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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. James A. Noyes, Director, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works

Topic: Current Operations and Future Plans for the Department of Public Works

January 10, 2002

Chairman Philibosian introduced Mr. Noyes a county veteran that recently was unanimously appointed Los Angeles County Director of Public Works by the Board of Supervisors. One of the areas of interest for the E & E Commission Economic Development Task Force is permit streamlining which is also an area of Mr. Noyes' involvement.

Mr. Noyes thanked Chairman Philibosian and discussed his view of the issues important to the Department of Public Works. Mr. Noyes mentioned that a draft of the DPW's Strategic Plan (which will mesh with the Los Angeles County Plan) will be available in February 2002, would be glad to share it with any of the commissioners.

An element of the plan is customer service. Mr. Noyes noted that the DPW services 10M Los Angeles County residents via roads, flood control, water delivery, and wastewater removal. Extensive customer service training programs for DPW employees are currently being studied for their adequacy and level of quality. In 2002 the use of technology in Los Angeles County and in the DPW is lagging behind the private sector, especially Internet usage. The DPW is working closely with several L. A. County Departments: the Chief Information Office (CIO), Mr. Jon Fullinwider; Internal Services (ISD); and the Chief Administrative Office, (CAO), Mr. David Janssen to resolve this situation.

Mr. Noyes has stressed to the DPW staff an awareness of departmental expenses. In government, due to a lack of competitiveness, there is a tendency to forget the "bottom line". The DPW wants to create an environment in which the delivery of services is both efficient and economic.

Current issues include carefully observing the actions of the California State Legislature. Governor Davis stated that it was not his intent to solve the State's problems at the expense of the cities and counties, but he said nothing about special districts. The DPW is the "king" of special districts with 128 different operating funds that cannot be commingled, (i.e. money's from retail water customers cannot be utilized for street lighting projects). A number of these funds receive monies from property tax revenues. Six or seven years ago when California had a major fiscal problem, it balanced its budget by raiding the property tax revenues of cities and counties. However, special districts were left alone. The DPW has \$79M in this year's budget;

property tax revenues that are going for garbage districts, lighting districts, waterworks districts, and flood control districts. Of the 128 funds 40-50 are covered within the \$79M.

On December 13, 2001 the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board issued the DPW its third Storm Water Permit. The first was issued in 1990 and the second in 1996. The Water Board serves as administrator of the Federal Clean Water Act. It will be extremely expensive to meet the terms of the storm water permits as well as water quality initiatives. The DPW is filing an administrative appeal with the State Water Resources Control Board regarding issues where the regional board has exceeded their authority. Several of the cities in L. A. County are doing the same thing because the cities in the County, except Long Beach, Lancaster and Palmdale, are included in this permit.

Chairman Philibosian asked Mr. Noyes to expand on what Regional Water Board regulations L. A. County is to follow. Mr. Noyes responded that it has to do with storm water, (the rainfall that is collected in the storm drains and the flood control channel system. An extensive portion of the system is maintained by the DPW. Many of the cities in L. A. County are also responsible for storm drains. The purpose of the storm water permits is to clean up the water so that when it reaches the Pacific Ocean it does not constitute a hazard to the public or the marine life. Although 1990 and 1996 permits' regulations were met by DPW, inspection of businesses, control of herbicides and pesticides of the 10M+ population has dramatically changed over the past 100 years. Mr. Noyes recommended a balance of expenditure in the government and in the private sectors to clean up storm waters that fall on their respective property before being discharged into storm drain systems.

When Congress first passed the Clean Water Act in 1972 the emphasis was on sewage treatment plants; storm water regulations were mostly ignored until the environmental community began filing suits against the EPA. Commissioner Padilla commented that new housing/industrial developments have to make rainwater percolate under their development as opposed to being just storm run off. Mr. Noyes responded that this requirement was a part of the 1996 Permit, which is just beginning to be implemented. The first $\frac{3}{4}$ inches of rainfall must be contained within the land or be treated to remove pollutants prior to discharge.

Commissioner Petak stated that when he had chaired the 208 Wastewater Section for the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) they were arguing for impoundment and percolation, but the civil engineers wanted more brick and mortar. Mr. Noyes responded that Mark Pisano, (SCAG) and he have had discussions as to where 208 fits, and will meet again in six weeks to discuss the matter further.

Mr. Noyes said that in 1998 The American Society of Civil Engineers issued a bad report card on the nations infrastructure. DPW (basically all civil engineers) has undertaken their own internal report card, which is now being reviewed; it is not yet available for public release. The Los Angeles County infrastructure is in good shape. Mr. Noyes said he had attended the first of several meetings with cities and the consulting industry as to creating a countywide report. L. A. County through the CAO's office is creating a report card on services that the county provides its 10M residents.

Chairman Philibosian asked Mr. Noyes to elaborate on other DPW functions. Mr. Noyes replied that the DPW was also responsible for maintenance. Also in 1989 the State Legislature (Assembly Bill 939) decreed that all 58 counties in California be responsible for solid waste planning. The DPW does not deal with landfills, but it does deal with the overall planning and regulation of all construction (i.e. subdivisions or individual one bedroom additions to single family homes) in the unincorporated areas and in twenty contract cities. Permit issuance comes into effect in the Building and Safety Division and the Land Development Division. The DPW will go before the Board of Supervisors with recommendations to contract with private firms to assist with the permit streamlining process. When the workload is overwhelmed, the "private" firm will supplement the permit review. Use of overtime is another option.

Commissioner Balderrama asked whether leasing out of properties is a possibility? Mr. Noyes responded that these were areas in the flood control district, which were not necessary for operating purposes and could be sold or leased, depending upon the applicants' needs. Another common example would be the channel system (trapezoidal concrete areas) for flood control; people from the private sector can negotiate leases from the DPW using these operating facilities to create parking by covering the channels (e.g. Home Depot

in Monrovia). The Board of Supervisors has adopted fair market value principles that govern the DPW operations in terms of lease charges. Mr. Greg Kelley, Division Chief in charge of the Mapping and the Property Management Division, and his staff manage the leases (626-458-7000).

Commissioner Philibosian noted that Commissioner Fuhrman mentioned maintenance, and asked Mr. Noyes to discuss that area. Mr. Noyes replied that in the flood control district there are 33 facilities that are licensed as dams by the State of California and that require extensive monitoring to ensure their maintenance, for example: there are 3,000 miles of underground storm drains, and 250 miles of open channels (i.e. the Los Angeles River). The DPW Sewer System through the Consolidated Sewer Maintenance Districts serves 2 ½ M people in the unincorporated areas in 44 cities. The DPW is also in the retail water delivery business through the Waterworks Districts with a customer base of 250,000 people. Out of this year's \$1.3B budget, approximately \$350M has been earmarked to maintain infrastructure. A large part is done through private sector contracting which is more cost effective during temporary increases of service. The Auditor/Controller agrees for each contract that the private sector's method of delivering services is the way to go.

Commissioner Balderrama asked what preparations were made before anticipated rainstorms on drainage maintenance (i.e. Caltrans chooses inconvenient times to maintain their drainage system). Mr. Noyes said that Caltrans was sued because they were not following the regulations of the Water Quality Control Board with respect to the storm water quality issue, and now are much more responsive. The DPW does not react to a forecast of rain, but there are a whole series of maintenance activities that are conducted from August 1st through November 1st to prepare for the winter rains. Commissioner Balderrama asked if Caltrans water went through the County system? Mr. Noyes said often it does, but that Caltrans has their own drainage system for which they are responsible.

Commissioner Tortorice returned to the issue of the storm water permit and their major cost components? Mr. Noyes replied that since 1968 storm water has been monitored. Presently, four storms are sampled every winter and data is submitted to the Water Board; the water is automatically collected in sampling devices, the DPW goes out and picks up those samples. The agricultural commissioner's laboratory is used for testing. Inspections of illegal connections are another cost. Public education costs the department \$2M per year to prevent pollution (i.e. dumping used oil into a catch basin). Commissioner Tortorice asked whether these were variable personnel costs as opposed to capital costs. Mr. Noyes replied that there were not a lot of capital costs. However, at many of the maintenance facilities in the yards there have been capital costs to keep the water within the confines of the property or to run it through clarifiers before being sent into the sewer or the storm drain system. Another capital cost, which has occurred in a few cases during low flow periods, was diversion of the low flows into the sanitary system to be treated by the Carson plant, any of the Sanitation Districts' plants or the Hyperion Plant. The DPW has been working closely with the Sanitation Districts for many years on this issue. Another capital cost at the catch basins that lead into the storm drains is installing devices to keep trash from entering the system. The Regional Board has given the DPW and all cities in the watershed an order to get all of the trash out of the Los Angeles River within the next thirteen years.

Commissioner Simmons questioned those areas that are not conducive to percolator pits, with most of the runoff going into the ocean. Does that necessitate installing another Hyperion-type plant to clean up the storm water, (i.e. this is the complaint of the people from "Save the Bay" in Santa Monica)? Mr. Noyes responded that the general direction of the storm water permit, and the DPW's response is: prevention, as opposed to treatment. The problem is not "technical" (the DPW knows how to treat it) it is "volume". The storm flows are massive, and cannot all be treated instantaneously; it needs to be stored (somewhere), treated and released. The land required would be extensive. About four years ago Caltrans commissioned Brown and Caldwell to do a study of that type of retention, for Caltrans freeways and state highways in Los Angeles County. The estimated cost was \$54B and that did not include the cost to buy the land to build the facilities. Commissioner Simmons replied that with the construction of the new East Central Intercept Sewage (ECIS) system, the North Outfall Sewage (NOS) system would be taken out, couldn't the latter be used for storage or housing once it were repaired? Mr. Noyes responded that it could be.

Commissioner Hill asked how the DPW factored the events of the September 11th into their operation? Mr.

Noyes replied that the major change has been heightened patrolling and security of the 83 water works' tanks to avoid contamination. The dams are empty at this time of the year, however by the end of March they should be full; armed guards may be posted at all the facilities. The reason for filling the dams by the end of March is ground water recharge (400,000 acre-feet of water). Ten years ago the population used about 2M acre-feet of water. Two thirds of Los Angeles County water comes from the Colorado River Aqueduct, City of Los Angeles Aqueduct and state project water from northern California. One third is pumped from ground water, the Ground Water Recharge Program is designed to put local water back in to replenish the ground water. After March, the water is siphoned out and put into the recharge facilities where it percolates down and replenishes the ground water supplies. Commissioner Padilla asked if that were in Irwindale. Mr. Noyes answered that the best spreading grounds (i.e. how quickly the water gets underground) are at the corner of the 210 and 605 Freeways, which is leased from the Corps of Engineers at the Santa Fe Dam.

Chairman Philibosian introduced Commissioner Sylva, Chair of the Economic Development Task Force, which deals with permit streamlining. Commissioner Sylva commented that last month the E & E Commission met with a panel from the California Contract Cities Association who expressed their concerns regarding permit streamlining. Mr. Noyes suggested the DPW staff get together with Commissioner Sylva's Task Force.

Commissioner Padilla asked Mr. Noyes to give a brief summary of the Governor's \$40M appropriation to buy the Taylor Yards and the Cornfield Areas (across from Griffith Park and the Gene Autry Museum, an old Southern Pacific Rail yard) for use as an open spaced park. Mr. Noyes stated that MTA bought a portion of it for a maintenance facility for the Metrolink trains, the environmental community wants a portion to make a park and the local community wants to use it to create jobs. Money is promised and is available to make it into a natural park, however the DPW has not been heavily involved. Commissioner Padilla stated that there was an issue for diverting the water from the Los Angeles River to the Hyperion area for percolation into the ground. Mr. Noyes said there are thoughts as to possible uses through the wetlands and a groundwater recharge program. All of the ground water in the San Fernando Valley flows southeasterly. As it approaches that area (called the Gallery) it gets constricted; which causes the ground water to rise. The Corps of Engineers (who owns and maintains this area) decided to leave the river in its natural condition. With the ground water tending to naturally rise, it was not conducive to percolation. The DPW had looked at the property in terms of building a tunnel, which would take the water from that location to the San Gabriel River where there is a capacity to take the water and spread it for recharge of ground water purposes; however it may not be cost effective. It was considered cheaper to use desalination rather than build the tunnel.

Commissioner Padilla summarized by stating that the DPW was not involved with the development. Mr. Noyes replied, no, because both of the projects are within the City of Los Angeles; the First Supervisorial District would have more answers.

Commissioner Balderrama congratulated Mr. Noyes and his predecessor for the beautiful job of installing sidewalks on Atlantic Blvd. and on Whittier Blvd. to Arizona. Mr. Noyes mentioned that in 2000 – 2001 Governor Davis "earmarked" an additional \$39M for transportation projects in unincorporated area roads through AB 2928. The funds need to be spent by June 2002 and an additional \$25M per year for the next few years for transportation improvements is forthcoming.

Commissioner Hill stated that the previous Director Harry Stone won the first all time award from Quality and Productivity Commission; however, Mr. Noyes will give him a "run for his money" because he brought in El Sol, the bus system for East Los Angeles, as well as taking all of the honors with the Code Enforcement Program which has gone national and might become international.

Chairman Philibosian thanked him for his presentation. Mr. Noyes expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to represent the DPW stating that he would be glad to work in any way possible with the E & E Commission.

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