers.

The solid and hazardous waste management programs include: a household hazardous waste collection program, a program to prevent groundwater contamination from underground tanks, a program to reduce the amount of waste disposed in landfills, a curbside recycling program and the promotion of composting and source reduction through the largest public education and awareness program in California related to pollution prevention and source reduction.

Construction

In addition to its responsibility for management of the design and construction of major county facilities such as LAC-USC Medical Center and the Disney Concert Hall, DPW is tasked with enforcing building codes for private builders. The plan check and inspection process verifies compliance resulting in more than 30,000 permits annually. The Department also performs soils engineering and geological surveys.

With 90 miles of recreational bike trails along waterways and at beaches, DPW has incorporated recreational features at many facilities. It has an ongoing goal of constructing wetlands habitat, and greening river corridors.

Emergency Response

Finally, maintenance of infrastructure requires excellent response in periods of crisis like rainstorms that result in flooding, landslides, earthquakes, and firestorms. The Public Works Operations Center is activated at a moment’s notice as part of county-wide emergency response team. This 24 hour dispatch center handles responses to major emergencies as well as routine problems like traffic signal outages, downed street signs, flooded streets and road obstructions.

Following the video presentation, Mr. Wolfe discussed some of the issues facing the Department.

The Future

Priorities in the next 5 years include: the completion of LAC-USC Medical Center on time and on budget, Antelope Valley flood control, compliance with the Federal Clean Water Act, the franchising of garbage collection in the unincorporated areas, improved traffic management, and the reemphasis of internal Department values.

LAC-USC Medical Center

Currently the construction of this major facility is on schedule and slightly below budget. At \$830 million, this facility is the largest County construction project in history. To keep the project on budget, careful management of change orders and avoidance of litigation are essential.

Antelope Valley Flood Control

Currently, there is no flood control district in the Antelope Valley. Everything north of Avenue S flows into dry lake beds. There are votes coming up to solve this situation, either by forming a new flood control district in the area, or by annexing the area into an existing flood control district.

National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES)

The Federal Clean Water Act has stringent regulations that apply to municipalities. These entities are not allowed to transport pollutants along with the water flowing in their storm drain systems. The County receives a permit every 5 years from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) that establishes Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for pollutants including trash and bacteria that will be dumped into receiving waters from storm drains.

Compliance with the NPDES and TMDL regulations is necessary to avoid large monetary penalties. Achieving this compliance has already required diversion of infrastructure construction and maintenance dollars. This trend is likely to continue as estimated costs of compliance for the next 20 years range from \$30-350 billion depending upon how rigid the RWQCB is in establishing TMDLs and NPDES requirements as well as enforcement.

Solid Waste

Currently, the County is not in compliance with AB 939, a state law from 15 years ago which mandated that municipalities had to reduce their waste stream by 50% by the year 2000. Since the County does not have control of the waste stream, this goal was not achieved.

To bring the County into compliance, DPW has worked with the Board of Supervisors to encourage the franchising of all garbage collection in Los Angeles County. These non-exclusive franchises will allow the County to set standards like compliance with AB 939 as a contractual obligation.

Traffic Management

In the past, DPW has focused on reducing traffic congestion. However, the current approach seeks to balance the goal of reducing congestion with the goal of "traffic calming". Traffic calming refers to traffic management that keeps pedestrian routes safe and avoids routing cross-traffic through residential areas. Traffic signal synchronization has both positive and negative impacts. For example, improvements in east to west flow can create bottlenecks in the north to south flow.

Questions and Comments

Commissioner Barcelona inquired as to whether the water treatment in the Antelope Valley area would be tertiary treatment. Mr. Wolfe responded in the affirmative. Commissioner Barcelona then followed up with a question about whether folks in the Aloe Verde Hills would ever have their roads paved. Mr. Wolfe candidly replied that it is very unlikely that there will be any aggressive paving program in the near term due to budget constraints. He then went on to explain the fact that gas tax money is not available for the construction of roads not owned by the County. However, any private road that is up to County standards can be turned over to the County for maintenance in perpetuity.

Commissioner Ikejiri asked about DPW's ability to respond to an emergency situation. Mr. Wolfe referred to the experience of the most recent winter when over 200 roads were closed due to storms. There are still 21 roads closed including San Francisquito Canyon which lost 3 miles of roadway. This experience demonstrates that DPW is prepared to respond rapidly to resolve any situation.

Commissioner Sylva requested that Mr. Wolfe elaborate on DPW's permit streamlining process. He described the problems being encountered with the information technology contractor developing the system. The project is behind schedule as the last release did not meet the County's specifications.

Chairman Philibosian commented that the problems DPW has encountered have been common with innovation projects contracted by other departments. Many other commissioners assented to his assertion commenting that delays of this kind are a function of pushing the "state of the art". Mr. Wolfe suggested that DPW may attempt to get the code from the contractor and finish the job in house. He went on to state that only one bidding company was remotely qualified to handle the job but that the company has not been adhering to the specifications to which they agreed. He credited County Counsel for protecting the County's interests in their drafting of the contract as the County is losing time, rather than money.

Chairman Philibosian then commented that there was a breakdown in the negotiation in that the attorneys did not assure that there was a "meeting of the minds". Though they protected the County financially, the fact that the project has not been delivered is proof that the contract negotiation was flawed. Commissioner Petak interjected that contracting with the low bidder, in this case a small company unable to complete the job adequately, was a result of County policy. Commissioner Hill informed the Commission that there is an issue with contracting county-wide and that the Quality and Productivity Commission believes that there should be standardization of the contracting process. They also believe that a training academy for those County employees responsible for contracts should be established to provide them with the training necessary to fulfill their responsibilities.

Commissioner Sullivan commented that the parties involved in contracting are not always in agreement: Technical people know what they want, contract people know what they want, and the lawyers know what they want. Technical people need to know what's possible. Contract people need to determine if the contractor can deliver and the lawyers need to be fully informed so that the contract reflects the interests of all parties.

Mr. Wolfe responded to Commissioner Petak's point about contracting with the low bidder. He mentioned that state law requires bids based on qualifications for architectural and engineering bids. After qualifications are established, then there is a negotiation on price. Pending legislation would allow the County to establish the same qualification based bid process for vertical construction projects.

Commissioner Petak asked whether there is collaboration among internal staff and the contractor. He also wondered whether there may be hidden motives among the County employees regarding worries about losses of employment due to innovation. Mr. Wolfe responded that there will be no net job loss due to the innovation. He suggested that the loss of morale on the project has to do with frustration among those assigned due to the lack of a deliverable product.

Chairman Philibosian thanked Mr. Wolfe for taking time from his schedule to make this extremely informative presentation to the Commission.

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