



January 12, 2018

The Honorable Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr.
 State Capitol, Suite 1173
 Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: California Transportation Commission Appointments

Dear Governor Brown:

The undersigned organizations represent a broad cross section of stakeholders that are actively involved in improving our state’s transportation system – particularly for our most vulnerable and neglected residents. We are writing to recommend replacements for the two expiring appointments to the California Transportation Commission (CTC). As you know, the forthcoming appointment process coincides with new state law per Assembly Bill 179 (Cervantes, 2017), which requires the CTC to have “diverse membership” with specific mention that diversity include “socioeconomic background” and “experience working in, or representing, disadvantaged communities”. We believe now is the time to increase the diversity of an exceedingly homogenous and imbalanced Commission to better meet the needs -- and match the diversity of -- our state.

Under your leadership, California has made great strides in setting ambitious statewide climate change, air quality, and social equity goals. Many state agencies' boards and commissions have added members that represent burdened, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and environmental justice communities. This change has resulted in a significant shift to long-embedded state policies and practices to solve durable and some more immediate challenges. The California Air Resources Board, per AB 1288 (Atkins, 2015), and the California Coastal Commission, per AB 2616 (Burke, 2016), provide precedent for this transformation. By increasing diversity -- and representation -- on state boards and commissions, we've seen state agencies' develop policy that helps us achieve our statewide goals and address the needs of communities throughout California that are most burdened by pollution and inequities, particularly low-income people and communities of color.

Despite the groundbreaking achievements in these areas, the state's transportation sector continues to be a major blind spot. Despite our ambitious climate and equity goals, we have not seen significant transformation in the way the state plans, invests, and implements our transportation system to remedy long-standing injustices. Increasingly the public, as well as specific members of the Legislature and other state agencies, are aware that the majority of our state's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and rampant toxic air pollution are from mobile sources that disproportionately concentrate harm on low-income populations and people of color. Most public notoriety and state attention on reducing GHGs and toxic pollutants has been on stationary sources. Despite the development of the Air Resources Board's Mobile Source Strategy in 2017, it remains unclear how this strategy influences our transportation planning or investment. Many leading state representatives, including Chair Nichols at the Air Resources Board, have stated we will not meet our 2030 GHG targets per SB 32 or substantially improve air quality for disadvantaged communities without focusing more intently on our transportation sector. Moreover, elected officials and stakeholders focused on localized air quality impacts, particularly for our most disadvantaged communities, are increasingly turning their attention to the way in which our state's transportation investments disproportionately burden our residents.

In addition to the disproportionate environmental and health burdens, our transportation system continues to unevenly distribute mobility benefits -- both physically, socially, and economically. For example, low-income populations who are walk-, bike-, or transit-dependent are more likely to lack physical access to jobs, homes, families, and services. They are also more likely to live in neighborhoods that face extreme deficits in basic infrastructure such as sidewalks, safe crossings, and bicycle paths, and inadequate transit service. This has contributed to disproportionately high pedestrian fatality and injury rates among people of color and low-income students, and a lack of freedom and opportunity to improve their social and economic status. Research has shown that the relationship between commute time and social mobility is stronger than the relationship between crime, elementary-school test scores, or the percentage of two-parent families and social mobility. In fact, commute time is the single strongest factor influencing the odds of escaping poverty.¹

¹ Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren, "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility: Childhood Exposure Effects and County-Level Estimates" (May 2015). Available: http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hendren/files/nbhds_paper.pdf.

California is well-positioned to redress these longstanding transportation injustices with the infusion of new transportation funds per SB 1 (Beall, 2017). The increased responsibility of the CTC makes it the perfect time to add two new commissioners that meet the intent of AB 179. Senator Beall himself stated on the dais while voting for AB 179 that with SB 1 it is “imperative we have all viewpoints” on the Commission. Implicit in his remark was that the current Commission is not representative of millions of the state’s residents. The majority of the commissioners on the CTC represents business, development and labor interests. There is a lack of balanced representation for sustainable or alternative modes of transport, and expertise representing burdened and/or low-income communities, or the climate, equity, or health impacts of our transportation investments.

We strongly urge you to consider addressing the state’s major blind spot in meeting our social equity, climate, and public health goals by adding commissioners that represent these viewpoints. We would be happy to partner with you to identify a range of potential commissioners that could fulfill the requirements of AB 179. To this end, we appreciate the upcoming meeting on January 19th with your Administration to discuss these opportunities.

If we want to achieve our state’s ambitious climate and equity goals, we need coordinated holistic state action. Your appointment authority on the CTC can continue to provide significant leadership on climate change, improved air quality, and social, economic, and environmental justice. Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments. We look forward to contributing our experiences to this discussion.

Sincerely,

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Liz O'Donoghue, Dir. Infrastructure and Land Use
The Nature Conservancy

Cc: Ronda Paschal, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of Governor
Mona Pasquil Rogers, Appointments Secretary, Office of Governor
Brian Kelly, Secretary, California State Transportation Agency
Brian Annis, Undersecretary, California State Transportation Agency
Malcolm Dougherty, California Department of Transportation
Susan Bransen, Executive Director, California Transportation Commission