



PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS



IN CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT

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CALTRANS DELIVERS PROJECTS ON TIME DESPITE BUDGET AND STAFFING RESTRICTIONS

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The California State Auditor concluded that the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) manages 2500 capital outlay (construction) projects on state highways. The main criticism in the audit was that the support costs for some of these projects were more than originally projected. The audit concluded the system needs more red tape through detailed reporting and additional reviews which would further increase support costs.

But what the audit doesn't show is how successful Caltrans has been over the past five years. Since 2006, 1391 of 1394 projects were delivered to construction on schedule, including 304 of 306 projects in the last fiscal year. The report did not note that when additional federal funds were made available last year, Caltrans obligated 100% of its allocation, while local agencies only achieved a 72% success ratio. The report also did not note that Caltrans' successful performance was in spite of hiring freezes, furloughs, and other intended impediments to successful performance.

“The report zeros in on problems that are beyond the department's control, but doesn't mention its phenomenal record of success,” said Matt Hanson, President of Professional Engineers in California Government (PECG). “Caltrans has a long track record of delivering projects on time and within budget despite continued staffing restrictions and other unnecessary roadblocks.”

The report had no criticism of Caltrans staffing levels, organization structure, list of projects, project delivery, and the budget request process. The main complaint in the report was that some projects had higher support costs than had been projected years earlier. The report acknowledges that the primary reason was an increase in salaries for the engineering staff to achieve parity with engineers in local agencies with lesser responsibilities.

Caltrans is criticized for placing focus on the number of hours required to complete each project, rather than support costs, despite the obvious fact that the necessary support for a project is determined by the hours needed to deliver the project.

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The report calls for yet another study of the cost of an outsourced engineer versus a state employed engineer. Yet the Legislature has determined in the State Budget, based on actual data, that the cost for an outsourced engineer for one year is \$226,000, plus contract advertising, award, and oversight; and that the cost for a state employed Caltrans engineer is \$113,000. If the Auditor is concerned about costs, rather than recommending more funding for consultants for non-existent temporary workload increases, the Auditor should recommend that outsourcing for more than specialty work should be eliminated because it costs twice as much.

Certainly Caltrans can improve some of its procedures, although unnecessarily detailed additional reports which serve no good purpose are not the answer. It would have been more appropriate for the Auditor to have pointed out what Caltrans is doing well, rather than focusing on minutia or problems beyond the department's control.

ABOUT PECCG

PECCG represents the 13,000 state-employed engineers and related professionals responsible for designing and inspecting California's highways and bridges, ensuring that schools and hospitals are safe during earthquakes, and protecting our air, water and beaches from polluters.