



ECOS

ENVIRONMENTAL
♦ COUNCIL ♦
OF SACRAMENTO

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A Transportation Plan for All Our Needs

April 19, 2007

Dear SACOG Director,

The signers of this statement represent a broad and diverse cross-section of the population of the Sacramento region: senior citizens, business owners, people with disabilities, teachers, people concerned about housing affordability, planners, doctors, people struggling to get by on lower incomes, architects, environmental scientists and advocates, developers, members of neighborhood associations, students, and many more.

We want to express our gratitude for the committed efforts of SACOG staff in proposing and developing the Blueprint process and for engaging in unprecedented outreach related to the current Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP) update. In particular, Gordon Garry deserves immense credit for SACOG's sophisticated modeling capabilities; Matt Carpenter has done an excellent job coordinating the MTP update workshop process; and Mike McKeever has worked tirelessly balancing competing interests and a limited budget and explaining the complexities in the pursuit of the best possible transportation system for the Sacramento region.

In recent months, as the current MTP update progressed, we eagerly responded to the call to become "citizen planners." We participated in the workshops, testified at hearings and spoke up at meetings because we care about our communities and want to do whatever we can to ensure a future for everybody in the Sacramento region that is healthy, economically successful, socially equitable and environmentally sustainable. We also learned a great deal about our current and future transportation needs and the challenges inherent in preparing the best possible plan. As this update has moved toward completion and the contents of the MTP and related priority lists have become clearer, we have grown increasingly concerned that the package of projects which appears likely to be approved does not adequately address our most pressing needs.

We understand that there are tremendous challenges in developing a comprehensive transportation plan that is coordinated with land use and air quality goals. We harbor no illusions that a "perfect" plan can ever be achieved. However, given the fiscal, social and environmental challenges we face, now and in the coming years and decades, we can and must do better. A number of projects being considered for the MTP will cost huge sums of money but will not deliver a good return on our investment. The following projects, many of which have been identified by members of the SACOG board as priorities, will fail to address our most pressing transportation needs and will actually make it more difficult for us to meet these needs in subsequent planning cycles.

- Road Widenings (e.g., Cosumnes River Boulevard, White Rock Lane, Hazel Avenue)
- Part-Time Highway HOV Lane Extensions and Expansions

- Connector in South and East Sacramento County Along Grant Line Road
- Highway Interchange Widenings
- Downtown-Natomas-Airport Rail Line
- Placer Parkway

Demographics

Our region's population is growing and aging rapidly. Given our current land use and transportation patterns, many of us already find it extremely difficult to simply move about our communities and access our jobs, shopping, schools, government buildings and essential services. Prioritizing projects like those listed above will make mobility and accessibility increasingly challenging in coming years.

The Sacramento region is also facing a growing disparity between wealthier, healthier segments of the population and those among us who are struggling to meet their basic needs. Many thousands of our residents can not afford a vehicle and must rely on transit services that are grossly inadequate or bike lanes or sidewalks that are not connected or do not even exist. The MTP should address this reality by prioritizing investments that will provide real transportation options for everyone.

In order for the Sacramento region to effectively harness population growth and meet even the most basic needs of aging residents, students, people with low incomes and people with disabilities, our transportation plan must reorient investment to serve neighborhoods with mixed land uses that are more walkable, bikeable and livable. Continued prioritizing of projects primarily designed to move cars will hinder these crucial transitions and make life even more difficult for large segments of our population in the years to come.

Environment

The heritage of the Sacramento region is found in our farms and rivers, our rolling oak woodlands and seasonal vernal pool grasslands, and our beautiful trees and wide open skies. We all know that the environment that has nurtured and inspired the people of this region for so long is suffering under the weight of our planning decisions: the seemingly relentless paving over of some of the best farmland in the world; the ongoing destruction of woodlands and open spaces that are home to numerous endangered and threatened species; and the severe and potentially worsening air pollution are but a few examples of the impacts of our planning decisions.

Fiscally and socially responsible transportation planning is also environmentally responsible planning. We need a transportation plan that minimizes the impact of the built environment on the natural environment and that allows all of us to celebrate and enjoy a vibrant and thriving natural heritage for generations to come.

Health

There is increasing realization that our current approach to transportation planning and land use is having negative impacts on public health. Obesity, diabetes and depression, increasingly severe among all age groups and of particular concern among young people, are linked to lack of physical activity, too much time indoors and in the car, and the near impossibility for people in many neighborhoods to walk, bike, access healthy foods, or even just be outdoors.

Severe health impacts and costs can also be traced to air pollution: chronic bronchitis, asthma, lost school/work days, higher cancer rates, and even premature death. These problems will become increasingly compounded as our population ages and may ultimately become completely intractable if we do not commit now to a transportation plan that cleans the air and facilitates a very different lifestyle from the one we have promoted for the last few decades.

Transportation Priorities That Meet Our Needs

The signers of this statement believe that there is a different way — that we can shift our transportation spending priorities to meet the most pressing needs of the Sacramento region with social, fiscal and environmental responsibility and stewardship. We call on you, our elected officials serving on the SACOG board, to carefully consider your upcoming votes on the priority lists and ultimate MTP project list. We urge you to de-prioritize the car-oriented projects that are currently at the top of your priority lists and to instead prioritize the following projects. These projects are not presented in order of priority but are offered as a sample of projects that received broad support from participants in the SACOG workshops and will meet our full range of needs, now and for many years to come.

- “Complete Streets” Throughout the Region (for Pedestrians, Bikes and Wheelchairs)
- Sidewalk, Bike Lane and Transit Connectivity
- Improved Maintenance for Existing Roads and Highways
- Neighborhood Mini Bus Shuttle Service in Central Sacramento (MiniBus Pilot Project)
- Neighborhood Mini Bus Shuttle Service in South Sacramento and Arden Arcade
- Neighborhood Mini Bus Shuttle Service in Placer, El Dorado, Yuba and Sutter Communities
- Increased Bus Service Between Regional Housing/Job Centers
- Increased Bus Service within Natomas and Connecting Natomas to Downtown Sacramento
- Bus Rapid Transit on Watt Avenue and Sunrise Boulevard
- Streetcar Between Downtown Sacramento and West Sacramento
- Double-Track Folsom Light Rail Gold Line to Folsom
- Extend South Sacramento Light Rail Blue Line to Cosumnes River College
- Increased Regional Rail Service, Including Additional Stations (e.g., Swanston and Watt)
- Increased Light Rail Service With 10-minute Headways During Peak Hours

We understand that you, as a SACOG board member, must balance competing interests and meet as many needs as possible with limited transportation funds. We also understand that there is a real need for investment in our region’s roads, as evidenced by the numerous road improvement and maintenance projects listed above.

We urge you, however, to consider the MTP project and priority lists, compare your priorities with our list above, and then ask yourself which projects do a better job addressing our current and future needs. As you know, data produced by SACOG staff suggest that the MTP in present form will have rather minimal positive impacts on mode share, transportation affordability, mobility, accessibility, vehicle miles traveled, congestion, air quality and the rezoning and development of farmland and open space.

We all know we can do better — much better. Thank you for your consideration.