



INSTITUTE OF TRANSPORTATION ENGINEERS

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SECTION

NEWSLETTER

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March 2009

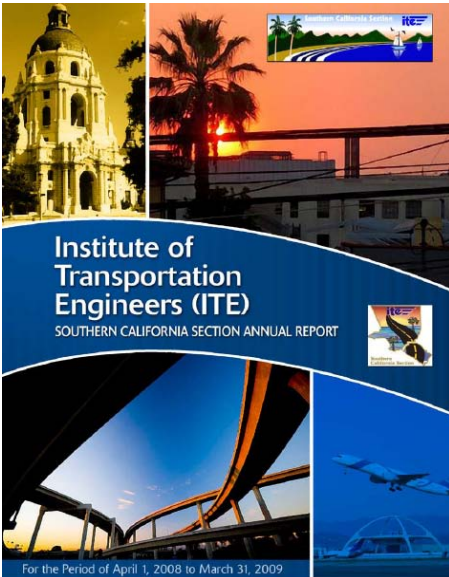
President's Message

Carlos Ortiz, PE, TE, PTOE



Our February Meeting was our annual joint meeting with the Central Coast ITE Section. Our guest speaker was **Mr. Darren Kettle**, Executive Director, Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC). **Mr. Kettle's** presentation was on "The Transportation Funding Crisis at the Federal, State and Local Level: Rules of the Game and How to Stay in the Game". Mr. Kettle discussed some of the upcoming projects in the County of Ventura and the challenges that the County is facing without a county gas tax measure. Please see the Scribe Report for more details.

We still have the co-newsletter editor position available. If you would like to know about the position please call Mr. Steve Itagaki or myself. Also, this is the time when we will be looking for candidates for next year's Treasury/Secretary position. Please contact Ruth Smith if you would like to be a candidate. We encourage our members to participate in this great organization.



The section board is currently working on the Section Annual Report that will be submitted to District 6. If you would like a PDF copy, please let us know and we will send you a final copy after our submittal in April.

This month's meeting was held on Friday, March 13, 2009. This was a joint meeting with the San Diego ITE Section. The meeting was held early in the month per the request of the speakers. Details of the meeting will be provided in the April newsletter.

The ITE 2009 Technical Conference and Exhibit will be held in the City of Phoenix, Arizona on March 22 – 25. Hope you can make it to the meeting.

(Cont'd on Page 2)

Meeting Announcement

Wednesday, Apr. 15, 2009
@ 11:30 a.m.

Monterey Hill Restaurant
3700 W. Ramona Boulevard
Monterey Park, CA 92629
(323) 264-8400

For Reservations Contact:

Lisa Martellaro-Palmer at
lisa.martellaro-palmer@lacity.org

Ph. (323) 957-6823

By 12:00 pm on Friday,
Apr. 10th, 2009

(E-mail preferred)

See Flyer for More Details

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 2nd Volunteer Needed

President's Message (Cont'd)

On March 10, the City of Garden Grove dedicated the Amber Alert Signs ribbon cutting ceremony to **Mr. George Allen**. This project was very close to George and it was great to see how the community of Garden Grove dedicated this project to one of our members who is no longer with us.

We will have a great presentation at our April meeting. The meeting will be on April 15. **Mr. Lawrence (Jesse Glazer)** with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will be presenting the latest on President's Obama stimulus economic recovery package which is now officially called the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act" (ARRA). **Mr. Glazer** will bring us the latest federal guidelines and requirements for the distribution of the ARRA funds. We are hoping that a second speaker will join the presentation and discuss the local requirements. The meeting will be held at the Monterey Hill Restaurant in the City of Monterey Park. Please RSVP in early April. We expect a large crowd and we do not want to exceed the room capacity.

The joint ITE Southern California and Orange County Traffic Engineering Council (OCTEC) Annual Golf Tournament will be held on Friday, May 15 at the Green River Golf Club in the City of Corona, please see the attached flyer for details. We are looking for tournament sponsors. Also, raffle prizes are appreciated as always. If you would like to sponsor, please contact **Mr. Jim Sommers**, KOA Corporation, at 714-573-0317.

Our Meeting in May will be our joint meeting with Orange County Traffic Engineering Council (OCTEC). Students from our local universities will be presenting at the meeting. Please try to attend and support our local students. The meeting will be on May 20 in the evening. We will provide you with more details next month. ♦

WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU THERE!

February 2009 Scribe Report

By John A. Dorado II



The ITE Southern California Section monthly meeting was held jointly with the Central Coast ITE Section on Tuesday, February 10, 2009 at The Plug Nickel Restaurant in the City of Westlake Village. The meeting was filled to capacity with ITE members from both sections. Our guest speaker was **Darren Kettle, P.E., P.T.O.E., Executive Director**, with **Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC)** regarding "The Transportation Funding Crisis at the Federal, State and Local Level: Rules of the Game & How to Stay in the Game", a presentation examining the need to improve transportation systems under new government rules addressing climate change and other environmental sensitivities.



Mr. Darren Kettle, opened his presentation by saying that at this is one of the most dynamic and changing times as it will ever be in our lifetime.

He gave an overview of several topics including:

- Federal funding
- Stimulus package overview of transportation funds
- Ventura County transportation funding source challenges and opportunities

Federal Funding

The Federal Highway Trust Fund includes approximately an \$8 billion bailout. There is a current SAFETEA-LU funding of approximately \$350 million per year.

He hopes that the next Federal Transportation Act will pull in \$500 billion over the next five years.

Stimulus Package Overview of Transportation Funds

Stimulus package dollars will mainly be used for overlay projects.

Processing time is one of the problems in order to deliver projects through the stimulus package guidelines (quick turn-around).

Expect more design-build projects within California.

Ventura County Transportation Funding Source Challenges and Opportunities

There are challenges ahead especially due to the declining source of funds for transportation projects. With cars being more efficient, the gas tax funds for transportation projects will run out and other tax revenues need to be explored.

Currently, Ventura County is the only urban county in California that does not have a gas sales tax measure to fund transportation projects. Therefore, there are not any other revenue streams. Ventura County relies on State and Federal dollars which allocates their funds based on competing projects that other counties apply for.

Ventura County is looking to place a 0.5¢ sales tax measure on the ballot, but it takes a two-thirds vote to pass any measure. With that said, it needs to be placed on the ballot at a strategic time with the proper campaign to strengthen its chances of passing. In order to campaign, it will cost approximately \$500,000 to \$1 million, which emphasizes how critical the timing is. Also, other factors are considered such as focused independent polls. If it is likely to be on the ballot in year 2010, current polling shows that it will not be successful. If the 0.5¢ sales tax measure passes, it will generate approximately \$60 to \$65 million for transportation projects in the Ventura County.

Next steps include the following:

- Create a stronger VCTC brand
- Reach-out to local communities
- Reach-out to local politicians to take ownership of transportation projects

He closed his presentation emphasizing the need to determine other sustainable methods to provide reliable revenue streams, which is in question and the challenge. ♦

Legislative Analysis

By Walter Okitsu, PE, PTOE



Stimulus Package, Finally!

This country has a huge national debt and the economy is in a mess. So what did Congress and President Obama do? They passed a stimulus bill that increases spending and reduces taxes, further increasing the debt by another \$800 billion, in hopes that the short-term jolt will perk up the economy enough to reduce the deficit. "Stimulus" means spending money you don't have to get everybody else to spend more money, so that in a couple of years you can spend less money you don't have. The Bush Administration ran what was essentially an eight-year stimulus package. Obama's stimulus package had to be gigantic to make an impression.

Unfortunately for us, only 5% of the package is going to transportation. After transportation was used to sell the stimulus package to the public, with all the talk about the biggest infrastructure program since the Interstate Highway Program, we were given very little. About \$40 billion went to ground transportation nationwide. This could make it tougher to get adequate funding in the next omnibus transportation bill. SAFETEA-LU funding expires in September.

California gets about \$4 billion of the ground transportation stimulus money. Caltrans District 7 Director Doug Failing, who spoke at a UCLA ITE Student Chapter meeting, said that LA and Ventura County will get about a billion of that. Orange County would probably get a hundred million or two.

Some are concerned that projects would start too slowly to create the necessary stimulus jolt to the economy. Environmental clearance through NEPA compliance is required. Governor Schwarzenegger pushed Congress to "streamline" NEPA compliance, but Senator Boxer inserted the language maintaining NEPA. Nevertheless, the State of California has no lack of projects that are ready to go. For instance, the many Proposition 1B bond-funded projects that have stalled due to the lack of bond buyers could easily eat up the stimulus money all by themselves, fast! Doug Failing plans to use Federal stimulus funds in place of Proposition 1B money on some major projects like the I-405 Sepulveda Pass job, on which Kiewit/HNTB was the lowest and only bidder. When the Proposition 1B sales start picking up, he'd use that money for other projects. Tom Bogard of OCTA plans to do the same in Orange County.

Local agencies don't have as many projects on the shelf and ready to go, so they are working frantically to get their share of the Federal stimulus dollars.

Transit Rider Subsidies Increase

Transit riders who have been able to set aside \$120 per month from their paychecks to pay their fares can now set aside \$230 per month with the new Federal stimulus law.

This might not be a big deal in Southern California. It only costs \$70 for an LA Metro monthly pass, and \$55 for an OCTA monthly pass, so it's probably only the Metrolink, Amtrak and long distance commuter bus riders who would benefit from the stimulus increase. This is not exactly an anti-sprawl measure, but at least it could take a few cars off the road.

I am not aware of how many employees in Southern California take advantage of the pre-tax benefit and receive transit vouchers from their employers. It's much easier in the Washington, DC area. According to the Dr. Gridlock's Washington Post Blog, 400 federal agencies and 4,000 private employers there participate in the SmartBenefits program. Employers pump in whatever amount the employee requests, up to \$230 per month, directly into SmarTrip fare cards.

Omnibus Appropriations Bill

The Federal government is working on its own budget bill, with the House passing H.R. 1105 last month that funds domestic federal programs for the full 2009 fiscal year. The bill includes an all time high funding for transit, according to the American Public Transportation Association. We are awaiting the Senate's take on the budget bill.

Senator Dorgan of North Dakota inserted language that would finally halt "the Mexican long-haul trucking program in the U.S. started by the Bush Administration." The Obama administration is concerned, however, that ending the program might violate the North American Free Trade Agreement.

One thing the Obama people want is high-speed rail. The budget bill also includes a \$5 billion high-speed rail state grant program. This money would come on top of the \$8 billion already allocated to high-speed rail in the stimulus package.

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State Budget Approved. Yay!

On Thursday, Feb. 19, the California Legislature passed its 2009 budget. To close a \$42 billion shortfall, the budget features more than \$14 billion in cuts and \$12 billion in new taxes. The remainder is, well, borrowed.

According to ACEC California, the budget bills include design-build authority for 10 state transportation projects, five local non-state highway projects, 10 state non-transportation projects, and 10 local redevelopment design-build projects, and unlimited authorization using design-build for infrastructure projects that would have to be started by 2017.

California's Bonds Still Aren't Selling

Even though the budget passed last month, California still can't sell bonds for transportation projects. The State has shut down about \$4 billion worth of construction projects due to the lack of bond buyers. The State has an "A" rating, which is a good grade if you're in school but a terrible grade for bond buyers, the worst of the 50 states.

There is one noteworthy buyer. The Bay Area Toll Authority bought \$194 million worth of Proposition 1B bonds. Some Proposition 1B projects will be built and operated by the Authority. They figured that if they've got money to invest, it might as well go to bonds that will help move their projects along, even if the bonds are near junk.

Gas Tax versus the VMT Tax

The National Surface Transportation Infrastructure Financing Commission (NSTIFC), a bi-partisan Congressionally-created group, issued their latest recommendations. You might recall that last year, a previous version of this commission recommended a 40-cent fuel excise tax increase, that was ignored by the Commission's chairwomen, US DOT Secretary Mary Peters. The latest Commission is calling for Federal assistance toward congestion pricing, i.e. tolling portions of roads and charging premiums for rush-hour travel in heavily used urban corridors. The Commission also calls for a VMT tax. They estimate that to meet the base case "Need to Maintain and Improve" annual investment level, the federal VMT fee assessed on all miles driven, regardless of the system where they occur, would be roughly 2.3¢ per mile for cars (equivalent to a 48.4¢ gas tax).

But the Commission also recommends a ten-cent-per-gallon increase in the federal gas tax (15 cents for diesel) and indexing the tax to inflation going forward. The current Federal gasoline tax is 18.4 cents, and is not currently indexed to inflation. The Commission

points out that the gasoline tax has lost one third of its purchasing power since 1993, the last time the tax was increased.

Meanwhile, the new US DOT Secretary Ray LaHood floated up the idea of a VMT tax. This was quickly knocked down by Obama's press secretary Robert Gibbs, who said "It is not and will not be the policy of the Obama administration." Barack Obama said on the campaign trail last summer that he opposed an increase in the gasoline tax, as well. The President might see these ideas as competing with his proposed carbon tax, in which motorists would somehow be charged a fee, with the revenues not coming back to roads.

California's fuel excise tax is 18 cents per gallon, on top of the Federal tax. A twelve cent gas tax increase was in the California budget bills, but then dropped. I was in Sacramento last month with members of ACEC California, campaigning for a 20-cent gasoline tax increase, but we were happy to see even the 12-cent hike being proposed. But the Republicans demanded it be dropped, and the Democrats probably decided that the fuel tax increase was expendable. Because the gasoline tax revenues are so well protected from being raided by the general fund (thank goodness), a fuel tax increase does not reduce the budget deficit. It's not exactly stimulus money either. Rather, it's a user fee that raises revenue to be spent on facilities used by those who pay the fee. Republicans usually listen positively to that pitch, but they also listen to talk radio hosts who protest against any tax increases. And Democrats know that their constituents regularly watch gasoline prices. It won't happen this year in California.

Traffic Engineers Might Become Practicing PE's

Senate Bill 275 (Mimi Walters) is the latest attempt by dedicated do-gooders, including yours truly, to fix the Professional Engineers Act in California. Currently only licensed civil engineers are allowed to practice engineering dealing with fixed works. Furthermore, civil engineers are free to practice electrical and mechanical engineering, although the reverse is not true for EE's and ME's. Registered PE's in 9 other disciplines, including traffic engineering, have no license to practice at all, only protected titles.

SB 275 would convert the 9 title disciplines into practices, and would allow overlap among the various disciplines within the license holder's own expertise. Thus, electrical and mechanical engineers would benefit from this bill as well.

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However, for this bill to pass, support can't come from electrical, mechanical, agricultural, chemical, or traffic engineers. In fact, letters from traffic engineers sent to legislators could be counter-productive. Opposition is likely to come from two trade groups, the Professional Engineers in California Government (PECG) and the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC), who have strong lobbying strength in Sacramento. Legislators would look at your letter and see the bill as just a no-win turf war. Instead, the support will need to come from the users of engineering services.

The California Farm Bureau Federation and the Chemical Industry Council of California are the co-sponsors of the bill. They see value in agricultural engineers and chemical engineers becoming practicing PE's. Similar industrial and commercial users of engineers would need to support the bill, as well.

If you really want to help the bill move along, though, you can contact the president of Registered Traffic Engineers of America (RTEA), who'll send your dues toward the lobbyist behind the bill. Disclaimer: I am the president of RTEA.

CTCDC's Speed Limit Meeting

The California Traffic Control Devices Committee (CTCDC) was supposed to meet in late February to discuss a proposed change to the California MUTCD's setting of prima facie speed limits. That meeting has been postponed.

The California MUTCD currently requires rounding off the 85th percentile speed to the nearest 5 miles per hour. The CTCDC's proposal would allow the speed limit to be within 5 mph of the 85th percentile speed, that is, you can round down by more than 2 mph. The hot topic at the next meeting will be whether to have a "soft floor" or "hard floor" to the prima facie speed limit. The California Highway Patrol and Caltrans prefer a hard floor requirement that the prima facie speed limit SHALL NOT be less than the 50th percentile speed, while the rest of the CTCDC favors a soft floor with "SHOULD NOT" language. The new date of the meeting is March 19, 3 pm in Sacramento.

Bill Proposes to Make 85th Percentile Irrelevant

The CTCDC's effort could be tossed out the window for non-State highways. If Assembly Bill 766 (Krekorian) were to pass, local authorities could pick whatever speed limit they want. A local authority could decide, after a public hearing, that "a higher speed limit is not the most appropriate for the orderly movement of traffic upon the street and does not promote a safe environment for the neighborhood or pedestrians." Engineering and traffic surveys wouldn't have to justify use of radar at the lower speed limit.

Can you imagine the number of public hearings that local traffic engineers would have to attend regarding requests for lower speed limits? One for nearly every street in town.

Must You Stop at a Dark Signal?

Last month, I cited the wrong California Vehicle Code section regarding stopping at dark inoperable traffic signals. CVC 21800(d) (1) is the right place to look to find out what to do when approaching a dark inoperable traffic signal. At least one traffic court interprets the language to mean that you only have to stop if the signals "become inoperative because of battery failure." Only a few of us traffic folks have that information. Everyone else approaching a dark signal must react as if the intersection were uncontrolled, yielding to vehicles approaching from the right, but not necessarily stopping. A fix to the CVC might come in the current legislative session.

This analysis is based on the world as it stood March 3, 2009. For comments, please contact Walter Okitsu at wokitsu@crainandassociates.com. ♦

Accessible Pedestrian Signal Workshop

By Bernard Hicks, P.E.

On February 3, 2009 the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation hosted a workshop to disseminate information about Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) to engineers and technicians responsible for design and installation decisions. The workshop was attended by engineers from DOT as well as Caltrans, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, consulting engineers and other agencies throughout Southern California.

The workshop was a full day course presented by Daniel Carter of the University of North Carolina. The main objective for APS installations is to provide safe and independent crossing for blind pedestrians at signalized intersections. His presentation highlighted the new guidelines for the installation and operation of APS that will be included in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). New devices will replace the "cuckoo" and "chirp" tones with a rapid "tick" tone and tactile arrow during the walk phase. A slower "tick" tone operates during the "flashing don't walk" and "don't walk" phases. This slower Tick" tone serves as a locator tone for pedestrians who are blind.

As transportation professionals, we should consider the needs of all pedestrians when we design traffic signals and especially the needs of the blind. Therefore, APS should be considered at all signalized intersections. ♦

Announcements

Let's Carpool to Our Monthly Meetings

ITE Southern California Section would like to offer carpooling to our monthly meetings.

In order to coordinate, please provide the following information to our board members:

1. Name and contact information (cell phone preferred).
2. Whether you are looking for a ride or if you are driving and have room in a vehicle.
3. Location (e.g., downtown LA, Santa Monica, etc.)
4. How many seats available in your car if you are driving.
5. Ability to travel to a central meeting point.
6. Any other accessibility concerns (e.g., in a wheelchair, etc.)

For those interested in joining a carpool in the **Santa Monica/LA vicinity**, please contact:

Sam Morrissey, PE
 Principal Transportation Engineer
 Planning and Community Development/Transportation Management
 City of Santa Monica
 Tel: (310) 458-8291
sam.morrissey@smgov.net

Newsletter Sponsorship

This newsletter is a perfect venue for advertising your products and services, as it is circulated nine (9) times a year to more than 700 ITE recipients all over Southern California. Advertisements are priced reasonably for the benefit of our members.

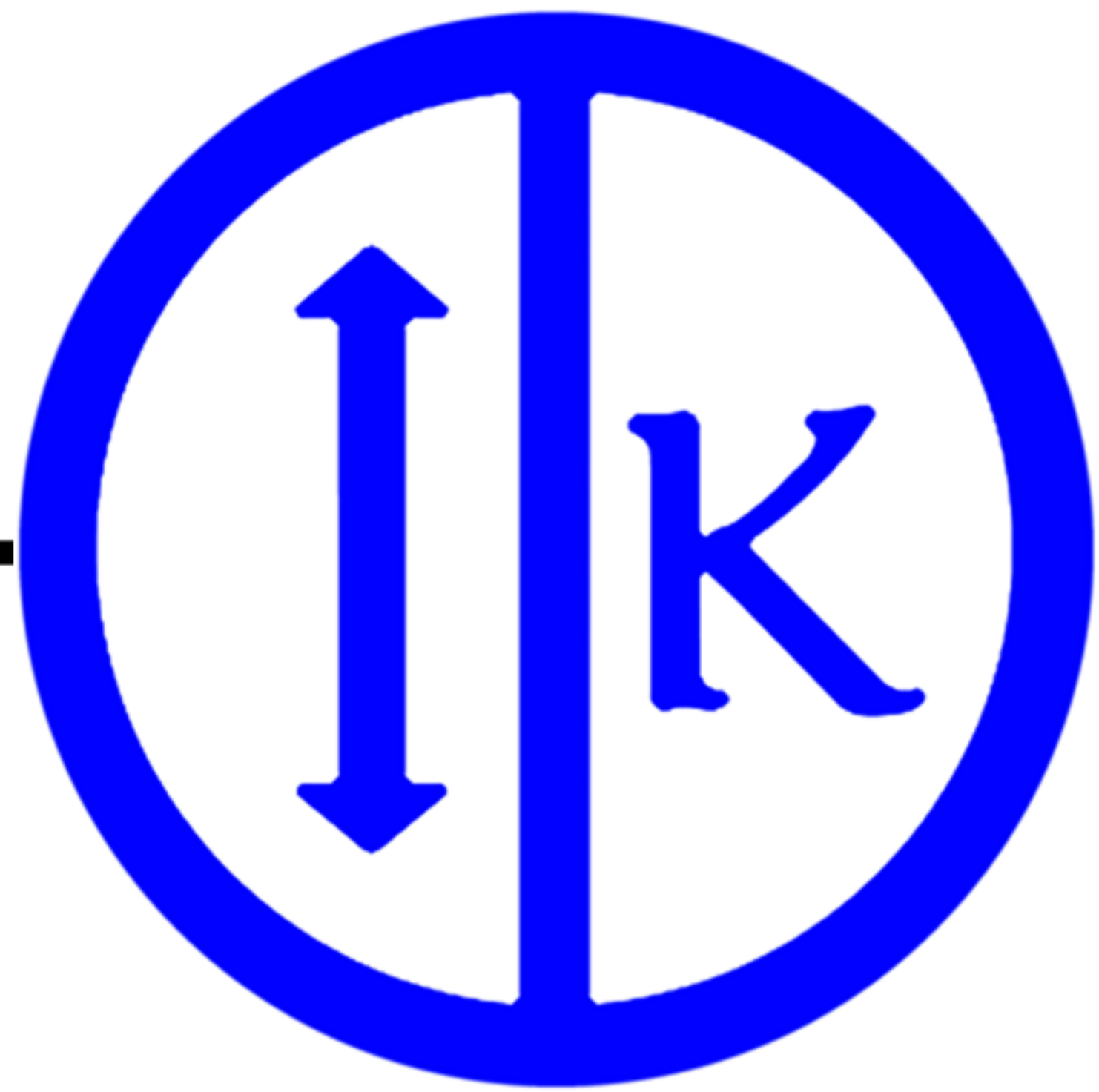
There is no charge for brief job announcements or course announcements (about 100 words) that would be of interest to our members. Free announcements may be edited or condensed as necessary, though.

Thank you in advance for your contribution to the ITE Southern California Section.

On behalf of our Newsletter committee, I, Julia Wu, would like to thank you, all currently-committed sponsors, for your support. It is thanks to your help in sharing the production costs that makes the newsletter distribution possible and allows us to increase our student support. I hope the advertisements in our newsletter have contributed to raising your profiles in the local transportation industry. Please note that with the electronic newsletter, the ads are now full-page and in color. To our prospective sponsors, I encourage you to make your companies better known in the community. We have vacancies **after May**. Feel free to contact me, Julia Wu, at jwu@koacorporation.com, to schedule your sponsorship ad. ♦

Jan-09	Iteris, Inc.
Feb-09	Phoenix Highway Products, Inc.
Mar-09	Kunzman Associates
Apr-09	Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.
May-09	Al Grover & Associates
Jun-09	(Available)
Jul-09	(Available)
Aug-09	(Available)
Sep-09	(Available)
Oct-09	(Available)
Nov/Dec-09	(Available)

If you find any factual errors, have comments about any of the articles you have read in this newsletter, or have suggestions on how to improve the newsletter, please e-mail our newsletter editor: Steve Itagaki (sitagaki@jmdiaz.com).



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