



May 18, 2021

Darwin Moosavi
Deputy Secretary, Environmental Policy and Housing Coordination
California State Transportation Agency
915 Capitol Mall, Suite 350B
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AMBAG Comments on CalSTA's Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure Plan (CAPTI)

Dear Mr. Moosavi:

We understand and appreciate Governor Newsom's goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and encourage additional investments in public transportation and active transportation projects. The Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure Plan (CAPTI) serves as an important document to work collectively on those efforts. While the Central Coast Coalition is in strong support of addressing climate change and appreciates your leadership on this issue, success will require creative, flexible, and pragmatic solutions to account for the unique opportunities and challenges that face each region.

The CAPTI strategy to prioritize certain projects will benefit the Central Coast region to the extent that we have been working for many years to increase rail service along the Central Coast and are currently working on several bus-rapid transit corridors. However, we are concerned that this strategy will neglect critical highway safety and congestion relief improvements that support goods movement, tourist travel, transit travel times, and employees who are traveling to jobs in major urbanized areas. These improvements are delivered in partnership between the State, Regional and Local partners and oftentimes rely upon state competitive grants for delivery. Given the region's unique geography, vast agricultural farmland, heavy goods movement, tourism traffic and the jobs-housing imbalance we must continue to accommodate all modes of travel in the AMBAG region. With a population under 800,000, the AMBAG region does not experience the same travel patterns as high-density urban areas. As such, our region requires continued state investment along several key highway routes, including Highways 1, 17, 25, 152, 156, and U.S. 101 to maximize safety, goods movement and mobility within the region.

Regional flexibility and regulatory relief for rail, bus and active transportation is key to supporting a balanced multimodal transportation system that will meet our mutual goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reducing fatalities and injuries, and enhancing mobility. Our key comments are as follows:

Allow Regional Flexibility to Address Safety, Goods Movement and Mobility Needs

State funding programs should provide flexibility to regions so that they can address all modes efficiently as possible to maximize safety, mobility, goods movement, and throughput in order to expedite the response to climate change. AMBAG requests that CAPTI adopt a geographically sensitive approach in recognition that many parts of the state are more rural than the large urbanized areas.

The AMBAG region has an equitable, sustainable and multimodal approach to improving the transportation network. Our multimodal regional transportation plans detail the substantial need for investments to expand rail service on the rail line to Monterey County. In fact, we strongly urge CalSTA to support making Coast Rail service a reality by filling the 153-mile gap in rail service between Gilroy and San Luis Obispo. Our regional plans also include bus-on-shoulder in Santa Cruz County and the SURF! Busway along the Monterey Branch Line. In addition, there are substantial plans to expand bicycle and pedestrian facilities and networks, such as the Fort Ord Regional Trail and Greenway in Monterey County and Monterey Bay Sanctuary Scenic Trail/Rail Trail in Santa Cruz County. We submitted many of these projects in the last Active Transportation Program funding round and strongly support the CTC's request for a \$2 billion investment of general funds in this oversubscribed program.

One of the strategies identified by CAPTI, however, is to 'promote projects that do not increase passenger vehicle travel'. AMBAG requests that CalSTA take a geographically sensitive approach to this strategy as there are small urban/rural areas that still need to plan, fund and deliver projects that address safety and support goods movement. Note that improving roadway safety by reducing injuries and fatalities on our state highways is a key priority for both regional and state agencies. These projects will include proven safety countermeasures, such as roundabouts or new interchanges connected by a network of new frontage roads. It is important to not exclude such safety improvements from SB 1 funding programs if our Vision Zero goals are to be met.

Further, the AMBAG region represents one of the most productive agricultural regions in the state, if not the world. Fresh produce, berries and wine grapes cannot be delayed when going to processing or to market. Investment in regional goods movement transportation corridors will remain a priority for our region.

Finally, the state must also consider areas where capacity expansion is necessary to address climate adaptation and resiliency or to close gaps on evacuation routes to prepare for natural disasters or other climate events. Examples of recent climate resiliency gaps include mudslides near Big Sur severing access to Highway 1, and when Interstate 5 closed during inclement weather events over the Grapevine, making US 101 the only north-south alternative. These safety improvements rely upon state investments that are not just critical for regional needs but also meet state and national priorities

Support Additional Strategies that Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

As noted above, our region fully supports investments into public transportation, but transit is not the universal answer to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Expanded electric vehicle use and charging facilities and enhanced broadband capacity should be a key part of our climate action strategy.

The pandemic's crash course in teleworking has proven it to be effective at reducing travel while maintaining the productivity needs of employers and employees in many industries. We request that CalSTA include in its strategies expanded investment in broadband, particularly in rural areas, to support enhanced telecommuting, and state support for local implementation of transportation demand management strategies, vanpools and park-and-ride lots, and VMT-mitigation credits.

In addition, we appreciate the Governor's direction through N-79-20 to invest more into zero-emission infrastructure and ask that the Central Coast be considered a priority for rebates for zero-emission vehicle purchases as a critical opportunity to help the region realize its air quality and mobility goals. The Central Coast is working collectively with Caltrans on installing charging stations within the region and has applied for a Caltrans planning grant to enhance our efforts. These strategies should be a key part of the Climate Action Plan whose ultimate goal is not just to reduce vehicle miles travel but also to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Support the Will of the Voters and Maintain State and Local Partnerships

All three of the counties in the AMBAG region have enacted local sales tax measures that make multimodal improvements on and near the state highway system. These measures required comprehensive public engagement, contain diverse investments in multi-modal options, and required a 2/3 vote for passage. Our agencies have made a commitment to the voters and our public to deliver the investments that our expenditure plans promised. A key part of keeping our promises is to secure state matching funds, since each county does not generate enough in

local sales tax revenues to make up for the disproportionate cost of delivering projects. This funding gap makes continued access to state funding for a multimodal range of projects imperative.

In 2017, the legislature enacted SB1 to address mobility, safety and congestion, in addition to maintaining infrastructure. The Central Coast advocated for the bill to include: the creation of the vehicle registration fee as a carbon-neutral funding source to address congestion and multimodal options; the creation of the State Rail Assistance Program, dedicating operations funding for passenger rail service; and augmentation of the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program. In 2018 voters rejected Proposition 6 (the repeal of SB 1) and supported Proposition 69 (protecting SB 1). It is important to support the intent of the voters in order to maintain the public trust, by preserving all of the modes supported in the original SB 1 legislation.

In conclusion, AMBAG wants to be part of the plan to take action to limit climate change, but we ask that state investments be responsive to the unique needs and characteristics of each region: urban and rural, valley and coastal. We look forward to partnering with you and the appropriate state agencies to develop pragmatic solutions to meet the objectives articulated in the Executive Orders and providing additional input on the development of CAPTI.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (831) 264-5100 or mtwomey@ambag.org.

Sincerely,



Maura Twomey
Executive Director