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September 16, 2021

Chair Catherine Blakespear  
Board of Directors  
San Diego Association of Governments  
401 B. Street, Suite 800  
San Diego, CA 92101

**SUBJECT: Recommendations for Reform for SANDAG's Bicycle Safety Projects**

Dear Chair Blakespear:

On behalf of the below organizations, we are writing to provide recommendations for how SANDAG should reform its efforts to build safe bicycle infrastructure for the San Diego region.

**1. Introduction**

SANDAG has a strong record of leadership among regional planning agencies for funding bicycle projects. Safe bicycle infrastructure is crucial to achieving climate and mode-share goals, and to save lives.

Unfortunately, the process of taking projects from planning through approval and construction has been unacceptably slow and expensive. Significant media coverage illustrates how SANDAG spends enormous amounts of funding on planning efforts, with too few bicycle lane miles to show for it.<sup>1</sup>

We certainly support SANDAG continuing to fully fund its planned projects. However, the agency also needs to reform how it operates.

**2. The SANDAG Board of Directors should direct staff to adopt reasonable time frames for soliciting community input.**

SANDAG as an agency has prioritized community consensus over approving projects in a timely manner. In prior years, the Board of Directors and staff executive leadership was not as supportive of bicycle lanes as the current Board and executive leadership claims to be. Still, with new leadership, the agency continues to take unacceptably long periods of time to bring projects to the SANDAG Board for approval.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Bowen, "\$61 Million Spent On SANDAG's Bike Program; Less Than 4 Miles Completed," KPBS, January 10, 2018, available at <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2018/jan/10/sandag-bike-program-less-4-miles-complete>; Joshua Emerson Smith, "SANDAG's regional bikeway program delayed a year, \$79 million over budget," October 28, 2019, San Diego Union Tribune, available at <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/transportation/story/2019-10-28/sandag-bikeway-program-79-million-over-budget>.

It is necessary for explicit direction to be given to SANDAG staff about new priorities.

The elected officials on the SANDAG Board should direct staff to change their priorities in favor of faster approval. Community engagement and should still be a part of any design and approval, but it should not be an indefinite process with unlimited opportunities for delay. Staff should be directed to identify at the outset of a reasonable timeline—usually no more than six months—and to stick to that timeline. If community consensus is not reached on a design, staff should bring their best proposal to the SANDAG Board for consideration and adoption.

**3. The SANDAG Board of Directors should direct staff to design future projects in a cost-efficient manner.**

The approach by SANDAG for their active transportation projects has been to bolster them with other amenities in the hope of securing support from skeptics. Many of these amenities are actually benefits for cars, like parking spaces and meters. The result is that projects tend to be very expensive, and take a long time to complete. While projects like the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue bike lanes will be attractive, they are taking many years to construct, in stark contrast to the quick and successful 30<sup>th</sup> Street bike lanes. For every year of delay, lives are placed in danger.

SANDAG staff should be directed to prioritize safety and speed of implementation into future designs. Building ever-more elaborate amenities to attract community support was a well-intentioned strategy, but the agency should learn that it has not succeeded.

This recommendation is not about spending less money on active transportation. Instead, if they money allocated for bike lanes were spend more efficiently, then more safe bike lanes can be built throughout the region.

**4. Conclusion**

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. We believe that the SANDAG Board of Directors and staff, are committed to making our streets safer for bicyclists. However, we also recognize that the current processes are flawed, and need reform.

Sincerely,

Colin Parent  
Executive Director and General Counsel  
Circulate San Diego

Andy Hanshaw  
Executive Director  
San Diego Bicycle Coalition

Noah Harris  
Transportation Policy Advocate  
Climate Action Campaign