



2023.10.17

60+ Organizations Call for Caltrans Accountability to Governor Newsom's Climate Vision



CLIMATE100.NEXTGENPOLICY.ORG/CALTRANS-CLIMATE-ACCOUNTABILITY-LETTER/

October 17, 2023
The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Holding Caltrans Accountable to Your Climate Vision

Dear Governor Newsom,

We are writing to you as dedicated climate, transportation, and environmental justice advocates deeply concerned about ongoing developments within the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), which fundamentally put the department at odds with the achievement of the State's climate goals and your enduring climate legacy. We commend your leadership as a staunch climate champion and understand your administration's commitment to fostering sustainable practices and policies. However, we find it imperative to bring to your attention recent actions taken by Caltrans leadership that appear to be incompatible with your vision for equitable climate leadership.

The California Air Resources Board has issued an urgent warning: if California does not significantly reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the near future, the state will not be on track to meet its legally binding 2030 and 2045 greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets. Despite this stark forecast, our state continues to pour billions of taxpayer dollars into highway and interchange expansions that increase our reliance on driving, draining household budgets and making traffic worse. These expansions also facilitate sprawl development, which in turn undermines the emissions and affordability benefits of our state's efforts to promote dense land use and build more infill housing. Meanwhile, Californians are suffering from a sustained uptick in traffic fatalities and life-altering injuries; and every day, disadvantaged communities are subject to the deep environmental injustices of air pollution and displacement from urban freeways that have long scarred their neighborhoods.

Recent developments at Caltrans threaten to tarnish California's reputation as a leader in the fight against climate change. Specifically, our concerns revolve around Caltrans'

ongoing disregard for your own climate agenda for the transportation sector, the Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI). Caltrans' implementation of CAPTI has been marked by continued expansions of highways and interchanges, persistent neglect of its own guidance for reducing VMT and GHGs, and repeated efforts to water down its Complete Streets policy – all of which demonstrates an insufficient dedication to building the sustainable, multimodal transportation network that Californians deserve. Together, these actions position Caltrans as an agency that is actively working against the equitable climate vision that you have worked so tirelessly to champion.

Furthermore, we are deeply worried by Caltrans Deputy Director Jeanie Ward-Waller's recent public assertions that Caltrans District 3 is misusing roadway maintenance funds for highway expansion projects. These assertions reinforce our existing concerns surrounding Caltrans's lack of transparency, agency culture, and our state's failure to make progress on key climate and equity metrics in the transportation sector. If Deputy Director Ward-Waller's concerns are found to hold merit, they would likely represent a serious violation of state law and a betrayal of your efforts to fulfill urgent climate and equity mandates.

The fact that Deputy Director Ward-Waller claims that she was reassigned from her role as a result of challenging Caltrans's alleged misuse of funds elevates our concern.

With the issuance of Executive Order N.19.19 and subsequent adoption of CAPTI, you set forth an admirable vision for a modern sustainable transportation system that could serve as an example nationwide. But accomplishing such an ambitious vision will require proactive, enthusiastic implementation. Currently, Caltrans is failing to champion this vision.

We implore you, Governor Newsom, to rigorously evaluate and address the systemic issues within Caltrans to ensure alignment with the State's ambitious climate goals. The current discord between state policy intent and Caltrans' implementation not only undermines California's climate commitments but also casts a shadow over your esteemed reputation and legacy as a progressive climate leader.

To this end, we request that you initiate a comprehensive external audit of Caltrans' alleged misuse of State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP) funds for roadway capacity expansion projects.

Further, we request that you appoint an independent third party to investigate the extent to which the practices alleged by Deputy Director Ward-Waller are being employed throughout Caltrans and its districts to circumvent state environmental law and SHOPP rules.

We ask that you order a moratorium on highway and interchange expansions until these investigations are concluded.

By addressing these pressing concerns and steering Caltrans toward a path of environmental responsibility and policy coherence, we believe that you will be taking a crucial step in solidifying your legacy as a true climate champion and furthering California's leadership in combating climate change.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We are looking forward to your swift and decisive actions in addressing our concerns and restoring faith in California's commitment to a sustainable and equitable transportation future. For any questions or further information, please contact Dave Weiskopf, Senior Policy Advisor at NextGen California, at david.weiskopf@nextgenpolicy.org, or Jamie Pew, Climate Policy Advisor at NextGen California, at james.pew@nextgenpolicy.org.

Sincerely,

Arnold Sowell Jr.
Executive Director
NextGen California

Craig Segall
Vice President
Evergreen Action

Zak Accuardi
Senior Transportation Advocate
Natural Resources Defense Council

Hana Creger
Sr. Program Manager of Climate Equity
The Greenlining Institute

Marc Vukceвич
State Policy Director
Streets For All

Phoebe Seaton
Co-Executive Director
Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

Nailah Pope-Harden
Executive Director
ClimatePlan

Melissa Romero
Deputy Legislative Director
California Environmental Voters

Matthew Baker
Policy Director
Planning and Conservation League

Sofia Rafikova
Policy Advocate
Coalition for Clean Air

Laura Deehan
State Director
Environment California

Eli Lipmen
Executive Director
MoveLA

Jared Sanchez
Policy Director
CalBike

Jenn Engstrom
State Director
California Public Interest Research Group (CalPIRG)

Zach Lou
Coalition Director
California Green New Deal Coalition

Joanna Gubman
Executive Director
Urban Environmentalists

Kevin D Hamilton, RRT, ACS
Executive Director
Central California Asthma Collaborative

Jason John
Associate Director
Sierra Club California

Ian Griffiths
Policy Director
Seamless Bay Area

Ana Gonzalez
Executive Director
Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice

Zack Deutsch-Gross
Policy Director
TransForm

Bryn Moncelsi
Deputy Director
Climate Resolve

David Diaz
Executive Director
Active San Gabriel Valley

Warren Wells
Policy & Planning Director
Marin County Bicycle Coalition

Kevin Shin
Deputy Director
California Walks

Susan Herre AIA AICP
President of the Board of Directors
**Environmental Council of Sacramento
(ECOS)**

Stuart Wood
Executive Director
Sustainable Claremont

Jonathan Matz
California Senior Policy Manager
Safe Routes Partnership

Amee Raval
Policy and Research Director
Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Belen Bernal
Executive Director
Nature for All

Solange Gould
Co-Director
Human Impact Partners

Topher Mathers
Steering Committee Member
Pasadena Complete Streets Coalition

Sara Zimmerman
Executive Director
Climate Equity Policy Center

Joel Ervice
Associate Director
**Regional Asthma Management &
Prevention (RAMP)**

Rick Longinotti
Chair
Campaign for Sustainable Transportation

Deb Banks
Executive Director
Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates

Rita Clement
Transportation Team Co-Lead
San Diego 350

Patricia Moore
Board Member
350 Sacramento

Jack Fleck
Transportation Team Co-Lead
350 Bay Area

Mari Lynch
Founder
Bicycling Monterey

Ross Pringle
Communications Director
Claremont Streets for People

Kris Miller
President
South Pas Active Streets

Anar Salayev
Executive Director
BikeSD

Alexander Standke
Organizer
Car-Life Long Beach

Sharlene Liu
Bike Sunnyvale Lead
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition

Michelle Lewis
Hub Coordinator
Sunrise Movement Long Beach

Moiz Mir
Hub Coordinator
Sunrise Movement Sacramento

Nicolas Gardner Serna
Hub Coordinator
Sunrise Movement Los Angeles

Simren Kaur
Campaign Lead
Sunrise Movement San Diego

Diana Cassady
Facilitator
Third Act Sacramento

Marven Norman
Executive Director
Inland Empire Biking Alliance

Chris Brown
Coordinator
Sacramento Climate Coalition

Sim-Marcel Bilal
Director
Youth Climate Strike Los Angeles

George Spies
Organizer & Co-Founder
Traffic Violence Rapid Response

Nicole Capretz
Executive Director
Climate Action Campaign

Josie Morales
Vice President
United Latinos

Laura Cohen
Western Region Director
Rails to Trails Conservancy

Carter Lavin
Co-Director
Transbay Coalition

Steve Birdlebough
Chair
Sonoma County & Land-Use Coalition

Sandhya Laddha
Policy and Advocacy Director
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition

Darryl Yip
Northern San Mateo County Lead
Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition

Herman Barahona
Lead Community Organizer
The Sacramento Environmental Justice Coalition