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May 18, 2021

The Honorable David S. Kim
Secretary
California State Transportation Agency
915 Capitol Mall, Suite 350B
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Comments on the Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure

Dear Secretary Kim:

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) plans, funds, delivers, and operates transportation solutions for Orange County's 3.2 million residents, 1.5 million employees, and over 45 million annual visitors. OCTA's efforts help to shape the Southern California Associations of Governments' Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that, if implemented, will significantly reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions between now and 2045. To meet the GHG reduction targets, OCTA and other agencies will need to make major investments in nearly every form of Southern California transportation infrastructure and related programs.

Developed pursuant to the Governor's Executive Order N-19-19, the Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI) Plan aims to assist the State in meeting its climate change goals, by seeking ways to improve alignment over transportation planning, funding, and programming processes. OCTA is supportive of the State's climate goals and has developed many of its own innovative programs aligned with that purpose. This includes an expansive advanced environmental mitigation program, the adoption of a plan to convert OCTA's transit fleet to entirely zero-emission by 2040, the construction of the largest hydrogen fueling station for transit purposes in the country, and innovative transit passes to allow colleges students to ride transit for free. Going forward, OCTA is leading several studies to build on these efforts and inform other climate change processes, including analysis related to the resiliency of rail infrastructure to climate change impacts, potential new transit connectivity projects, and new ways to incentivize transit usage.

However, in order to achieve further GHG reductions and expand on the aforementioned activities, OCTA will need additional funding and technical support from the State. OCTA is providing the following recommendations that would enhance the currently proposed approach.

Provide funding for long-term transit operations

As the region's transit agency, OCTA is particularly supportive of CAPTI's recommendation to leverage state programs to support transit-supportive investments such as zero-emission buses, bike and pedestrian improvements, and passenger rail. Funding for zero-emission technologies should also be inclusive of paratransit and microtransit platforms. In addition, while supportive of efforts to further incentivize and provide technical assistance related to the use of contactless fare payment systems, such efforts should remain at each region and agency's discretion and not be directly linked to receipt of existing funds.

To further the effectiveness of CAPTI, which recognizes the need for transit expansion, OCTA encourages the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) to also include a proposal for additional, long-term funding support for increased transit operations.

Support implementation of projects included in an approved RTP

As a regional agency, OCTA is concerned that CAPTI may impede delivery of approved RTPs that achieve regional GHG reduction targets and meet federal conformity requirements. RTPs chart the path to more mobile and sustainable regions, and the projects and programs in RTPs require a substantial investment of time and capital to make that happen. OCTA is concerned that portions of CAPTI may reduce access to SB 1 (Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017) funding for committed RTP projects. Many of these projects resolve operational challenges and are essential to improving mobility, air quality, and reducing GHG emissions.

Continue support for Self-Help County investments

For years, self-help counties have worked with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the State to deliver commitments to both on-system and off-system improvements funded through voter-approved sales tax measures. While CAPTI does not directly impact use of local sales tax measure funds, OCTA is concerned that the CalSTA's priorities identified in CAPTI could result in a reluctance by state partners to support these voter-approved commitments. Therefore, OCTA would appreciate inclusion of assurances that protect and preserve long-standing partnerships between the State and self-help counties and help to deliver many more beneficial projects in the years to come.

Convene a roadway pricing group that includes toll operators and transportation sales tax counties

Southern California regional transportation agencies, including OCTA, have significant experience in developing policies and overseeing tolling activities within the State. As the implementing agencies and operators of all existing toll facilities in the State, regional transportation agencies have knowledge and experience related to the construction, financing and operating of such facilities. Furthermore, pursuant to current state statute, regional agencies are planning for expansion of tolling, and the reinvestment of any revenues from such facilities in multimodal improvements that are critical to goals outlined by the CAPTI initiative.

Because these expansive activities are already undertaken by regional transportation agencies, in coordination with Caltrans, any recommendations related to developing future pricing and roadway tolling activities should build from the existing frameworks and be coordinated with those regional transportation agencies who are already implementing such policies. In order to ensure that any future pricing policies do not conflict or undermine the operation, financing or statutory authority underpinning such facilities, any discussions related to future pricing policy must include those agencies that are current owners and operators. This would include coordination with the California Toll Operators Committee (CTOC), which includes representation of all existing toll operators in the State in addition to Caltrans. CTOC was formed pursuant to state statute to coordinate operations and enforcement activities and develop parameters for interoperability. In addition, the Self-Help Counties Coalition (SHCC) represents many regional transportation agencies who not only operate existing facilities but are also planning for future facilities. The SHCC was also the sponsor of AB 194 (Chapter 687, Statutes of 2015), which is the underlying statutory authority for future tolling facilities in the State. Each of these groups should be at the table if any future roadway pricing group is formed.

Transportation Funding Linkages to Infill Housing

While understanding of the significant need for housing development across the State and exploration of proposals to incentivize the development of such, OCTA encourages any linkage to transportation be limited to new sources of funding, or funding sources approved directly for such purposes. Linking infill housing directly to transportation funds, could potentially create tension undermining local support for transportation projects that may benefit CAPTI's overall goals.

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Because transportation agencies do not directly control zoning requirements or development approvals, many of these decisions related to housing occur separately, without transportation agency input. It would therefore potentially impede a transportation agency's ability to compete for funding for worthwhile projects.

OCTA looks forward to working with CalSTA on CAPTI next steps and will continue to be involved in subsequent updates to funding program guidelines. OCTA also appreciates that CalSTA has indicated that the plan will have the ability to evolve over time in case challenges arise in ways that negatively impact transportation. Thank you for providing this opportunity to comment. If you have any questions or need additional clarification, please contact me at (714) 560-5343 or djohnson@octa.net.

Sincerely,



Darrell E. Johnson
Chief Executive Officer

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c: Chair Hilary Norton, California Transportation Commission