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New Multi-State Study Reveals How California Can Speed Delivery of Transportation Projects

SACRAMENTO – To maximize the impact of transportation funding and to speed the delivery of transportation projects, the state should make more use of private-sector experts and should learn from other states that have tackled major transportation projects, according to a study released today.

“It’s time for a culture change at Caltrans, and the focus should be on freeing Californians from traffic congestion and giving taxpayers the roads and freeways they were promised when they approved billions in new transportation spending,” said Teresa Casazza, president of the California Taxpayers’ Association.

“Californians approved major transportation bonds, and they enacted Proposition 35 to allow the government to contract out on freeway projects,” Casazza said. “The will of the voters is clear – they want the government to get to work and end freeway gridlock, and this report provides several recommendations to help shift the state’s transportation projects into high gear.”

“This study shows that California can indeed succeed in rebuilding the state’s infrastructure if both the private and public sector work together,” added Brent Felker, chair of the Infrastructure Delivery Council. “As other states have clearly demonstrated, the role of the private sector is a crucial factor in meeting the demand for infrastructure improvements.”

The study, “A National Assessment of Transportation Strategies and Practices: Lessons for California,” examined the best practices of the departments of transportation in 10 states with programs that are expanding dramatically: Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Missouri, New York, Oregon, Texas, Utah and Washington.

The report’s findings include:

- The nine comparative states (excluding California) decided to use the private sector to help deliver projects faster, so taxpayers receive a more timely benefit for their investment.
- Timely project delivery drives the decision-making process for selecting which projects stay in-house and which are completed by private-sector engineers.
- States cited a need to bring in individuals from the private sector who have specialty skills that are necessary to engineer increasingly complex projects.
- The use of outside resources in the form of private consulting firms is the most common and probably the most effective strategy employed by the DOTs to address the demand for growing capital programs.

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- While no firm consensus exists among the states, there seems to be some consensus around the thought that the level of outsourcing should optimally be in the 50 percent range, unless there is insufficient state staff to maintain it at that level and still deliver the program.

The principal author of the study, Tom Warne, has 28 years of experience in the transportation industry, including serving as the executive director of the Utah Department of Transportation and deputy director/chief operation officer of the Arizona Department of Transportation for a combined nine years. He regularly serves as a consultant on a variety of service areas, including large project implementation, state and national policy issues, design-build, partnering and other key transportation areas.

"A National Assessment of Transportation Strategies and Practices: Lessons for California" was commissioned by the Infrastructure Delivery Council, an affiliate of the Consulting Engineers and Land Surveyors of California, and the California Taxpayers' Association.

For a copy of the report, visit www.caltax.org or www.celsoc.org/news.asp?nid=103.

The California Taxpayers' Association was formed in 1926 to protect taxpayers' rights and to advocate for government efficiency.

CELSOC is a statewide association representing 1,200 private consulting engineering and land surveying firms that average 20 employees each. CELSOC is dedicated to enhancing the consulting engineering and land surveying professions, protecting the general public and promoting the use of the private sector in the growth and development of our state. Its members provide services for all phases of planning, designing and constructing projects. For more information, visit www.celsoc.org.

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