



ECOS

ENVIRONMENTAL
♦ COUNCIL ♦
OF SACRAMENTO

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ECOS SUES CALTRANS ON HIGHWAY 50 EXPANSION PROJECT

On July 3, 2017, the Environmental Council of Sacramento (ECOS) filed a Petition for Writ of Mandate with the Sacramento County Superior Court challenging the adequacy of the Initial Study/Environmental Assessment with a Mitigated Negative Declaration prepared by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for a project to expand Highway US 50 in the City of Sacramento. Specifically, this project would add high-occupancy vehicle (HOV or carpool) lanes to US 50 between I-5 and Watt Avenue.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires State agencies to identify any adverse environmental impacts of proposed projects, and explore ways to lessen those impacts. As mandated under CEQA, Caltrans prepared a Mitigated Negative Declaration for this US 50 expansion project that asserts no significant impacts on air quality, human health and safety, or regional growth patterns -- even though this project would lead to a significant increase in vehicles on the freeway.

Carpools are an important part of a sound transportation policy, and ECOS could support a Mitigated Negative Declaration provided Caltrans approved Alternative 3 to convert two existing lanes to HOV lanes, instead of constructing two new lanes (one in each direction). However, Caltrans wants to increase the number of lanes, without reviewing the potential impacts on air quality and neighborhood quality of life that a full environmental impact report (EIR) would provide. Several studies have shown that freeway expansion leads to increased vehicle miles traveled (VMT) ("induced demand") and encourages sprawl, thereby exacerbating the region's traffic and air quality woes, and increasing greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change. The ECOS petition cites numerous deficiencies in Caltrans' environmental assessment for this project, including the failure to estimate the impacts of increased traffic volumes that would result from adding lanes to US 50.

"Sacramento's elected officials, planners, and the public need an accurate assessment of the environmental costs of expanding this freeway," commented Ralph Propper, Co-Chair of the ECOS Transportation, Air Quality & Climate Change Committee, and previously an air pollution research specialist with the California Air Resources Board's health research branch. "This stretch of US 50 passes through residential areas, and near-road exposure to vehicular emissions has been linked to increased incidence of asthma, premature births, low birth-weight babies, cancer (especially from diesel exhaust), and cardiovascular disease such as strokes and heart attacks. In addition, the increased emissions will exacerbate the Sacramento region's severe

ozone smog, which damages the lungs of the young, the elderly, and those who exercise outdoors. We need an evaluation of the relative benefits of road expansion compared with alternatives such as expanded light rail. By submitting its 'Negative Declaration', Caltrans is preventing the public and the region's policy makers from receiving the information needed to make a sound transportation planning decision.”

The Environmental Council of Sacramento is a coalition of individuals and environmental and civic organizations that supports land use and transportation planning that makes more efficient use of land, preserves open space, and reduces pollution of air, water and land.