



The Honorable Frank Bigelow  
Assembly Member, 5<sup>th</sup> District  
State Capitol, Room 4158  
Sacramento, CA 95814

September 21, 2021

**RE: Comments on CAPTI from the San Joaquin Valley**

Dear Assembly Member Bigelow:


On July 12, the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) announced its adoption of the Governor's Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI). The purpose of CAPTI is to implement Governor Newsom's Executive Orders N-19-19 and N-79-20. Those Executive Orders collectively aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) and vehicle miles traveled (VMT) through limiting capacity projects along the state highway system, discouraging the use of single-occupant, gas-powered vehicles, while encouraging mode shift through accelerated investments into public transportation, bicycle and pedestrian programs, and electric vehicle infrastructure.


The San Joaquin Valley resides in a non-attainment air district, and our constituents suffer from poor air quality that is predominantly caused by our geographic "bowl" shaped valley. Wind patterns, which blow in pollution from the west, along with the heavy presence of goods movement and super commuter traffic exacerbates the problem. CAPTI serves as an important document to work collectively on those efforts.


The CAPTI strategy to prioritize active and public transportation projects will benefit the San Joaquin Valley by increasing support for passenger rail service, providing more active transportation options, and making transit more efficient to help reduce congestion and improve safety and air quality. We are however concerned that CAPTI will neglect highway capacity projects that address critical safety and congestion relief improvements to accommodate severe goods movement traffic, tourist travel, transit travel times, and employees who are commuting to jobs in major urbanized areas, such as the Bay Area and Los Angeles Basin. As such, our region requires continued state investment along several key highway routes, including Highways 41, 46, 58, 99, 120, 132, 152, 198, and 205, to maximize safety, goods movement and mobility within the region. These improvements are delivered in partnership between the state, regional and local partners and oftentimes rely upon state competitive grants for delivery.


Given the region's unique geography, vast agricultural farmland, heavy goods movement, tourism traffic and the jobs-housing imbalance, we must continue to accommodate all modes of travel in the San Joaquin Valley to provide a balanced multimodal transportation system that will meet our mutual goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reducing fatalities and injuries, and enhancing mobility.

The focus on VMT in the San Joaquin Valley is not pragmatic given that the region is less densely populated than other regions and has a disproportionate number of disadvantaged communities that are car dependent,

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including farmworkers, laborers, and other blue-collar professionals that cannot carry tools or equipment on a bus or a train.

While the San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies Policy Council is in strong support of addressing climate change, success will require creative, flexible, and pragmatic solutions to account for the unique opportunities and challenges that face each region. Our suggestions are as follows:

### **1. Allow Flexibility in State Funding Programs to Address All Modes**

SB 1 provides thoughtful, wide-ranging opportunities to address our infrastructure and mobility needs through the various programs that have been enacted. State funding programs should continue to provide flexibility to regions so that they can address all modes as efficiently as possible to maximize safety, mobility, goods movement, and throughput to expedite the response to climate change, especially on the state highway system. We request that CAPTI recognize smaller urban/rural areas that still need to plan, fund and deliver projects on the state highway system that address safety and congestion.

The state must also consider areas where capacity expansion is necessary to address climate adaptation and resiliency or to close gaps on evacuation routes to prepare for natural disasters or other climate events. Highway 99 is the San Joaquin Valley's "main street," serves as the main arterial for the region, and is integral for interstate commerce. Enhancing access and throughput by completing gap closures is essential to help move goods and people in a safe manner.

Further, our region represents one of the most productive agricultural regions in the nation, if not the world. The San Joaquin Valley annually generates over \$35 billion and produces 25 percent of the nation's food supply. Fresh produce cannot be delayed when going to processing or to market. Investment in regional goods movement transportation corridors will remain a priority for our region, and heavy truck traffic is expected to increase, along with our region's population. This necessitates a more balanced planning approach, which supports sustainable economic development across all of California and recognizes the diversity and interconnectedness of all regions, including the San Joaquin Valley.

Our request is that rather than prioritizing non-capacity inducing projects on the state highway system, we request that state funding programs, particularly the SB 1 competitive programs – Local Partnership Program, Solutions for Congested Corridors, and Trade Corridor Enhancement Program – provide greater flexibility to address all modes, such as more funding for grade separations, passenger rail, and active transportation projects, so that state resources are flexible and are used as efficiently as possible to maximize safety, mobility, and throughput, in order to expedite the response to curbing climate change on and off of the state highway system. Augmenting oversubscribed programs, such as the Active Transportation Program (ATP), would also help, but highway capacity must still be considered and not devalued, particularly when it is the only option in some areas to address congestion and safety.

### **2. Support Additional Strategies that Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

As noted above, our region fully supports investments in public transportation, but transit is not the universal answer to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In FY 2017-18, the Amtrak San Joaquin service carried more than 1.1 million passengers, and 1.5 million passengers boarded the Altamont Corridor Express, a total of 2.6 million passenger trips. Despite this success, this is a fraction of the total number of individual drivers; there are over 25 million registered drivers in this state, and it simply is not realistic or viable to expect that a significant shift to heavy investment in transit (or bike/ped) will be as effective in the Valley.

Transit is also expensive to build and operate and is not always a pragmatic or efficient solution for a constituency's daily mobility needs. This is because transit typically lacks flexibility (traditional service is fixed-route service without options for route deviation and schedules), it can be unreliable, or have long headways, and is sometimes limited or non-existent in more remote unincorporated areas. Pre-pandemic, transit ridership levels declined in 31 metropolitan areas nationally. In fact, as of 2017, only 5 percent of all trips in densely populated regions, such as the San Francisco Bay Area, were made using transit. Per-capita transit ridership in the region decreased 12 percent between 1991 and 2016.

The widespread impact of COVID-19 on public transportation has exacerbated this predicament due to the shelter in place order and social distancing protocols. Choice riders often utilize transportation network companies, leaving society's most vulnerable, such as seniors, school kids, those on a fixed income and the physically challenged, to cover the cost of operating expenses. Grocery shopping or taking kids to soccer practice is not ideal when waiting for 15-minute headways, at best, which are less frequent in many areas in the Valley. The Valley's transit operators are working tirelessly to provide the most efficient and frequent service possible, particularly for on-demand services, which are costly to provide for the medically challenged, and seniors. The recent passage of AB 149 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 81, Statutes of 2021, provides more flexibility in meeting farebox recovery requirements to maintain, if not expand service, but our residents are price sensitive to fares, which poses a challenge. The emergence of transportation network companies, which provide on-demand, personalized service, has eroded the base of choice riders for our transit system.

The pandemic's crash course in teleworking, however, has proven to be effective at reducing travel while maintaining the productivity needs of employers and employees in many industries. We request that CalSTA include in its strategies expanded investment in broadband, particularly in underserved areas, to support enhanced telecommuting, and consider additional strategies such as state support for local implementation of transportation demand management strategies, vanpools and park-and-ride lots, and VMT-mitigation credits, as well as a statewide telework incentive program (starting with the state workforce), which has strong potential to expedite addressing climate change. We appreciate the Legislature's \$6 billion investment into broadband infrastructure that is intended to improve speed and reliability in rural and lower-income communities, as well as the proposed \$3.2 billion in the FY 2021-22 State Budget, to invest more into zero-emission infrastructure and rebates.

Our ask is that low-income residents in the San Joaquin Valley be considered a priority for rebates for zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) purchases and charging infrastructure deployment as a critical opportunity to help the region realize its air quality and mobility goals. These strategies should be a key part of the CAPTI whose goal is not just to reduce VMT, but also to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The focus on VMT alone could have the unintended consequence of exacerbating the problem for disadvantaged communities, farmworkers, and laborers where driving is the only option.

### **3. Support the Will of the Voters to Complete Projects and Maximize Investments**

The San Joaquin Valley has six counties (Fresno, Madera, Merced, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tulare) with locally voter-approved sales tax measures that include investments on the state highway system, which is owned and operated by Caltrans. CAPTI could adversely impact our ability to fulfill our fiduciary responsibility to voters by denying investments on the state highway system. These measures require comprehensive public engagement, contain diverse investments in multi-modal options, and ultimately require a 2/3 vote for passage so they must appeal to vast constituencies. Our region has made a commitment to the voters and our public to deliver the investments that our expenditure plan promised. A key part of keeping our promises is to secure state matching funds since each county does not generate enough in local sales tax revenues to make up for the disproportionate cost of delivering projects. This funding gap makes continued access to state funding for a multi-modal range of projects imperative.

In 2017, the legislature enacted SB 1 to address mobility, safety and congestion, in addition to maintaining infrastructure. The San Joaquin Valley initiated the discussion and worked with the delegation to advocate for the creation of the vehicle registration fee as a carbon-neutral funding source to address congestion and multi-modal options; the creation of the State Rail Assistance Program, dedicating operations funding for passenger rail service; and augmentation of the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program. In 2018 voters rejected Proposition 6 (the repeal of SB 1) and supported Proposition 69 (protecting SB 1). It is important to support the intent of the voters to maintain the public trust, by preserving all modes supported in the enactment of SB 1.

Our request is to maintain the state and local partnership, and maximize the return on previous investments, by allowing for local sales tax measures to continue leveraging state dollars to deliver highway capacity projects, which would also help facilitate public transportation service.

In conclusion, the San Joaquin Valley Policy Council is an eager partner in taking action to combat climate change and deliver more multi-modal options, but we ask that state investments be responsive to the unique needs and characteristics of each region: urban, rural, valley and coastal.

We look forward to partnering with you and the appropriate state agencies to develop pragmatic solutions to meet the objectives articulated in the Executive Orders, while maintaining the legislative intent of SB 1, and providing additional input on the development of CAPTI. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our legislative advocate, Gus Khouri, at (916) 605-8975 or [gus@khouriconsult.com](mailto:gus@khouriconsult.com).

Sincerely,



Robert Poythress

Chair of the San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies Policy Council  
Madera County Supervisor

cc: The Honorable Joaquin Arambula, Assembly Member, 31<sup>st</sup> District  
The Honorable Andreas Borgeas, Senator, 8<sup>th</sup> District  
The Honorable Anna Caballero, Senator, 12<sup>th</sup> District  
The Honorable Jim Cooper, Assembly Member, 9<sup>th</sup> District  
The Honorable Susan Talamantes Eggman, Senator, 5<sup>th</sup> District  
The Honorable Heath Flora, Assembly Member, 12<sup>th</sup> District  
The Honorable Vince Fong, Assembly Member, 34<sup>th</sup> District  
The Honorable Adam Gray, Assembly Member, 21<sup>st</sup> District  
The Honorable Shannon Grove, Senator, 16<sup>th</sup> District  
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The Honorable Jim Patterson, Assembly Member, 23<sup>rd</sup> District  
The Honorable Rudy Salas Jr., Assembly Member, 32<sup>nd</sup> District  
The Honorable Carlos Villapudua, Assembly Member, 13<sup>th</sup> District