**Caltrans Sustainable Communities Grant to Southern California Association of Governments
Summary of Data Collection from Counties and County Offices of Education
Regarding Email Addresses for 3 Big Eligible Populations**

Overview and Purpose

The Regional Broadband Consortia (RBCs) collected data from several sources and through outreach to stakeholders and interviews with low-income households to determine the potential to reduce vehicle trips (and associated vehicle miles traveled--VMT) and, in turn, to decrease greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The data collection included requesting information from Counties and County Offices of Education (COEs) about the 3 Big Eligible Populations for public assistance to assess if low-income households could reduce vehicle trips if the SCAG Region achieved ubiquitous deployment of high-speed Internet infrastructure (referred to generically as broadband) and universal adoption of technology to get online all residents with sufficient digital literacy skills to navigate the Internet to improve their lives. This data is important because most households not online are low-income and do not have the ability or opportunity today to avoid vehicle trips. The 3 Big Eligible Populations are residents receiving the following public benefits: Medi-Cal; CalFresh; and National School Lunch Program (NSLP).

Each RBC reached out to County and COE officials in their respective regions to request data about: (a) the number of residents enrolled in each of the 3 Big Eligible Populations; and (b) the number of those enrolled who have on file an email address as a proxy indicator of how many of those receiving public assistance. This report summarizes the results of this data collection effort and the experiences of the RBCs in contacting County and COE officials.

In the SCAG Region the 3 Big Eligible Populations include the following recipients (which are qualified individuals and not the number of households that requires a calculation of the average number of people per household for each of these public assistance categories):
  — Medi-Cal Recipients: 7,221,232
  — CalFresh Recipients: 2,247,876
  — NSLP Students: 2,835,435
The University of California (USC) Annenberg School estimates that the number of low-income households that were eligible for the FCC Emergency Broadband Benefit Program (EBB) was 2,554,905 and only 473,183 (18.5%) enrolled.

Data Collection Findings and Results

- County and COE officials were responsive to the Regional Broadband Consortia (RBCs) when contact was made with the appropriate agency administrator. Counties and COE officials generally can provide the number of recipients and some are able to provide data about the number of households (taking into account that often there are multiple enrolled beneficiaries in a given households).

- Counties and COEs, however, generally do not ask public assistance applicants for email addresses and cannot easily determine how many of their enrolled households can be reached online. The California State Department of Public Social Services (DPPS) also does not collect information about the number of Medi-Cal or CalFresh recipients with email addresses on file and do not address the opportunities of reducing bureaucracy (or vehicle trips) by helping clients get online to help them save time and money.

- Although CalFresh encourages online applications and Medi-Cal applications can be submitted online, the applications do not require an email address. It appears that a low percentage of applicants voluntarily provide their email addresses and neither program has focused on being able to communicate with these clients via the internet.

- COEs and School Districts often decline to provide data citing confidentiality concerns, however that restriction does not apply to non-personalized aggregate population statistics.

- Another possible indicator of the number of low-income households not online is a count of students who received hotspots from School Districts during the pandemic shelter-in-place orders. COEs and some School Districts have figures about the number of hotspots distributed, but not have a count of households or sufficient information about the nature of connectivity or digital literacy proficiency for students and households receiving them.

- RBCs received a wide range of responses and results regarding the number of email addresses available for the 3 Big Eligible Populations:
  - Imperial County: Email addresses are available for 20%-27% of recipients.
  - Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties): Counties have email addresses for about 1% of recipients and School Districts have emails addresses for about 18% of NSLP students.
  - Los Angeles County: The data on number of email addresses on file are not available.
  - Ventura County: Email addresses are available for 41%-52% of recipients.

- County and COE officials generally have not thought about the relationship between recipients being online, the ability to reduce vehicle trips, and the opportunity to decrease GHG to help fight climate change. When engaged in the conversations by respected RBC civic leaders, there is a willingness to consider taking action, although many officials say they have limited funding to take on additional work and most have not considered potential operational savings by having all recipients online.

Summary of Major Findings

There is a significant opportunity to increase the number of public assistance recipients who can reduce vehicle trips if they are connected at home with high-speed Internet access and have the appropriate computing devices and digital literacy skills. However, Counties and COEs cannot communicate with recipients if they don't collect email addresses and ensure they can interact and conduct business online. Based on the USC estimate for the number of households eligible for EBB, which is a reliable indicator for the number of households also qualifying for the successor FCC subsidy for Internet service, Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), the vast majority of public assistance households—on average at least 50% and likely up to 80%--could reduce vehicle trips if Counties and COEs (to engage all School Districts):

➢ Adopt a policy to get all recipients connected to affordable home Internet service, establish a practice to collect email addresses from all recipients, and shift to online as many meetings and communications as possible.
➢ Launch a focused effort to inform all recipients about ACP and refer them to community resources to help them enroll (or subscribe for another affordable Internet service), obtain appropriate devices, and acquire sufficient digital proficiency.
➢ Proactively engage recipients online with information and support to help them save time and money and get out of poverty.