Executive Summary

Transit is more than just a way to get from place to place—it is a vital component of California's vision for a more equitable, prosperous, and environmentally sustainable future. Forward-thinking legislation laid a powerful foundation by recognizing transit as a cornerstone of California's ambitious climate goals. For example, over the past two decades, California passed laws to encourage transit-oriented development and funding for transit improvements to reduce car dependency, and positioned transit as a key solution to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.[1] These laws elevate public transit not only as a solution to meeting California's climate goals, but also as a catalyst for reimagining how Californians live, move, and connect. From integrated, regional planning and transit-oriented development to clean energy innovation, California is charting a path where transit drives progress across every corner statewide.

California's recent housing legislation underscores a growing commitment to building vibrant, transit-connected communities where people can thrive without needing to rely on a car. Recent legislation enabled affordable and mixed-income housing to be built along transit-friendly commercial corridors, and expedited approval processes for urban infill projects, including many near transit.[2] These laws are paving the way for walkable neighborhoods that are affordable, accessible, and sustainable—and they accelerate the creation of homes in the very places where transit can offer the greatest benefit. However, for these laws to work, we need robust, reliable public transportation to serve Californians.

Across California, transit agencies are already proving what is possible when we invest in people, safety, and community. For example, Bay Area Rapid Transit's (BART) Ambassador Program has redefined the rider experience by fostering a sense of presence and care on the system, helping restore trust and safety for thousands of daily riders. In Los Angeles, a groundbreaking, collaborative approach to Measure M united communities and secured transformative, long-term funding to reshape regional mobility. And when

[1] These include the California Green Tariff Shared Renewables Program (S.B. 43, 2014) the California Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act (S.B. 375, 2008) and the California Global Warming (A.B. 32, 2006).
[2] These include the California Affordable Housing and High Road Jobs Act (A.B. 2011, 2022); the California Middle Class Housing Act (S.B. 6, 2022); and the California Streamlined Multifamily Housing Approval Act (S.B. 423, 2023).

disaster strikes, transit acts as a lifeline, playing a critical role in mass evacuations and emergency response, such as during California's recent wildfires. These successes show that transit can be an engine for resilience, equity, and shared prosperity.

Transit in California is at a pivotal moment—facing real challenges yet holding immense promise. Declining ridership and revenues and rising costs test the resilience of our systems, even as operators navigate the effects of complex social issues such as the effect of homelessness, the opioid crisis, and more. Still, transit remains essential to achieving a livable climate, equitable access to opportunity, vibrant communities, and a thriving economy.

Transit reduces traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions by moving people with fewer vehicles and it supports economic activity by enabling access to jobs, education, healthcare, and commerce—greatly improving quality of life, particularly for those who cannot drive to due to age, ability, or income. California's population is aging, and transit connects elderly or disabled riders to vital accessible services. Additionally, transit fosters more livable, inclusive communities by reducing the need for extensive parking and encouraging walkable neighborhoods. For individual users, public transit can offer an affordable, convenient alternative to car ownership, and transit increases mobility and independence for society at large.

California's transit agencies face challenges driven by falling ridership, declining revenues, and rising costs from inflation, infrastructure needs, land-use patterns, and the transition to zero-emission fleets. Together, these factors threaten transit service reliability and financial stability. Task Force members noted that addressing these challenges requires more than reallocating existing dollars—it could be addressed through increased, flexible, and dedicated revenues and funding, efficiencies in capital and operating spending, and diversified revenue streams such as real estate development, toll revenues, and innovative financing tools. Task Force members also noted that legislative changes that reduce costs and expand agencies' authority to capture value from their assets will advance these goals.

With leadership and smart policy, we can transform public transit into a fast, reliable, and dignified alternative to driving—one that connects millions

more people to what matters most. Going forward, California can lead the nation in creating a transportation system that is truly built for the future.

This report is intended as a starting point for future conversations, and not as a menu of ready-made policy or fiscal proposals. Implementation of the recommendations found within this report will require additional development to determine the necessary resources, statutory changes, or other programmatic changes that would be needed before they can be implemented. This additional detail is beyond the scope of this report.

The Task Force's vision is that public transit is the backbone of a prosperous, affordable, climate-resilient, and equitable California—empowering Californians to move freely, reliably, and sustainably.

View the full report on the CalSTA webpage