

September 15, 2014

California State Transportation Agency
Secretary Brian Kelly
Undersecretary Brian Annis
915 Capitol Mall, Suite 350 B
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Kelly and staff:

In April 2013, the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) created the California Transportation Infrastructure Priorities (CTIP) workgroup to answer: *“What should California’s transportation system look like in ten years? How do we get there?”*

With the litany of sustainability legislation passed in recent years, AB 32, SB 375, SB 743 and SB 391 to name a few, California is committed to aggressively reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving health, equity, and sustainability for future generations. Californians are embracing the vision, as evident by Caltrans’ most comprehensive household travel survey, which found that 18 percent of all trips in California are made by walking and biking – nearly double since the year 2000. Our transportation system needs to reflect this commitment: state dollars *must be* dedicated to projects that promote walking, biking, and transit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions for future generations.

Due to the significant shift in state policy priorities, we are supportive of the CTIP effort to reform state funding programs to better implement the state’s sustainability goals. While we would like to support the specific recommendations listed in the CTIP State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Draft Whitepaper, we believe there is a stronger role CalSTA can play to ensure the STIP promotes sustainability and aligns with the state’s policy priorities. We offer the following comments and urge CalSTA to incorporate them into the STIP Draft Whitepaper.

Establish Strong Recommendations that Align the STIP with State Goals

The introduction to the Draft Whitepaper gives a robust explanation of the STIP and the state’s transportation priorities. This provides a strong platform for STIP reform recommendations that tackle the issues laid out in the introduction. However, the draft recommendations that follow seem to be disembodied from the introduction. Instead of suggesting better alignment of the STIP with current state goals, the recommendations largely promote a passive position that maintains the current status quo. We recommend that the STIP Draft Whitepaper promote better consistency by revising the recommendations to address the issues in the introduction, particularly around ensuring that the public dollars are well-spent and consistent with state policy.

Include SB 743 as a Key State Policy that Will Impact Project Selection

SB 743 directs the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to revise CEQA Guidelines to provide an alternative to Level-of-Service when evaluating transportation impacts. One of the reasons for the state policy reform that SB 743 requires is the potential for induced demand from

roadway expansion, the transportation phenomenon that the Draft Whitepaper explains well. SB 743 aims to “more appropriately balance the needs of congestion management with statewide goals related to infill development, promotion of public health through active transportation, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.” This key statewide policy will impact transportation planning and programming in future STIP cycles. We recommend that the STIP Draft Whitepaper specifically call out and address the role of SB 743 in Section 4: Impact of AB 32, SB 375, and SB 391 on Project Selection.

Promote Operational Improvements to Increase Capacity

If we want to better align the STIP with the goals of AB 32, SB 375, SB 743, and SB 391, the draft recommendations should explicitly state that highway capacity expansion must be used as a last resort. The recommendations should also prioritize highway capacity projects that increase throughput without physical expansion. Programs like the Freeway Service Patrol (FSP), which address commute traffic pattern problems by removing obstructions on the freeway as rapidly as possible, reduces overall traffic congestion and minimizes automobile emissions. Ramp meters and other tools are other positive ways to increase highway capacity and reduce traffic congestion without physically expanding highways.

Revise Recommendation 6.1 to Focus on State Policy Objectives

Recommendation 6.1 largely reinforces the current stated policy objective for the STIP and does not reflect the reform implied by the background on the changing policy landscape in the first five sections. Focusing only on regional and interregional policy objectives diminishes the role of state agency accountability for ensuring state policy implementation with state funds. We urge CalSTA to revise this recommendation to reflect a reformed policy objective for the STIP that implements the state policies outlined in Section 5.

In addition, the STIP Draft Whitepaper recommended against the State Smart Transportation Initiative (SSTI) recommendation that the State pursue legislation to allow the California Transportation Commission to reject individual projects in the STIP if they are not consistent with state policy goals. However, we urge CalSTA to strengthen their role and CTC’s oversight of the STIP by incorporating the following recommendations from the SSTI report into the Draft Whitepaper:

- The STIP Whitepaper should provide clarification on the CTC’s legal authority regarding the STIP. Our research showed that the CTC has the authority to “deviate” from RTIP if there is “an overriding state interest” Cal. Code Regs. tit. 21, § 8116. The Whitepaper should clarify if the CTC has this authority and address the need for additional legislation to strengthen and empower the CTC to align STIP funding to state priorities.
- CalSTA should review the proposed STIP project list more than a week before they go to the CTC for approval. CalSTA must become more engaged in the project selection and act as an informed resource for policies that could lead to better projects.
- CalSTA and Caltrans should utilize the CTC review process to implement a policy review of all the proposed investments. This would better shape the process to focus on

more strategic questions of policy and measuring performance versus minute details such as property acquisition and project cost changes.

Revise Recommendation 6.3 to Recognize Complete Streets Requirements

We support the assertion that STIP dollars should increasingly support rail, transit, and active transportation, with a decreasing emphasis on highway expansion. In acknowledging that highway expansion projects will continue to be funded through the STIP, the recommendation should call out the requirement to design for “Complete Streets”, or accommodate all users, on highway projects. At a minimum, the recommendation should specifically state that highway expansion projects that worsen conditions or create additional barriers for pedestrians or bicyclists should be ineligible for STIP funding.

In closing, we are supportive of CalSTA efforts to transform state transportation funding to better reflect the shift California is making to a more sustainable future. Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the groups for follow-up.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth O’Donoghue, Director of Infrastructure and Land Use
The Nature Conservancy

Jeanie Ward Waller, California Advocacy Organizer
Safe Routes to School National Partnership

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