



***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

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Contact: Eric Davis (916-457-2625) or Glenda Marsh (916-651-8764)

**ECOS and NAST settle with Caltrans to enhance transit access and protect our community and the environment**

ECOS (Environmental Council of Sacramento) and NAST (Neighbors Advocating Sustainable Transportation) have reached a settlement agreement with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) resolving the lawsuit filed over Caltrans' planned expansion of HOV lanes on Highway 50 from Sunrise Boulevard to Watt Avenue.

In light of the ongoing state budget negotiations and the importance of directing stimulus spending at important infrastructure upgrades, ECOS, NAST and Caltrans have agreed on a plan that will protect our communities and the environment while creating thousands of new construction jobs for our region. The agreement:

- clears the way for Caltrans to start construction this year on new HOV lanes on Highway 50 from Sunrise Boulevard to Watt Avenue;
- commits Caltrans to funding \$3.9 million in improvements on Regional Transit's Gold Line that will allow for 15-minute frequency light rail service from Hazel light rail station to downtown Sacramento and additional peak period express trains from Folsom to downtown Sacramento;
- commits Caltrans to funding 3 years (\$3.6 million) of Regional Transit's net operating costs to run 15-minute frequency service to downtown Folsom;
- commits Caltrans to finding an additional \$820,000 to fund construction of a bicycle pedestrian crossing over Highway 59 near Mather Field Road;
- commits Caltrans to enter into discussions with affected communities regarding the allocation of community enhancement funds to maximize access to and use of the Gold Line.

ECOS and NAST challenged Caltrans' proposed Highway 50 expansion on the grounds that the agency had failed to perform adequate environmental review of the project. This past summer, Judge Timothy Frawley ruled in favor of ECOS and NAST, finding that Caltrans had failed to address environmental and community impacts associated with the project and needed to consider transit-oriented alternatives. The delay in project implementation became a point of contention in ongoing budget negotiations between the Governor and the Legislative leadership, and the Governor had proposed altering the landmark California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to specifically exempt this project from the usual environmental review.

By resolving the outstanding litigation over Highway 50, ECOS, NAST, and Caltrans are helping to take CEQA compliance out of ongoing budget negotiations. Furthermore, by committing in

substantial ways to enhance transit service in the corridor and to increase pedestrian and bicycle access to transit, Caltrans has signaled that it understands the environmental and community concerns and will work with all interested parties to maximize the efficient movement of people and goods through the Highway 50 corridor.

ECOS spokesperson Eric Davis noted the historic nature of the agreement. “We are happy that improvements for the benefit of vehicle traffic in the Highway 50 corridor are now tied to improvements to transit service in the same area. Our agreement shows that economic stimulus and environmental protection can go hand in hand. We also hope that resolution of our lawsuit will help prevent the undermining of CEQA during the difficult budget negotiations that are underway.”

The resolution of this lawsuit also gives Regional Transit and Caltrans an unprecedented opportunity to work together to ensure that the highway and transit line function as an integrated system. ECOS and NAST look forward to an evolving relationship with both of these agencies to ensure that future transportation decisions in the corridor follow this promising new model.

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