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September 28, 2022

The Honorable Lee Ann Eager
Chair, California Transportation Commission
1120 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for SR 99 Tulare City Safety and Goods Movement Multimodal Interchange Improvement Project – 2022 Trade Corridor Enhancement Program Grant Application

Dear Chair Eager,

On behalf of the Madera County Transportation Commission (MCTC), I write in strong support of the Tulare County Association of Government's Trade Corridor Enhancement Program (TCEP) application for the SR 99 Tulare City Safety and Goods Movement Multimodal Interchange Improvement Project (SR 99 Tulare City Project). The SR 99 Tulare City Project meets all the TCEP's goals and desired outcomes, including multimodal mobility, economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, safety, state-of-good-repair, healthy communities, advancing the transition to zero-emission freight-related vehicles, connectivity and accessibility, and robust community mitigations.

The Need. The San Joaquin Valley is the heart of the state's agricultural economy – generating more than \$45 billion in agricultural products annually and providing 25-percent of the nation's food supply. The SR 99 corridor, on average, supports 1.3 million daily truck trips. Approximately 90-percent of freight through the San Joaquin Valley is moved by trucks, and those truck trips primarily occur on SR 99. However, eight segments in the San Joaquin Valley totaling 35 miles through Merced, Madera, and Tulare counties remain unfinished and need to be expanded from 4-lanes to 6-lanes. Where SR 99 changes from 4-lanes to 6-lanes and back to 4-lanes again, bottlenecks create congestion and serious safety issues. When people, goods, and services sit in congestion, it exacerbates dangerous and unhealthy air quality conditions and contributes to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

In 2020, 25% of total annual daily traffic on SR 99 was truck traffic. The number of truck trips on the corridor is projected to double within 20-years. Traffic projections indicate current capacity will be exceeded within 10-years, resulting in greater delay and congestion such that queuing at existing ramp-end intersections will back up onto the freeway mainline.

Finishing SR 99 throughout the San Joaquin Valley is a critical part of the transportation solution. A six-lane SR 99 corridor is essential to support jobs, the economy, goods movement, farm-to-market needs, reduce air quality and climate impacts, and most importantly – to protect the lives and livelihoods of the traveling public and the 4.4 million Californians that call the San Joaquin Valley home.

Member Agencies: County of Madera, City of Madera, City of Chowchilla

The Benefits. The SR 99 Tulare City Project will close one of eight remaining gaps on SR 99 thereby eliminating a key bottleneck on the corridor, increasing safety, reducing congestion, increasing connectivity, improving travel-time reliability of time-sensitive goods, and preserving acceptable facility operation on SR 99. More details on the specific benefits include:

- **Multimodal Mobility.** The Paige Avenue Interchange in the City of Tulare provides unsafe and incomplete pedestrian facilities and no bicycle infrastructure. The SR 99 Tulare City Project would provide enhanced multimodal options for traveling between the east and west side of the city, linking a disadvantaged residential community with commercial and industrial job centers that are currently disconnected from multimodal access.
- **Economic Prosperity.** By closing a gap on this key freight corridor, the SR 99 Tulare City Project will grow the economic competitiveness of California's freight sector through increased system efficiency and productivity. The project supports job growth in the larger goods movement sector and specifically within the agricultural economy. Over 44 percent of all employment in the San Joaquin Valley is associated with goods movement-dependent industries, which is higher than goods movement-related employment in all other regions of California.
- **Environmental Stewardship.** The SR 99 Tulare City Project is one of the first projects to undergo SB 743 review and includes more robust multimodal mitigations to reduce community impacts beyond the direct benefits achieved by improving freight throughput and the inclusion of active transportation elements on the Paige Avenue Interchange. Moreover, TCAG is working with the California Department of Transportation and the California State Transportation Agency to develop a hydrogen planning and deployment strategy to accelerate the transition to zero-emission vehicles in the freight sector.
- **Safety and Resiliency.** Eight segments in the San Joaquin Valley totaling 35 miles through Merced, Madera, and Tulare counties remain unfinished and need to be expanded from 4-lanes to 6-lanes. Where SR 99 changes from 4-lanes to 6-lanes and back to 4-lanes again, bottlenecks create congestion and serious safety issues. The SR 99 Tulare City Project will reduce freight-related deaths as well as other passenger travel by eliminating a bottleneck along this congested corridor.
- **Asset Management.** The SR 99 Tulare City Project helps complete, improve, and modernize the existing state highway systems and uses cost-beneficial treatments as indicated in the State Highway System Management Plan. The project will lead to improvements in terms of state-of-good repair goals.
- **Connectivity and Accessibility.** By adding bicycle, pedestrian, and ADA access and facilities, the SR 99 Tulare City Project will increase transportation choices and improve system connectivity for truck trips traversing SR 99.

Finally, the project will be ready to proceed to construction quickly, includes the required matching funds, and enjoys support from a broad cross section of stakeholders, including statewide and regional business organizations, labor, healthcare, and regional and local governments.

Member Agencies: County of Madera, City of Madera, City of Chowchilla

For these reasons, we are pleased to lend our enthusiastic support for the SR 99 Tulare City Safety and Goods Movement Multimodal Interchange Improvement Project. We urge the California Transportation Commission to award TCEP funding for this project.

Sincerely,

Supervisor Tom Wheeler, Chair
Madera County Transportation Commission

cc: Mitch Weiss, Executive Director, California Transportation Commission
Tony Tavares, Director, California Department of Transportation
Toks Omishakin, Secretary, California State Transportation Agency