

May 17, 2021

Via email: [capti@calsta.ca.gov](mailto:capti@calsta.ca.gov)

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

**SUBJECT:** Comments on Draft Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure

Dear Secretary Kim,

The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) thanks the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) for the opportunity to comment on the 2021 Draft Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI). The CAPTI serves as an important document to achieve the State's ambitious climate goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled, while encouraging additional investment in public transportation and active transportation projects. Along with the Central Coast Coalition, our Agency is in strong support of addressing climate change and appreciates your efforts and leadership on this issue. TAMC believes that its successful implementation will require a range of creative, flexible and pragmatic solutions to address the unique opportunities and challenges that face each region.

The CAPTI strategy to prioritize rail and transit projects will benefit Monterey County as we have been working for many years to increase rail service and implement bus rapid transit corridors along the Central Coast. Also, the CAPTI will enhance our ability to build out our regional bicycle and pedestrian network, including building the 28-mile network of trails christened the Fort Ord Regional Trail and Greenway project.

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 agencies and oftentimes rely on competitive state grants for delivery. Given our unique geography, vast agricultural farmland, heavy goods movement, tourism traffic and the jobs-housing imbalance, we must continue to accommodate all modes of travel across the Central Coast. As such, our region requires continuing investment along several key regional highway routes, including State Route 156, State Route 68 and U.S. Route 101 to maximize safety, goods movement and mobility in the region.

In 2016, 68% of Monterey County voters approved a 3/8% sales tax to fund the Measure X Transportation Safety and Investment Plan, which identifies solutions to regional transportation safety and local road needs of the highest priority. This tax is estimated to generate over \$600 million in funding over the next 30 years for local road projects, regional safety and congestion improvements and bicycle and pedestrian safety and mobility projects. The Agency's Board of Directors' goal is to leverage Measure X dollars to fully fund transportation projects throughout the County. We are concerned that if future Senate Bill 1 monies are shifted away from critical highway safety projects, our Measure X highway safety, goods movement and commuter projects will be shortchanged.

In coordination with the Central Coast Coalition and with input from the Agency's Board of Directors, TAMC has identified key suggestions for your consideration:

**1. Align State Agencies in Support of Rail, Bus and Active Transportation Improvements**

Our Regional Transportation Plan and sales tax measure includes the SURF! Busway and Bus Rapid Transit Project, which will utilize Monterey Branch Line corridor as a two-lane busway facility, running zero emission busses, and improving the route of the existing coastal bicycle trail. This project strongly aligns with the goals of the CAPTI and the State's climate goals and greenhouse gas reduction targets. However, this project, currently in the environmental review phase, has received negative comments from California State Parks - this despite the benefits provided by allowing visitors to travel to the park via bus. In fact, this project is an environmentally-sensitive complement to the Fort Ord Dunes State Park's plan to add new access for RVs and campers. In addition, the California Coastal Commission has expressed its concerns about the project, even though in other venues the Commission has indicated its support for improving bus access to our beaches and parks. We urge CalSTA to reach out to the California Natural Resources Agency and other state agencies to support projects such as the SURF! Busway that align with CAPTI goals. Approval of projects that align with CAPTI goals should be streamlined, not opposed, by other state agencies.

**2. Secure More Funding to Allow Construction of Active Transportation Projects**

Our Transportation Agency's adopted Active Transportation Plan has millions of dollars worth of projects to make it safer for travelers to choose to walk or bike to their destination, in support of health, air quality and environmental enhancement goals. A key project is the above-mentioned Ford Ord Regional Trail and Greenway (FORTAG), which will transform the region around the former Fort Ord military base by providing a 28-mile multi-use trail accessible to all ages and abilities. The trail will provide a healthy and safe way to travel to schools, parks, and residences in the most disadvantaged communities in the greater Monterey Peninsula. We were thrilled to receive Active Transportation Program funding for the first segment of this landmark project to leverage our Measure X monies. However, as more and more communities seek to grow their trails and sidewalks, the ATP funding has become difficult to obtain: the second segment of the trail did not receive Cycle 5 ATP funding. To fund transformational projects such as the FORTAG, we support the use of \$2 billion in surplus general funds in

the current budget to fund this and other trail projects that will significantly increase bicycle and pedestrian travel.

**3. Assist in Obtaining Agreements from Union Pacific for New Passenger Rail Service**

Our multimodal Monterey County Regional Transportation Plan details the substantial commitment we have to expanding rail service from the San Francisco Bay Area to Monterey County. We sincerely appreciate CalSTA and Caltrans' assistance in this effort. In addition, we ask for CalSTA to support running new interregional passenger rail service between San Jose and San Luis Obispo. As we move forward to make these services a reality, we would ask for your continued assistance in overcoming hurdles to project delivery. Specifically, we need to collaborate with CalSTA and other state agencies to leverage the attention and approvals required from Union Pacific to operate new passenger rail service.

**4. Continue to Support State Highway and Regional Road Safety Projects to Address Safety, Goods Movement and Mobility Needs**

Known across the globe as the "Salad Bowl of the World," the Salinas Valley is one of the most productive agricultural zones in the nation. As such, investments in regional goods movement corridors will be a high priority for our region. This investment is particularly important for our communities directly impacted by agricultural production along U.S. 101. Our U.S. 101 South of Salinas Improvement project will improve safety for agricultural goods movement and commuters by eliminating multiple at-grade highway crossings where slow turning trucks conflict with fast moving commuter vehicles. Removal of left turns will facilitate safer travel as well as more frequent transit use. Frontage roads are required as part of the safety improvements that will direct vehicle travel to one existing and one new interchange; the CAPTI should not consider such frontage roads as "capacity-increasing" but rather a critical part of an integrated design that will dramatically decrease injuries and fatalities.

**5. Support Creative Strategies to Reduce Emissions**

Rail and bus transit alone are not the universal answer to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Expanded electric vehicle use and charging facilities, enhanced broadband capacity, and innovative roadway design solutions, such as roundabouts, should be a key part of the state's climate action strategy.

The pandemic quickly taught us the capacity and benefits of teleworking, which have included reduced vehicle miles traveled and cleaner air. TAMC's travel demand management program, Go831, quickly pivoted from carpool and vanpool resources to providing telework and telecommute tools. However, limitations in broadband access have resulted in unequal access to teleworking and remote learning, especially in our more disadvantaged communities. We request that CalSTA include in its strategies expanded investment in and subsidies for broadband, particularly in rural areas, to support remote access to work, school and health care.

Another example that is often overlooked is the impact of roundabouts as a tool for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Roundabouts are a crucial element of our State Route 156 Castroville Boulevard Interchange project, which is estimated to save on average almost 3.5 tons of carbon dioxide emissions annually. Yet we have received significant push-back from Caltrans on the implementation of this feature, despite our professional intersection engineering analysis that confirms the superior safety and operational benefits of the proposed roundabouts. We ask that the CAPTI adopt a roundabout-first policy that supports and educates state engineers in the use of this not-so-new design strategy.

**6. Include Representation from Small Cities and Local Transportation Agencies on the Environmental Justice & Equity Committee**

Monterey County includes several small rural communities where there is potential for implementation of regional rail connections, yet the communities are often bisected by a state highway, surrounded by agricultural fields and navigating a jobs-housing imbalance. These communities, such as the City of King City, hold a unique transportation lens with specific needs that will look different from a more urbanized area such as the City of Monterey. It is essential that the Environmental Justice & Equity Committee identified under Strategy 3.1 include representation from such small cities and local transportation agencies to have a holistic perspective on their unique needs.

In conclusion, TAMC wants to be part of the plan to limit climate change through investments in rail, transit, active transportation, and the array of greenhouse gas reduction strategies that the CAPTI presents. However, we ask that the state support us by making it easier to plan, fund and deliver these projects, and respect the commitments we have made to not only Monterey County's voters, but to the statewide supporters of Senate Bill 1.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Debra L. Hale  
Executive Director