

## STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** March 5, 2024  
**TO:** City Council  
**FROM:** Legislative Subcommittee (Councilmembers Arnold and Neville)  
**SUBJECT:** Consideration of Letter to the State Regarding Transportation

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### **Recommendation**

1. Discuss and determine the merits of sending a letter; and
2. Direct Subcommittee to make adjustments, if any, to the attached draft letter and work with the City Manager to transmit the letter.

### **Fiscal Impact**

There is no direct fiscal impact to the preparation of this letter.

### **Council Goal(s)**

Review of this comment letter indirectly relates to the City Council's Goal Objective 2 task I: "Support state and regional efforts to remedy severe I-80 traffic congestion through the City of Davis and the Causeway through improvements to the freeway and mass transit options such as an express busway."

### **Commission Input**

This item is under the direct purview of City Council as an action requested of the Legislative Subcommittee.

### **Background and Analysis**

At its January 9, 2024, meeting City Council considered and acted on its response to the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the I-80 Project. The City Council approved a comment letter on the Draft EIR and authorized the City Manager to transmit that letter to Caltrans as the lead agency for the I-80 project. This report can be found [here](#).

That letter provided comments that were focused exclusively on the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the obligations of the lead agency – Caltrans – under that act. During the public comment period, and during the discussions that took place at multiple city advisory commissions leading to the adoption of the CEQA comment letter, there were numerous comments that expressed broader policy concerns regarding the widening of a highway. At its January 16<sup>th</sup> meeting, during the Long-Range Calendar Item, the City Council discussed the possibility of sending an additional communication to a "different audience" – this time to the Governor, the

California Air Resources Board and potentially other state agencies, about the broader policy concerns associated with widening a highway instead of making public transit more viable. It was agreed that Council Members Arnold and Neville should draft that letter. The attached letter was crafted by the Subcommittee for Council consideration and largely focuses on identification of various policies from the State of California that directly relate to transportation and mobility goals and climate objectives, including from the Governor's Office and from the California's State Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI).

**Attachments**

1. Draft Letter

## ATTACHMENT 1: DRAFT LETTER

March 5, 2024

The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
California State Capitol, First Floor  
Sacramento, CA 95816

Dear Governor Newsom,

At its meeting on January 9, 2024, the Davis City Council considered its response to the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Yolo 80 Managed Lanes Project. The Council approved a public comment letter that describes concerns regarding the sufficiency of the analysis and questioned whether Caltrans had considered all feasible mitigation measures, as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City Council limited its comments to obligations that Caltrans has as the lead agency under CEQA and submitted the comments to Caltrans on January 11, 2024.

We are writing now to express the broader policy concerns raised by many in our community throughout this process. Although some community members expressed support for the proposed project, the majority of the public comments the City Council received expressed strong disappointment over a proposed project that would widen a significant portion of I-80 and substantially increase vehicle miles traveled throughout the corridor. We heard the same question repeatedly: "Why is Caltrans proposing to widen a freeway when we all know, and the state has acknowledged, that this is the wrong approach to achieve our climate action and transportation policy goals?"

We applaud the work that the Newsom administration has done to adopt strong climate action policies and goals. Executive Order (EO) N-19-19, which you issued on September 20, 2019, calls for actions from multiple state agencies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change. Significantly, it includes a direct acknowledgment of the role the transportation sector must play in tackling climate change. The order states:

*"California has ambitious and essential climate goals to transition to a healthier, more sustainable and more inclusive economy, including reducing GHGs 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 ... California has made substantial, measurable progress on our goals, but in recent years, direct tailpipe emissions from cars, ships, diesel trains, airplanes, and other transportation sources have remained a stubborn driver of greenhouse gas emissions, totaling 40.1 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions statewide."*

The executive order explicitly directs the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) to

*“[W]ork to align transportation spending with the state’s Climate Change Scoping Plan where feasible; direct investments to strategically support smart growth to increase infill housing production; reduce congestion through strategies that encourage a reduction in driving and invest further in walking, biking, and transit; and ensure that overall transportation costs for low income Californians do not increase as a result of these policies.” (Emphasis added.)*

In addition, California’s State Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI) includes as one of its primary goals:

*“[P]romoting projects that do not significantly increase passenger vehicle travel, particularly in congested urbanized settings where other mobility options can be provided and where projects are shown to induce significant auto travel. These projects should generally aim to reduce VMT and not induce significant VMT growth. When addressing congestion, consider alternatives to highway capacity expansion, such as providing multimodal options in the corridor, employing pricing strategies, and using technology to optimize operations.” (CAPTI, p. 17.)*

The CAPTI goes on to explain:

*“Further, research over the past several decades has demonstrated that highway capacity expansion has not resulted in long-term congestion relief and in some cases has worsened congestion, particularly in urbanized regions. Projects in urbanized areas that add travel lanes result in changes in travel behavior due to a short-term reduction in travel time and improved reliability. This phenomenon, known as “induced travel,” explains why adding capacity has rarely succeeded in reducing congestion over the long term or supported alternatives to driving and more transportation-efficient land uses. Finally, highway expansions are costly. Expansion of the existing highway system means less available funding for other transportation needs and priorities, as well as continued increases to long-term maintenance costs of the existing system. We cannot continue the same pattern of highway expansion investment in California and expect different results.*

*Instead of continuing the dependence on autos, we support rethinking our approach to highway expansion projects that will be a critical part of ensuring we are working towards equitably meeting our climate change goals. We would encourage a vision that is captured by the State of California’s Rail Plan that reflects these goals and states: “The status quo is not an option. California’s economic, environmental, and equity goals demand a fully integrated, zero-emission, modern passenger and freight rail network that connects seamlessly with transit to safely and reliably delivers more service to more destinations more often and attracts significant demand away from highway and air travel.” (CAPTI, p. 18.)*

We could not agree more that the status quo is not an option, and that California must act now to address climate change. We must act in a strong, coordinated way to transform our prior transportation practices so that our climate action goals may become reality. We fully support

your administration's policy goals and agree that '[w]e cannot continue the same pattern of highway expansion investment in California and expect different results.'

We acknowledge that the proposed project contains some positive aspects for the public. It is expected to reduce vehicle delays and improve travel time reliability, particularly for the six bus routes that travel the corridor. Additionally, the project commits to making significant investments in transportation equity and expanded public transit, and to using toll revenue to create an equity program for toll lanes and fund more frequent train and transit service.

Nonetheless, we believe it is important to convey the primary concern that many in our community expressed which was a strong desire not to widen the highway but to instead put the State's efforts and resources immediately and directly into increasing and strengthening our public transit system. Also, we urge you, as chief executive of the State of California, to use your full authority to ensure that the State of California's climate action and transportation policies and goals are fully implemented in a cohesive manner where all state agencies act in collaboration as the State embarks on transportation projects.

Sincerely,

[signatory]

cc:

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