

# DIVISION OF LOCAL ASSISTANCE



## **CALTRANS OVERSIGHT INFORMATION NOTICE**



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DLA COIN Issue #15-02

Release Date: April 15, 2015

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### **Welcome to the COIN!**

*This is a Caltrans Oversight Information Notice, or “COIN” for short. These short, single-topic bulletins are intended to provide outreach information and guidance to local agencies on issues pertaining to Federal-aid projects. They cover a wide variety of subjects, including discussions of findings resulting from process reviews by Caltrans and/or FHWA, changes in procedures or regulations, reminders of existing procedures or best practices, and other timely information. The goal is to ensure proper and timely delivery of Federal-aid projects.*

### **Topic: Protected Bikeways and Design Flexibility**

The Caltrans Program Review, and more recently the State Smart Transportation Initiative (SSTI) report, identified a need to provide more flexibility in Caltrans’ design standards and procedures, especially in the context of urban environments and multimodal design.

Caltrans is continually improving its standards and processes to provide flexibility while maintaining the safety and integrity of the state’s transportation system.

#### **Protected Bikeways Act of 2014**

The Protected Bikeways Act of 2014 (AB1193) (Act), amended sections, 890.4, 890.6, and 891 of the Streets and Highways Code relating to bikeways and also added section 885.1 to the code. The Act created Class IV bikeways, called cycle tracks, and requires the Department and local partners, by January 1, 2016, to establish minimum safety design criteria for the planning and construction of each type of bikeway and roadways where bicycle travel is permitted.

The Act also allows local agencies to use alternative design criteria such as the National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) “Urban Bikeway Design Guide” for bikeways outside of the state highway right-of-way.

#### **Design Flexibility**

For improvements on local systems, the responsible local entities have long been delegated authority to exercise their engineering judgment when utilizing applicable standards. This delegation authority is outlined in the Caltrans LAPM, Chapter 11, Section 11.4—Design Exceptions at:

[http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/lam/prog\\_p/ch11-2012-10-05.pdf](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LocalPrograms/lam/prog_p/ch11-2012-10-05.pdf).

To support the philosophy of flexibility in design, Caltrans recently published “Main Street, California, a Guide for Improving Community and Transportation Vitality.” This guide emphasizes investments on California highways that function as a local main street and can improve multimodal travel and contribute to livable and sustainable communities. The guide is available at:

[http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/mainstreet/main\\_street\\_3rd\\_edition.pdf](http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/LandArch/mainstreet/main_street_3rd_edition.pdf).

In addition, the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) provides a wealth of knowledge in the guides that it develops at the national level. For example, AASHTO's "Guide for the Development of Bicycle Facilities" (AASHTO Bike Guide), provides information on how to accommodate bicycle travel and operations in most riding environments. The publication presents sound guidelines that result in facilities that meet the needs of bicyclists and other highway users. The guide provides flexibility to encourage designs that are sensitive to local context and incorporate the needs of bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists.

Other references relative to urban street and bicycle facility design can also be valuable resources. Publications such as NACTO's "Urban Street Design Guide" and, as noted above, "Urban Bikeway Design Guide," and the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) "Designing Urban Walkable Thoroughfares," are resources that local entities can reference when making planning and design decisions on local streets and roads.

Caltrans believes that such guidance, coupled with thorough documentation of engineering judgments made in the process, can be of assistance to communities, particularly in urban areas, to support the planning and design of safe and convenient facilities that they own and operate. Caltrans is currently analyzing these guides to identify areas of improvement in our own standards and guidance. *Chapter 11- Design Standards* of the Local Assistance Procedures Manual (LAPM) is currently under review to be more consistent with the philosophy presented in the guidance referenced in this COIN.

Given the flexibility provided to owners by existing standards and guidance, it remains of the utmost importance, as noted above, for the responsible entity to document appropriately their engineering decisions for design-immunity purposes. Adequate documentation serves to further the full protection of design immunity provided under law to the responsible entity.

Caltrans and local entities are encouraged to work proactively with their communities to provide convenient, safe, and context-sensitive facilities that promote increased use by bicyclists and pedestrians of all ages and abilities, and utilize universal design characteristics as appropriate. This approach has resulted in successful flexible design solutions in the past and the Department endorses its use as a fundamental principle of planning and design.