

Highway 1 Tourism Alliance Board of Directors Meeting Minutes | January 28, 2026 | Cambria Pines Lodge

H1TA Board Members Present: Gary Setting, Melissa Kurry, Mike Hanchett, Laila Kollmann, Bram Winter

Absent: Aaron Graves

County Liaison: Tessa Cornejo

Staff: CAO Cheryl Cuming

Guests: Lisa Belsanti (Visit SLO CAL); Emily Brown (Civitas) via Zoom; Lori Ritchey

Call to Order

2:15pm by Vice Chair Kurry

Public Comment

None

Administrative Items

- Roll Call: Gary Setting, Melissa Kurry, Laila Kollmann, Mike Hanchett, Aaron Graves, Bram Winter are present
- Next board meeting dates are February 25, 2026 and March 25, 2026. Board of Supervisors meeting on February 10 to review survey results and determine support for '94 formation.

Information Items

The December financials were reviewed. Contingency spend was \$72,671 of the \$325,207 budgeted for FYE 6/30/2025. Revenue was \$819,275 and expenses paid were \$732,430. Mike asked how other regions were faring and Lisa shared that Paso Robles and Atascadero are both down, SLO CAL is flat overall.

The SLO County Airport has a record breaking passenger year in 2025. Lisa Belsanti provided a recap of the "Turns Well Taken" campaign that launches February 2. She also updated on the new DAM with logins for all LFAs available.

The mid-year marketing report was presented by Lori Ritchey. Highlights include:

Website Performance: Over 715,000 sessions with notable time on site. The mix of traffic sources - paid, organic search, and direct are all contributing. On pace to match or beat last year.

Paid Media: Delivered 36.6M impressions, 917K engagements, 471K clicks, and 241K key events.

Spend was essentially flat at \$212K (-1% YoY), but results increased: +33% visitors and +26% key events year-over-year. Lowest cost-per-conversion (\$0.88) in six years, with high-quality actions.

Database growth is \$0.97 cost per lead.

SEO (Google Search): When people Google things like trips, beaches, or Highway 1 — we show up.

Visibility almost doubled from last year. Search is changing, we're growing, others are shrinking. Our content is earning exposure, aligns with searches, structured in a way Google can understand.

GEO (AI & ChatGPT Visibility): We're adapting early. AI is sending people our way. SEO aims to get users to click on our website from a search results page and GEO aims to get our brand mentioned, cited, or recommended within an AI-generated response, even when no click happens. Expect more visibility and fewer traditional clicks; we track GEO alongside SEO.

Content Strategy Update: The goal is to stay helpful and easy to find in Google and in AI. No one wants a robot travel guide. They want a local.

Email Summary: Improving list health. Almost 150,000 people on our email list. When we target new and engaged people, open rates are about 50%; a meaningful portion of the list hasn't engaged recently, which limits reach and can impact deliverability. Next step is a re-engagement plan to reactivate them or clean the list.

Organic Social Media: Across Instagram and Facebook, we've reached 7.4M impressions and generated 147K engagements, plus 13K shares.

PR & Stewardship: The reopening created a major PR opportunity, and we capitalized on it - Kirstin went to IMM and met with 23 editors and writers from top travel publications. Takeaway was that almost every outlet said they're eager for more road trip stories this year, largely due to the economy and the rise of nostalgia as a major travel trend, making road trips a natural fit.

Presentations

None

Consent Items

- A motion was made by Mike Hanchett and seconded by Laila Kollmann to approve the December 3 minutes, as well as the December financials. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.

Action Items (each topic will allow for Board Discussion, followed by Public Comment)

- **Constituent Survey:** Presentation materials were shared, including the highlight that TOT since inception is up 183%. San Simeon has been down almost 25% since the highway closure in 2022. The survey results also included data that the respondents who protested rated the CBID at least as favorably as those that did not protest, and the respondents that are highly engaged had a much more positive overall impression of the CBID's efforts.

Tessa discussed the February 10 BOS Agenda and the survey presentation. She indicated that the staff recommendation will be to move forward with the 1994 District formation. A letter of support from SLO CAL was shared, and the board asked that their thanks be sent back to SLO CAL. A draft letter from the H1TA board to the Board of Directors was shared for review and comment.

A motion was made by Laila Kollmann and seconded by Gary Setting to approve the letter as presented for submission to the Public Comment correspondence for the 2/10 BOS meeting. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.

The draft plan of action for the 2/9 and 2/10 BOS meetings was reviewed including deadlines, key talking points, participants for "Walk the Hall" meetings, partners that are anticipated to provide letters of support and responses from protest votes.

A motion was made by Melissa Kurry and seconded by Mike Hanchett to approve the plan. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.

- **1989 Renewal & 1994 Formation:** Emily Brown presented the Services Plan in preparation for the 1994 formation Marketing District Plan (MDP) development. The plan is not formally required, but Civitas and the Steering Committee are recommending it. Laila asked about shared admin expenses and Emily noted that the Steering Committee recommends we keep these details as

they are under the current district, and that will be outlined in the MDP. Tessa asked about the 1989 disestablishment process and Emily confirmed that it is needed. Review of the district map included discussion from Mike and Bram that it needs to be updated to planning districts or coastal zones.

A motion was made by Bram Winter and seconded by Mike Hanchett to move forward with the MDP based on the Services Plan. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.

- **Open Board Positions:** The CAO confirmed that there is one open position on the Highway 1 Tourism Alliance Board of Directors.
- **Open Board Positions:** Regarding Chair and Vice Chair (which are reconfirmed annually in January), a motion was made by Bram Winter and seconded by Laila Kollmann to nominate Aaron Graves as Chair and Melissa Kurry as Vice Chair. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.
- **Local Fund Area Applications**
 - Cambria & San Simeon: Central Coast Classico - A motion was made by Mike Hanchett and seconded by Bram Winter to approve \$45,000 from Cambria and \$5,000 from San Simeon for the Central Coast Classico event. Mike asked about Aaron Linn being the promoter and CAO Cuming confirmed that he wants to create this event based on the past success of Eroica. It was noted that the organization will also be asking the Cayucos LFA for \$6,000. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.
 - Cambria: Film Festival - A motion was made by Bram Winter and seconded by Mike Hanchett to approve \$4,500 for the Cambria Film Festival. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.
 - Cayucos: ECOSLO Summer Beach Cleanups: A motion was made by Bram Winter and seconded by Laila Kollmann to approve \$2,500 for the Summer Beach Cleanups. Mike asked if the Executive Director of ECOSLO is related to Supervisor Paulding; Tessa confirmed that Kendra is his wife. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.
 - Oceano | Nipomo: TJA marketing contract addendum – CAO provided background on why additional marketing funds need to be approved, and expressed the concern shared from the O/N LFA board on the budget management by TJA. A motion was made by Laila Kollmann and seconded by Bram Winter to approve \$12,000 for the contract addendum. With no further discussion, the motion was approved by a voice vote of the Board.
- **Local Fund Area Contracts**
 - None

Future Agenda Items

- Review outcomes from 2/9 and 2/10 BOS meetings
- Management District Plan draft
- Tax Returns
- VAC Classico funding
- Visitor Journalist budget needs following success at IMM
- Investment policy, including parameters

ADA Notice: To receive reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act during the meeting, please notify the local fund area administrator at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting.



Closing Comments & Adjournment

Melissa thanked the BID Bunch for great mid-year results. The Board also thanked Tessa for all her work in preparation for the 2/10 BOS meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:03pm.

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