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MOVE LA



ClimatePlan



December 4, 2020

Metro Board of Directors
One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90013

RE: SUPPORT - Modernizing Metro Highways - Measure R Highway Program Criteria and Measure M Guidelines

Dear Metro Board Members and Staff,

As community-based organizations and stakeholders committed to improving the health and well-being of community members of Los Angeles County, reducing our worst-in-nation air pollution, and advancing climate action on a regional level, we are submitting the following comments regarding Metro's consideration of updating Measure R Highway Program Criteria and Measure M Guidelines.

The following comments are informed by our collective experience working with local communities and stakeholders on Metro-funded projects, as well as our active participation in the passage of Measures R and M. Then and now, we recognize Metro for its leadership in planning for a diverse, resilient transportation network for Los Angeles County. We hope you will consider the following when reviewing the proposed updates to Measures R and M.

1) Measure R and M Highway Funding is already used for projects on Local Streets -- not just "Highways." The most recent and significant example of this is the ongoing reallocation of Measure R Highway funding for local improvements along the 710-N corridor. In 2018 Metro invited corridor cities to request funding for local Transportation Demand and System Management projects. In 2019 Metro Highways Department awarded almost \$1 Billion in funding to corridor communities, including Los Angeles, unincorporated Los Angeles County, Pasadena, South Pasadena, San Marino, San Gabriel, Monterey Park, and Rosemead.

2) When Metro Highway Funding is used on local streets, it impacts all roadway users, including older adults, children, and mobility-impaired residents who walk along and across streets to access local schools, community sites, and businesses. Transportation "improvements" should not make local streets more difficult or dangerous to cross by foot. This is particularly important in Los Angeles County, where traffic crashes are the number one cause of premature death for children aged 5-14, and number two cause for children 1-4, young adults 15-24, and adults 25-44.¹

For example, as part of the ongoing 710-N reallocation process, Metro Highways staff has not permitted San Gabriel Valley cities to utilize funding for pedestrian safety, transit, and multi-modal

¹Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Mortality in Los Angeles County.
<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/dca/data/documents/mortalityrpt12.pdf>

projects, despite corridor cities requesting over \$200 million in such projects and these actions by Metro staff being inconsistent with the adopted Metro Complete Streets Policy.

3) Vehicle trips are the main source of air pollution in southern California, one of the most polluted regions in the United States. The outcomes of our poor air quality are devastating, especially to our inland communities. High rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses, as well as cognitive impairments, some cancers, and even obesity have all been linked to exposure to high levels of air pollution. Most recently, researchers at Harvard discovered that [risk of dying from COVID-19 goes up 8% for each increase of 1 µg/m3 of PM2.5](#).² The cost of these health disparities -- particularly long-term, chronic illnesses such as asthma -- is billions in associated healthcare and diminished productivity to LA County.

4) California will never meet its climate action goals unless we reduce how much we drive. Individual and commercial vehicles are responsible for over 50% of all greenhouse gas emissions in the state of California when one accounts for emissions related to the extraction, processing, and distribution of oil. While vehicle electrification is a vital step, it alone will not be sufficient to meet our goals, according to the CA Air Resources Board.³ As a result it is absolutely critical that future investments help reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) per capita, do our part to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, and help lead our state towards a more sustainable economy and future. Metro Highway Funding can and should support our commitment to cleaner air and healthier communities.

5) Adding more lanes doesn't reduce traffic, and can even attract more. The potential for increased vehicle miles traveled, and resulting congestion as a result of roadway widening and expansion is well-documented and acknowledged in the academic world. In 2017 the Governor's Office of Planning and Research advised agencies that "[each percent increase in lane miles results in a 1.03 percent increase in vehicle travel](#)".⁴ Even Caltrans has acknowledged this fact.⁵

6) LA County voters overwhelmingly support pedestrian and safety projects. In Spring 2016, polling of voters prior to the passage of Measure M found greater support for repairing sidewalks than any other local improvement. Specifically:

- 83% favored using funds from the measure to make it easier and safer for children to walk or bike to schools.
- 81% favored using ballot measure funds to improve crosswalks so they are safer for pedestrians.
- 74% favor using ballot measure funds for fixing sidewalks, including more street trees, benches, wider sidewalks, lighting, and more separation from cars.
- 65% favored spending the sales tax funds on expanding freeway lanes.

² Source: Fine particulate matter and COVID-19 mortality in the United States A national study on long-term exposure to air pollution and COVID-19 mortality in the United States. <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/covid-pm>

³ CA Air Resources Board. "2018 Progress Report - California's Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act." Page 28. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/resources/documents/tracking-progress>

⁴ State of California Office of Planning and Research. Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts on CEQA. April 2018. pg. 29 - http://opr.ca.gov/docs/20180416-743_Technical_Advisory_4.16.18.pdf

⁵ Streetsblog California. "Caltrans Admits Building Roads Induces More Driving, But Admitting a Problem Is Just the First Step" <https://cal.streetsblog.org/2015/11/18/caltrans-admits-building-roads-induces-congestion-but-admitting-a-problem-is-just-the-first-step/>

[A countywide field survey in 2013 by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health](#) found similar levels of support among the public, with 89% in favor of more transit service for the elderly and disabled, 88% in favor of installing new and repairing existing sidewalks, 86% providing free transit passes to students, 85% expanding local transit service, and 83% increasing the availability of crosswalks and street lighting.⁶

Public understanding, awareness, and support for measures to improve air quality and take local climate action have only grown since Measure R and M passed. The proposed revisions will ensure these measures are better aligned with the will of the voters.

7) Measures R and M have mechanisms to allow for updates on a semi-regular basis, recognizing that future community mobility and related needs would change. The language that voters approved for both measures was as clear in its modal allocations as it was on the potential for future revisions to meet the changing needs of our region, particularly in light of Measure M's over fifty year timeline for implementation.

To that end, its authors included, and the voters approved, mechanisms that enable today's Modernizing Metro Highways proposal. The voters are not being misled by these proposed revisions; rather, they are consistent with voters' expectations that their tax dollars ensure a transportation system that remains resilient, reliable, and adaptable.

8) The proposed update would not limit the use of Highway Funding for highway projects, but would instead clarify that when Highway funding is used on local streets, projects can incorporate multi-modal improvements -- not that they *must*. We appreciate concerns that funds previously limited to "highway" projects, strictly defined, could be used for projects not directly related to "highway" improvements, but to the benefit of the transportation network generally.

We also recognize, as you do, the value of improving mobility for all users, and the important leadership role that Metro plays regionally and state-wide. We urge you to continue to lead by supporting the letter and spirit of the draft Modernizing Metro Highways proposal.

The undersigned request that Metro modernize its Highways Program to meet the needs and challenges of our time by expanding the eligible uses of such funding, as proposed.

Thank you,

⁶ Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. "Active Transportation and the Built Environment"
<https://investinginplace.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/dph-activetranspbuiltenviroment.pdf>

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