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May 18, 2021

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

RE: Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) Considerations on the Draft Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI)

Dear Secretary Kim:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft CAPTI framework. 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. CAPTI serves as an important strategy to work collectively on those efforts. While TAM 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.

Background

In 2018, almost 77% of Marin voters approved Measure AA, a ½ cent, 30-year local sales tax measure that makes multimodal improvements throughout the county, including some that are on and near the state highway system, which is a state-owned asset. These measures require comprehensive public engagement, contain diverse investments in multi-modal options, and ultimately require a 2/3 vote for passage.

It is worth noting that TAM's voter-approved ½-cent transportation sales tax measure dedicates 55% of its funding annually to transit operations and another approximately 15% to active and alternative transportation modes. In addition, TAM is one of the few county transportation agencies with a dedicated source of funding for an alternative fuels program, and we have provided funding to support the installation of over 300 electric chargers in the County.

The sales tax measure and other locally approved measures such as Regional Measure 3 also include improvements that are aimed at improving safety, efficiency, and access on or near the state highway system. For example, Highway 101 is the County's "main street" and serves as the main arterial for the North Bay and beyond. TAM's local measure includes a number of projects to enhance access and throughput on Highway 101 to help move people on and across the highway in a safe manner. Another example is State Route 37, where currently no transit services exist; in order to add efficient bus service that provides a travel time savings to users, it would be necessary to add an HOV lane to the corridor – adding capacity but doing so in order to develop a robust transit network. In both cases, a local agency like TAM, with locally committed funding, relies on partnership with the State to deliver improvements on the state highway system.

This two-pronged approach is woven into the expenditure plan – continuing to improve the current system, while simultaneously working toward reducing GHG emissions.

Our suggestions are as follows:

1. Support the Will of the Voters to Complete Projects and Maximize Investments

Our agency has made a commitment to the voters and our public to deliver the investments that our expenditure plan promised. A key part of keeping our promises is to secure state matching funds (as well as implementation support) 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 multi-modal range of projects imperative.

Our request is to maintain the state and local partnership and maximize the return on previous investments by allowing for local sales tax measures to continue leveraging state dollars to deliver regionally significant highway capacity projects, particularly if a project includes a safety or multi-modal component, such as making active or public transit more accessible, efficient, and reliable.

2. Allow Flexibility in State Funding Programs to Address Safety, Goods Movement and Mobility Needs

State funding programs should provide flexibility to regions so that they can address all modes efficiently to maximize safety, mobility, goods movement, and throughput in order to expedite the response to climate change, especially on the state highway system. We request that CAPTI recognizes small urban/rural areas that still need to plan, fund, and deliver projects on the state highway system that addresses safety and congestion along lifeline routes such as Highways 37 and 101.

Rather than prioritizing non-capacity inducing projects on the state highway system, we suggest that state funding programs, particularly the SB 1 competitive programs – Local Partnership Program, Solutions for Congested Corridors, and Trade Corridor Enhancement Program – provide greater flexibility to address all modes, such as more funding for regional transit networks, grade separations, passenger rail, or active transportation projects.

3. Support Additional Strategies that Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

We are supportive of the Governor's direction through N-79-20, and the proposed \$2.3 billion in the FY 2021-22 State Budget, to invest more into zero-emission infrastructure. Our suggestions are to expand electric vehicle use; expand grants, rebates or incentives for individuals and agencies to convert to electric vehicles including buses; expand funding and remove regulatory hurdles for installation of charging facilities and provide necessary utility infrastructure to support this shift; and enhance broadband capacity. In particular we ask that low-income residents in the Bay Area be considered a priority for rebates for zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) purchases and charging infrastructure as a critical opportunity to help the region realize its air quality and mobility goals.

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. Therefore, we further request that CalSTA includes in its strategies expanded investment in broadband, particularly in underserved 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, which may expedite addressing climate change.

In conclusion, TAM is an eager partner in taking action to combat climate change and deliver more multi-modal options, and, at the same time, we ask that state investments be responsive to local, voter-approved plans that reflect the unique needs and characteristics of each region. We look forward to partnering with you and the appropriate state agencies to develop pragmatic solutions and to deliver local and state priorities.

Sincerely,



Anne Richman
Executive Director

cc: The Honorable Marc Levine, Assembly Member, 10th District
The Honorable Mike McGuire, Senator, 2nd District
Hilary Norton, Chair, California Transportation Commission
Mitch Weiss, Executive Director, California Transportation Commission
Toks Omishakin, Director, Caltrans
Darwin Moosavi, Deputy Secretary, California State Transportation Agency