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TRAILS, TRANSPORTATION GROUPS OPTIMISTIC ABOUT NEW FUND
But rhetoric about benefits of biking and walking must be matched by more investment

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – After months of uncertainty over the future of transportation funding in California, on Friday Governor Jerry Brown signed into law an unprecedented integrated funding program that trails and transportation advocates say is a step in right direction.

The change will roll most existing state and federal sources of funding for trails, biking and walking into one fund, to be known as the Active Transportation Program (ATP). The Brown administration believes streamlining the process for financing biking and walking projects will reduce administrative inefficiencies and enable greater state and local control.

The ATP will combine the federal Transportation Alternatives, Recreational Trails Program and Safe Routes to Schools programs, with state funding sources for biking and walking infrastructure, into a single \$124 million fund.

A state-wide alliance of trails, biking and walking groups, planners and public health interests came together in the months of the law's development to ensure funding for trails and active transportation was protected.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy took a lead role in galvanizing the trails community to protect trail funding in the new program, and was an integral part of the state-wide Coalition for Active Transportation Leadership that was instrumental in shaping the ATP.

“That Governor Brown has made active transportation funding such a high profile issue is a great sign for the state’s trails and transportation future,” says Laura Cohen, Director of Rails-to-Trails Conservancy’s Western Region Office. “Over the past year, the Governor and California State Transportation Agency (CSTA) staff were genuine in their negotiations with our coalition. Programs like the Recreational Trails Program were absolutely on the chopping block, and we rallied tremendous support from a diverse range of interests across the state to convince them that trails – both for transportation and recreation – are essential to the California lifestyle, and play an important role in achieving health, environment and air quality goals.”

But, while she is optimistic about the new single funding source, Cohen says that rhetoric about the importance of active transportation must be matched by an increase in funding.

“The current iteration of the Active Transportation Program represents moving money from one pot to another,” Cohen says. “While we do appreciate the gains these administrative improvements will make, the next step is to see an increase in funding support for these investments from sources like cap-and-trade auction revenue.”

“There is so much at stake. The evidence is overwhelming that communities with greater access to trails, bike lanes, greenways, and places of active recreation are healthier, economically stronger, and avoid many of the severe downsides of a transportation system dominated by roads. If this is the California we want, then we need to invest in these facilities.”

The coalition, which includes the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, California WALKS, California Bicycle Coalition, PolicyLink, TransForm and the Public Health Institute, is watching closely to see how the working details of the innovative new fund emerge; in the coming months the California Transportation Commission will take up the difficult task of creating guidelines for the program.

Cohen says the appointment of Brian Kelly as the secretary of the newly reconfigured CSTA earlier this year is very promising.

“He has communicated his intent to increase the state’s focus on trails, biking and walking paths and other forms of nonmotorized transportation,” she said.

Cohen says that transportation officials across America are keeping a close eye on the success of California's new single funding source, as states explore ways to make the most of the limited funding support for biking and walking.

For more information about California's new Active Transportation Program, contact Laura Cohen at laura@railstotrails.org, or 415.814.1101.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a nonprofit organization with more than 100,000 members, is the nation's largest trails organization dedicated to connecting people and communities by creating a nationwide network of public trails, many from former rail lines and connecting corridors. Founded in 1986, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy's national office is located in Washington, D.C., with regional offices in California, Florida, Ohio and Pennsylvania. For more information visit www.railstotrails.org.