



Covino Smith & Simon
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Washington, DC 20005

Valley Voice 2025 Summary of Meetings

U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT)

Office of the Secretary (OST)

Sabrina McNeal, Government Affairs Specialist
Jonathan “Jack” Priebe, Jr., Special Assistant

Office of Public Liaison

Grant Burdett, Special Assistant

Federal Transit Administration (FTA)

Patrick Mullane, Senior Congressional Affairs Specialist

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)

Michael York, Government Affairs Specialist
Debbie Korbin, Government Affairs Specialist

Valley Voice delegation shared their regional projects and policy priorities with an assembly of officials representing the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Office of the Secretary (OST) and the Office of the Public Liaison, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). The group offered insights on the need to finish State Route 99, invest in other roads, and make critical investments in freight and passenger rail projects in the region to facilitate the movement of goods and people. DOT officials provided feedback in response to the delegation.

First, FRA officials shared that competitive grant solicitations for rail programs are expected to open soon. The agency expects that Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) will return to 90-day open periods, instead of the current 60-day timeline, to give applicants sufficient time to prepare applications.

FRA subsequently issued the first NOFO for the National Railroad Partnership Program, also known as the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Grant Program. The agency is reissuing the FY 2024 FSP NOFO with additional funding for FY 2025. A [recent FRA press release dated September 22, 2025](#) states that the NOFO “includes approximately \$2.4 billion the FRA de-obligations from the California High-Speed Rail boongoggle, which will now be reinvested into successful projects, critical infrastructure upgrades, and rail safety.”





FRA expects that the next round of the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program will likely be opened toward the end of the year. Regarding the Stockton Diamond Grade Separation Project, officials noted concerns about the proposed scope of the most recent CRISI grant application overlapping with the previously awarded 2020 Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Grant. That needs to be remedied in any future applications to be submitted to DOT. FRA also suggested the group consider applying to the FSP Grant Program.

Next, FTA officials provided updates on the Low or No Emission Grant Program and the Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Program. FTA received more than 500 grant applications totaling \$6 billion of requested assistance. Unfortunately, the agency only has approximately \$1 billion available for awards. Grant awards are expected later this month or in early October. FTA expects that there with a strong focus on diesel-related and low-emission projects. MCAG reviewed the grant application submitted by their partners at the Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System \$3 million the FY 2025 Low or No Emission Grant Program and Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Program for its Diesel Coach Bus Project. KingsCAG flagged the pending application from the Kings County Area Public Transit Agency seeking \$20 million through the FY 2025 Low or No Emission Grant Program and Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Program to support its All-Fuel Transit Maintenance Facility Replacement Project.

The delegation shared projects seeking federal funding through the Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Program. Following that review, DOT officials emphasized the importance of including solid data points that clearly demonstrate the severity of conflicts at local intersections, including fatalities, injury accidents, and non-injury accidents. Announcements are expected soon.

Congressman Vince Fong

Trevor Smith, Legislative Director

The Valley Voice delegation brief the Congressman on regional priorities and projects. Congressman Fong expressed his willingness to advocate support for local SS4A grant applications submitted by KernCOG and FresnoCOG to Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy. The Congressman hopes to arrange a time for the Secretary to visit the Central Valley. Congressman Fong shared updates regarding the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's work on the surface transportation reauthorization. indicated he would be happy to work with other members of the San Joaquin Valley Congressional delegation to work toward a resolution on transportation conformity. Congressman Fong shared that there was a lot of bipartisan support for ensuring that Community Project Funding requests are ultimately included and funded in any emerging budget deal.

Congressman Tom McClintock

Congressman McClintock provided history on federal government spending and transportation policy. He then shared relevant updates on Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations bills and prospects





for Congress to pass a short-term continuing resolution (CR) and avoid a government shutdown. He expressed that a stopgap measure is likely the only viable path forward and voiced support for regulatory relief to help advance infrastructure projects. The Congressman indicated he would be willing to follow up with the Administration directly on any unresolved issues associated with transportation conformity.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

Office of Air and Radiation

Aaron Szabo, Assistant Administrator

A dozen members of the Valley Voice delegation attended a meeting with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Assistant Administrator for Air and Radiation Aaron Szabo, who was recently confirmed to the position by the United States Senate. He previously served as a Senior Advisor to Administrator Lee Zeldin since January 2025. The group briefed the Assistant Administrator on State Implementation Plans (SIPs) and issues on the horizon with transportation conformity. The Associate Administrator acknowledged that it was the first time he was learning of these concerns from the region or elsewhere in California and offered to review potential solutions, contending that the Trump-Vance Administration would not intend to put critical highway infrastructure projects at risk.

Congressman Josh Harder

Ata Khan, Deputy Chief of Staff and Legislative Director

In a discussion with Executive Director Diane Nguyen, Congressman Harder referenced a recent [letter](#) sent to House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chair Sam Graves and Ranking Member Rick Larsen outlining his priorities for the next surface transportation reauthorization. He invited the Policy Council to share their priorities with his team and noted that his staff would send the letter to the Covino Smith & Simon team. He also highlighted the formation of the bipartisan Build America Caucus in the discussion on deregulation. Congressman Harder's Deputy Chief of Staff then sat down with the full Valley Voice delegation to review regional projects and priorities.

Senator Alex Padilla and Senator Adam Schiff

The Valley Voice delegation met with Senator Alex Padilla and Senator Adam Schiff together in the Capitol Visitors Center. The two Senators offered their insights on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations process and their concerns regarding the potential impoundment of Congressionally approved funding. The region's challenges with demonstrating transportation conformity following the Administration's revocation of three waivers authorized under the Clean Air Act following Congressional Review Act (CRA) disapprovals by Congress became the central topic of focus during the joint briefing. We provided updates to Senator Schiff regarding our engagement on the matter. Senator Padilla emphasized the need for bipartisan support from the House. The Senators offered to work with colleagues and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on





solutions that will enable the region to continue to move forward with delivery of infrastructure projects.

Congressman Adam Gray

The Valley Voice delegation reviewed local projects and policy priorities with Congressman Gray and his staff. MCAG and MCTC shared that the agencies had pending SS4A grant applications pending within the Congressman's district. Congressman Gray shared that his primary focus is on water issues, especially in smaller communities. The Congressman is a member of the bipartisan Build America Caucus that seeks to reduce regulatory barriers at the federal level in hopes of accelerating infrastructure investment in housing, energy, and transportation systems. He expressed interest in connecting with the Abundance Elected Network.

Congressman Jim Costa

Alexa Fox, Senior Legislative Assistant

The Valley Voice delegation met with Congressman Jim Costa and Alexa Fox, Senior Legislative Assistant. Congressman Costa shared updates about the legislative agenda on Capitol Hill and progress on local transportation projects. The Valley Voice delegation shared regional projects and policy priorities. FresnoCOG highlighted the SS4A grant application. On the Clean Air Act and the issue of transportation conformity, Congressman Costa recalled the grace period provided by the EPA back in 2010-2013 and noted it was good to have that past precedent as a potential example of a solution to present to the Trump Administration. Congressman Costa would like to work with his Republican colleagues on that engagement.

Congressman David Valadao

Olivia Speno, Legislative Assistant

The group concluded their meetings with Congressman Valadao and his staff. The Congressman provided an update on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations process as well as the surface transportation reauthorization. He noted that his legislation, the Farm-to-Market Road Improvement Act, had been submitted to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee as a priority for their consideration for potential inclusion in that reauthorization legislation. KingsCAG flagged a pending request from the Kings County Area Public Transit Agency seeking \$20 million through the FTA 2025 Low or No Emission Grant Program and Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities Program to support its All-Fuel Transit Maintenance Facility Replacement Project serving the Congressman's district. The group briefed Congressman Valadao on issues of demonstrating transportation conformity with EPA and FHWA, and he agreed to work with other Members of the Congressional delegation on potential solutions.

