

# ***Beyond Gridlock***

Meeting California's Transportation  
Needs in the Tweny First Century

Surface Transportation Policy Project

May 2000

# **Acknowledgements**

*Beyond Gridlock: Meeting California's Transportation Needs in the Twenty-First Century* was written by James Corless with additional contributions from Sharon Sprowls. Data regarding spending and growth in the state's highway system was provided by Dennis O'Connor at the California Research Bureau. Significant feedback and guidance was also provided by Gloria Ohland, Trinh Nguyen, Barbara McCann, Roy Kienitz, Hank Dittmar, Liza Pike, John Holtzclaw, Kristina Egan, Josh Shaw, Jackie Bacharach, and Stuart Cohen.

This report builds upon much of the work and research performed by the Surface Transportation Policy Project's national Transportation and Quality of Life Campaign. Assistance with research and data was provided by STPP's Michelle Garland.

The Surface Transportation Policy Project is a national coalition of over 200 organizations working to promote transportation policies that protect neighborhoods, provide better travel choices and promote social equity. STPP has offices in northern California, southern California and Washington, DC. Visit <http://www.transact.org/ca> for more information or contact the field offices at the addresses below. STPP's California work is made possible in part by funding from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

## **STPP Bay Area Office**

26 O'Farrell Street, Suite 400  
San Francisco, California 94108  
e-mail: [jcorless@transact.org](mailto:jcorless@transact.org)  
ph 415.956.7795

## **STPP Southern California Office**

617 South Olive, Suite 1110  
Los Angeles, California 90014  
e-mail: [gohland@transact.org](mailto:gohland@transact.org)  
ph 213.629.2043

## **STPP Sacramento Regional Office**

1414 K Street, Suite 315  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
e-mail: [tnguyen@transact.org](mailto:tnguyen@transact.org)  
ph: 916.447.8880

cover design: Seth Schneider

photo credits: Seth Schneider, James Corless, Stuart Cohen, Transportation Choices Forum, Association of Bay Area Governments

# ***Table of Contents***

INTRODUCTION	page 4
CALIFORNIA'S TRANSPORTATION NEEDS: AS DIVERSE AS OUR POPULATION	page 5
CHAPTER TWO: HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION AND TRAFFIC DEMAND	page 11
CHAPTER THREE: THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF TRAFFIC CONGESTION	page 15
CHAPTER FOUR: THE ROLE OF PUBLIC TRANSIT	page 19
CHAPTER FIVE: TRENDS IN TRANSPORTATION SPENDING	page 23
CHAPTER SIX: THE NEED FOR A VISION: IT'S NOT IF WE GROW, IT'S HOW	page 26
A NEW TRANSPORTATION AGENDA FOR CALIFORNIA	page 30
CONCLUSION: THE NEED FOR STATE AND REGIONAL LEADERSHIP	page 35

# **Introduction**

Infrastructure investments in general, and transportation funding in particular, are increasingly seen as some of the most pressing policy issues affecting all levels of government in California today. The state has long been home to some of the fastest growing regions in the United States, and now is facing a near doubling of the population—from 34 million to 58 million—by 2040. In the face of such an overwhelming increase in the number of California residents, there has understandably been strong interest in exactly how the state can provide both the physical infrastructure and the social services to keep pace.

Indeed, there are some who claim that state and local governments, particularly in the area of transportation, have failed to provide adequate infrastructure even for the existing population. Many argue that this is evidenced by increasing traffic congestion on the state's highways, and that in order to solve the problem, the state must get back into the business of building highways, something that proponents claim California has not done since the massive freeway construction projects undertaken in the 1950s and '60s.

But as policy experts and lawmakers continue to entertain plans for transportation system improvements and new spending, there are many unanswered questions that must be addressed regarding exactly how California should best target any new investments. How has the state spent its money on transportation programs in the past and what's been the result? Are we investing public funds in such a way as to provide mobility and access to all Californians? How have our public transit systems fared; do they provide a critical service to the state's residents or have they failed and why? How do current growth and development patterns impact our transportation needs and vice versa? And will simply spending more money on transportation fix our current problems over the long term, or does the system by which transportation spending decisions are made need to be overhauled?

The intention of this report is to begin to answer some of these critical questions, clarify issues in the ongoing debate over transportation issues, and recommend a more comprehensive approach to the complex problems of traffic, mobility and growth. We begin with a broad overview of the many transportation-related issues that the state faces today. Subsequent chapters are broken down by issue areas: traffic congestion, public transit, transportation spending, linking land use with transportation, and ,finally, the need for a new vision.

Despite the many complexities involved in the transportation debate, one thing is clear: without a more informed understanding of where we've been and where we're heading, California will be woefully unprepared to plan for its future.

# ***California's Transportation Needs: As Diverse As Our Population***

Tackling the problem of traffic congestion is one of the more popular transportation topics in California today, and for good reason. The state is home to three of the nation's ten most congested metropolitan areas (Los Angeles, San Francisco-Oakland, and San Jose), and freeway delays cost Californians as much as \$2.8 billion a year in wasted time and excess fuel consumption.<sup>1</sup> Yet as important as solutions to the state's traffic woes are, they must also be understood and approached in a broader context. Indeed, there are several issues that are critical for policymakers to understand in order to better meet the true diversity of transportation challenges that California is currently facing:

- Commuting—the traditional home-to-work trip that is often the focus of a majority of the state's transportation programs and investments—actually represents only a quarter of all trips that taken on an annual basis. This share continues to decline as the number of non-work errand trips increase and technology and telecommuting begin to radically alter work habits as well as travel patterns.
- Over a third of Californians aren't even licensed to drive, a statistic that ranks the state 46<sup>th</sup> nationwide. Indeed, the average Californian actually rides public transit more, and drives less, than does the average American.
- Even if ongoing efforts to leverage new funding for transportation projects are successful, both at the state and local level, there will continue to be an ongoing tug of war between funds for maintenance and funds for new construction—for both highway and transit projects. It is very unlikely there will ever be enough funding for both expansion and repair project wish lists statewide as they've currently been developed. Policymakers must thus become more involved in establishing priorities for basic repair and maintenance of roads and public transit systems, while minimizing the need for vast new infrastructure expenditures through more cost-effective system efficiency improvements and more sophisticated demand management techniques.
- There are other areas where the pursuit of a singular focus will involve important trade-offs between public policy goals. For instance, the traditional traffic engineering emphasis on moving the greatest number of vehicles at the greatest speed is increasingly involving a significant trade off with public safety goals. Twenty-five percent of California's traffic fatalities are pedestrians and bicyclists, a statistic that has resulted in part from the inability to strike a balance between vehicle speeds and the needs of other users of local streets and roadways.

Any comprehensive approach to addressing the state's most pressing transportation problems must thus address a range of issues in addition to the needed emphasis on traffic congestion. Such an agenda ought to also include the mobility needs of all Californians, public safety, aging infrastructure, environmental protection, as well as transportation's role in the state's continued economic prosperity. It must also begin to acknowledge the difficult choices and important trade-offs that policymakers at all levels of government are going to have to make in setting overarching priorities.

**1. Providing Mobility for All Californians.** In addition to the difficulties many drivers face at rush hour, more than twelve million Californians aren't even licensed to drive but nevertheless have important mobility needs. In fact, the percentage of Californians holding a driver's license has steadily dropped each year throughout the 1990s. Additionally, there are many others who can't afford to drive, or who are finding themselves increasingly isolated and immobile in newer suburban areas that

require the use of motor vehicles for virtually every trip. Among the many populations whose mobility needs California’s transportation system must address:

*Low-Income Families.* The working poor rely on both urban and rural public transit systems to hold steady jobs and access health care, child care and other critical social services. The issue of former welfare recipients finding work is completely dependent upon the provision of reliable and convenient transportation services. This need will only be addressed in the coming years by a diversity of programs that include vastly expanded public transit services; employer vanpools; attracting companies to relocate in downtowns, inner cities and suburban locations that are accessible to affordable housing and transit; and cost-effective and affordable auto ownership programs.

*Children.* California’s eight million children under legal driving age have become increasingly isolated in suburban communities.<sup>2</sup> Parents’ legitimate fears of traffic and a lack of safe and convenient facilities prohibit children from walking and riding bicycles to school or extracurricular activities. Today’s children largely miss out on even the moderate levels of independence and mobility that their parents enjoyed just a generation earlier—while nearly two-thirds of kids walked or biked to school as little as thirty years ago, that number has now fallen to less than ten percent.<sup>3</sup> An ever-increasing reliance on parents to chauffeur kids everywhere has given rise to the “soccer mom” phenomenon and has contributed greatly to the sharp increase in short-distance trips made by automobile that would previously have been made on foot or by bike. This trend has also contributed to the recent decline in childhood physical activity and concurrent rise in health-threatening obesity.

**TABLE 1: CALIFORNIA COUNTIES WITH LOWEST RATES OF LICENSED DRIVERS – 1999**

Rank	County	1999 Population	Percent of Population Licensed to Drive	Percentage Point Change from 1998
1	Kings	128,500	45.9	-1
2	Tulare	365,700	54.4	-0.1
3	Merced	207,900	55.4	-0.1
4	Fresno	797,350	55.6	-0.2
5	Los Angeles	9,799,600	55.7	-0.4
6	Lassen	33,675	55.8	-0.4
7	Madera	116,350	56.2	no change
8	Imperial	144,900	56.5	+0.5
9	Kern	652,400	57.1	-0.2
10	San Joaquin	561,850	57.2	+0.3

source: California Department of Motor Vehicles; California Department of Finance

*People with Disabilities.* Californians with disabilities depend on a variety of transportation facilities in addition to streets and highways, including public transit, specialized vanpool services, wheelchair ramps and accommodations, accessible sidewalks with curb ramps, audible signals, trails and foot-paths, and a host of other transportation services and specially designed facilities. Studies have shown that despite initially higher costs, designing walkable and transit-supportive neighborhoods and transportation systems can benefit the entire population.

Public transit agencies and local governments are perhaps those most financially responsible for implementing the provisions of the 1990 federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and have spent substantial amounts of funding on bringing themselves more in line with the intent of the Act.

Access for the disabled will continue to be a critical issue in the transportation arena for the foreseeable future, and in many ways is still not getting the attention and funding it deserves from both state and local agencies.

*Current and Future Seniors.* California’s growing elderly population, expected to increase exponentially with the aging of the baby boomers, will also face growing mobility problems as they retire in suburban communities designed exclusively for the automobile. While many older Americans continue to drive with few problems well into their 80s, there are also many whose struggle to retain their license reflects the reality that losing access to a car in many California communities is akin to a complete loss of independence.

**TABLE 2: HISTORIC TREND IN CALIFORNIA'S LICENSED DRIVERS**

Year	California Population (millions)	Licensed Drivers (millions)	Percent of Population Licensed to Drive
1993	31.5	20.1	64
1994	31.8	20.1	63.2
1995	32.1	20.2	63.1
1996	32.4	20.2	62.6
1997	33	20.5	62.1
1998	33.5	20.7	61.9
1999	34	21	61.8

Nevertheless, as older Californians continue to make up an increasingly larger percentage of the state’s population, due to both the graying of baby boomers and longer life spans, this is an issue that will only get worse. Without better transportation choices, expanded public transit services, and more walkable neighborhoods, the next generation of California parents may well see their time spent behind the wheel continue to rise as they play chauffeur to both their kids and their own parents.

**TABLE 3: EXPECTED GROWTH IN CALIFORNIA'S SENIOR POPULATION**

Year	Population Over 65 (millions)	Percent of Total Population Over 65
1990	3.1	10.4
2000	3.7	10.7
2010	4.6	11.4
2020	6.4	14
2030	8.8	17.1
2040	10.1	17.2

source: California Department of Finance

**2. Public Safety.** Despite gains in reducing alcohol-related fatalities, traffic accidents are still one of the leading causes of accidental death and injury for all Californians. More than 3400 motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians die every year and an additional 290,000 are injured on the state’s streets and highways. In fact, Southern California has one of the highest fatality rates as a result of aggressive driving, and Los Angeles as well as Silicon Valley are home to some of the highest pedestrian fatality rates in the country.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, pedestrians and bicyclists account for roughly 25 percent of all traffic-related fatalities each year in California yet receive less than one percent of all federal traffic safety funding apportioned to the California Department of Transportation.<sup>5</sup> A disproportionate share of all pedestrian fatalities in California are Latino and African-American.<sup>6</sup>

**TABLE 4: MOST DANGEROUS CALIFORNIA COUNTIES FOR PEDESTRIANS – All California Counties Above 100,000 Population as of 1/1/99**

Rank 1998	COUNTY	Pedestrian Fatalities 1998	Pedestrian Injuries 1998	Population 1998	Incident Rate	Pedestrian Exposure Index	California Pedestrian Danger Index
1	Los Angeles	200	5541	9,757,500	58.8	3.3	100
2	Santa Clara	33	600	1,715,400	36.9	2.1	98.5
3	San Mateo	9	319	722,800	45.4	2.6	98.2
4	Sacramento	25	475	1,177,800	42.5	2.4	96.4
5	Contra Costa	5	284	916,400	31.5	1.8	94.9
6	Kern	19	227	648,400	37.9	2.4	88.4
7	Stanislaus	6	182	433,000	43.4	2.8	84.4
8	Orange	36	909	2,775,600	34	2.2	84.3
9	Placer	4	78	225,900	36.3	2.4	82.1
10	Alameda	26	811	1,433,300	58.4	4	81.4

Source: Surface Transportation Policy Project, Caught in the Crosswalk, September 1999.

**3. Aging Infrastructure.** There are many who argue that California’s true transportation crisis stems from our inability to repair and maintain our existing road, highway and transit systems, a physical infrastructure that amounts to a combined investment of over \$1 trillion statewide. Most of these repair needs exist on local roads and streets and throughout the state’s public transit systems. Current estimates place the total backlog of pavement repair costs on local streets and roads at around \$10.5 billion, an amount that is increasing by about \$400 million a year.

**TABLE 5: COUNTIES WITH HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF LOCAL ROADS IN NEED OF REPAIR – 1998**

Rank	County	1999 Population	Total Local Street Lane-Miles	Percent of Lane-Miles In Need of Repair
1	Amador	33,350	936	89
2	San Benito	48,750	1040	89
3	Mendocino	86,400	2277	87
4	Lake	55,300	1534	78
5	Calaveras	38,300	1399	75
6	Napa	123,400	1515	67
7	Del Norte	27,600	645	65
8	Sierra	3,250	791	63
9	Madera	115,600	3469	62
10	San Francisco	793,300	2160	62

Source: California Transportation Commission, Inventory of Ten Year Funding Needs For California’s Transportation Systems, May 1999.

**4. Environmental Protection.** California’s natural and biological resources are essential for the environmental and economic health of the state. Ninety-five percent of California’s wetlands have vanished over the last two centuries, thirty-two percent of California’s native plant species are currently at risk (the highest percentage of any state in the continental U.S.), sixteen percent of the oak woodlands in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada have been lost, and twelve percent of the Central Valley’s prime farmland has been paved over.

Transportation policies, by facilitating growth into farmland and natural areas, have played a role in this loss of natural habitat, and will continue to influence the environmental health and habitat diversity found throughout the state for decades to come. Transportation is also a significant source of both air and water pollution.

*Air Quality Problems.* Despite improvements from the days of notoriously smog-ridden Los Angeles, California is still home to some of the worst air pollution problems in the country. Every major metropolitan area in the state fails to meet fully federal air quality standards, exposing more than 80 percent of California's population to unhealthy levels of air pollution. Transportation is one of the major contributors to air pollution because the number of trucks, buses and cars on the road traveling further and further distances is overwhelming any recent technological advances in cleaner fuels and engines.

*Water Quality Problems.* Paved surfaces including highways, streets, roads, and parking lots, are also increasingly responsible for polluting waterways with contaminated runoff. The Regional Water Quality Board has become so concerned with contaminated runoff in Los Angeles County that it recently adopted a rule requiring that new developments include mechanisms for capturing urban runoff.

Transportation plans and programs must also reflect and incorporate growth management principles, address and mitigate environmental impacts, as well as partially fund open space and habitat preservation as part of a more balanced approach that recognizes transportation's linkage with the environment. Individual projects must also be designed to better incorporate components that will ensure the health of surrounding habitats, like wildlife tunnels under freeways and stormwater runoff controls to reduce water pollution.

**5. Economic Prosperity.** Research shows that the prevalence of traffic congestion has serious negative impacts on California's economic health. Yet highway construction in particular is seen to have increasingly mixed results in terms of relieving congestion, and many types of transportation projects in general don't always produce the lasting economic benefits they're often touted for. A series of studies on beltway and bypass construction conducted for the U.S. Department of Transportation and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development concluded that "no strong evidence exists demonstrating that beltways improve a metropolitan area's competitive advantage... a proposed beltway only rarely can be justified on even the partial basis that it will enhance the region's economic position."<sup>7</sup> What often appears to happen as a result of beltway and bypass construction projects is a mere shift in economic activity from one area to another within the same region. As University of California researchers found in another recent study: "our results offer overwhelming evidence for one overriding conclusion: that highway capacity expansion stimulates development activity, both residential and non-residential, in the corridors served by the expanded facilities."<sup>8</sup>

At the same time, California does stand to greatly benefit from many other types of transportation projects that can help to enhance tourism while preserving natural habitats and scenic resources. Enhancing and protecting scenic roadways, providing recreational trails and state-of-the-art bicycle touring routes, and marketing existing Amtrak services all provide tremendous potential for reducing traffic demand while boosting local economies. A recent study by the National Park Service found that new biking and hiking trails were rewarding local communities with millions in revenue from this increasingly popular form of tourism. The popular Lafayette-Moraga Trail in Contra Costa County draws in over \$1.6 million annually from visitor expenditures on food, lodging and bike rentals.<sup>9</sup>

**6. TRAFFIC CONGESTION.** While deserving of a more sophisticated approach to its solutions than has traditionally been the case, traffic congestion is still undeniably a major problem that will continue to demand the attention of California's policymakers well into the future. Once the almost exclusively the domain of Los Angeles, roadway congestion has now become a reality in many of the state's larger metropolitan areas like San Diego, the San Francisco Bay Area and Sacramento in addition to a growing number of communities that were until recently largely rural and agricultural in nature. Yet these trends towards increasing vehicle hours of delay demand a closer look into their causes.

As it turns out, worsening congestion isn't solely a function of highway supply failing to keep pace with population throughout the state. In fact, California's state and local governments have been building and widening highways and roads over the last several decades. In California's major metropolitan areas where a majority of the state's residents live, new roadway capacity expansions have actually kept pace with population growth over the last fifteen years (while the California's metropolitan areas' population has increased 28 percent since 1984, road capacity has increased by 24 percent).<sup>10</sup> In reality, much of what has driven the recent growth in traffic congestion is an even sharper increase in driving (measured in vehicle miles traveled), an exponential increase that cannot be explained by population expansion or even the demographic shift to two-worker households alone. Rather, the trend towards an increasing number of miles driven primarily reflects the trend towards lower-density residential and commercial development patterns that force people to drive more frequently over longer distances.

For all these reasons and more, the underlying causes of traffic congestion and our larger set of transportation needs deserve far more attention and discussion if we truly care more about solving the longer-term causes of traffic congestion rather than spending tens of billions trying to repeatedly treat its symptoms.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> California Travels: Financing Our Transportation System; State of California, Legislative Analysts Office, May 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Population estimate from State of California, Department of Finance, County Population Projections with Age, Sex, and Race/Ethnic Detail. Sacramento, California, December 1998.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

<sup>4</sup> Surface Transportation Policy Project: Aggressive Driving—Are You At Risk?, Washington DC, March 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Surface Transportation Policy Project, Mean Streets, Washington, DC, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Latino Issues Forum and Surface Transportation Policy Project.

<sup>7</sup> USDOT and USHUD, Land Use and Urban Development Impacts of Beltways, June 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Marlon P. Boarnet, "Highways and Economic Productivity: Interpreting recent Evidence," *Journal of Planning Literature*, Vol. 11 #4, May 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Morris, Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, "Trails and Greenways: The Quintessential Sustainable Development Public Works Project," STPP's Progress, February 1999.

<sup>10</sup> Texas Transportation Institute, Federal Highway Administration data (see Table 7).

# Chapter Two: Highway Construction and Traffic Demand

Traffic is one of the hotter topics on the minds of both politicians and the public throughout California today. Yet there is undeniably a sense of frustration when it comes to attempting to solve traffic congestion problems, as well as a great deal of disagreement and very little understanding about exactly what California has been doing about its traffic congestion problems. Have we been adding capacity to our streets and highway networks or haven't we? Even more significantly, there's very little discussion about the fundamental causes of traffic congestion. Is it a simple case of demand outpacing supply, or are there other economic, demographic and social trends that we're missing? Without a proper understanding of why congestion occurs, finding long-term solutions to the problem will be nearly impossible.

## *Traffic Demand vs. Highway Supply: Are We Keeping Pace?*

One of the more popular assertions in California's current debate over traffic congestion is that road building is not keeping pace with California's booming population. A recent report to the legislature from the California Transportation Commission detailed the problem of playing catch up with "three decades of population growth that out-paced highway and road capacity increases by a factor of two, and growth in vehicle miles of travel (VMT) that out-paced population by a factor of nearly three."<sup>1</sup> Similar reports about highways failing to keep pace with population have been widely circulated in the state legislature and the media. Recent articles and reports have variously asserted that population has doubled while the state highway system has grown by less than ten percent in the last two decades. Other reports claim that California's highway system has grown by only 64 lane-miles the last two decades.

Have highways really failed to keep pace with population and the amount people drive? And is a comparison of highway and road expansion with population growth and vehicle miles traveled even a meaningful measure of transportation success or failure?

*Overall Growth in the State's Road Network.* In the thirteen years between 1984 and 1997, at least 26,000 lane-miles of streets and highways were added to the entire road network statewide. The Interstate highway system grew by five percent, freeways and expressways off the Interstate system increased by 26 percent, principal arterial streets grew 13 percent, and minor arterial streets increased 26 percent. Over that same period California's population grew 28 percent and the amount of driving increased by 45 percent.<sup>2</sup>

<b>TABLE 6: TRENDS IN STATEWIDE ROAD SUPPLY AND TRAFFIC DEMAND</b>			
<b>Facility Type</b>	<b>1984</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>Percent Change 1984-97</b>
Interstate Highways	13,584	14,276	5%
Other Freeways & Expressways	6,252	7,873	26%
Principal Arterial Streets	28,851	32,618	13%
Minor Arterial Streets	35,240	44,472	26%
Collector Streets	61,976	66,602	7%
Local Streets	?	215,989	?
<b>TOTAL STATEWIDE</b>	<b>?</b>	<b>381,827</b>	<b>?</b>
Subtotal less Local Streets	194,590	220,608	13%
Population (millions)	25.8	32.9	28%
Vehicle Miles Traveled (billions)	196	286	45%

source: California Research Bureau, Federal Highway Administration, California Department of Transportation.

Of course, expanded facilities were built in many different parts of the state, but with only statewide figures, it's difficult to tell how those expansions compared with population growth in the same area, making drawing more detailed conclusions difficult. However, there are more disaggregated statistics available.

*Road Expansion in Metropolitan Areas.* A vast majority of California's population lives in metropolitan areas—geographic regions defined by the U.S. Census consisting of both cities and suburbs. Nearly all of California's traffic congestion problems occur in its metropolitan areas, and for this reason many respected transportation research organizations like the Texas Transportation Institute conduct their analyses of traffic congestion at the metropolitan level rather than the state level.

California rapidly expanded its freeway construction program in the 1950s and '60s, building massive networks of roads and highways that at that time were unrivaled in any state in the country. A new mile of freeway added to the state system before the mid-century building boom would automatically appear to be a far greater increase than if it were added after the boom. Table 8 below illustrates this example with two hypothetical situations.

When analyzed at the metropolitan level, the major roadway network's capacity in California's largest urbanized areas grew 24 percent between 1984 and 1997 (the most recent year for which metro area level data is available), while population grew by 28 percent and the amount of driving increased 45 percent. Thus, in California's major metropolitan areas, roadway capacity did indeed increase in roughly the same proportion as population in terms of percentage growth since 1984. But more importantly, what did outpace both population and highway growth at both the regional level and statewide was the total growth in driving measure in vehicle miles traveled (VMT).

Comparisons viewed at the state level and at the metropolitan level will obviously differ, no matter which statistics one uses. But questions must be raised about whether the common practice of comparing percentage increases is even meaningful to the transportation debate. Measuring the growth in any item will differ vastly by the window of time one chooses for analysis. Additionally, percentage increases or decreases will always be more pronounced when starting with less of the item being measured, and less pronounced when starting with a greater quantity. Even more importantly, is there a valuable correlation between facility expansion, population growth and/or VMT that would tell us we are spending our dollars effectively and wisely?

**TABLE 7: TRENDS IN REGIONAL ROAD SUPPLY AND TRAFFIC DEMAND**

ITEM	1984	1997	Percent Change
Metropolitan Freeways, Expressways & Principal Arterial Streets (lane-miles)	27,990	34,570	24%
Metro Area Population (millions)	18.8	23.9	28%
Metro Area Vehicle Miles Traveled (billions)	94	137	45%

*The Problem with Percentages*

California rapidly expanded its freeway construction program in the 1950s and '60s, building massive networks of roads and highways that at that time were unrivaled in any state in the country. A new mile of freeway added to the state system before the mid-century building boom would automatically appear to be a far greater increase than if it were added after the boom. Table 8 below illustrates this example with two hypothetical situations.

**TABLE 8: THE PROBLEMS WITH PERCENTAGES**

Item	Before	After	Percent Change
REGION 1 Population	10 million	11 million	10%
REGION 1 Road Capacity	1 lane-mile	2 lane-miles	100%
REGION 2 Population	1 million	2 million	100%
REGION 2 Road Capacity	10,000 lane-miles	10,001 lane-miles	0.01%

NOTE: In each case, the region added one million people and one lane-mile. However, in region one, road capacity outpaced population by a factor of ten to one. In region two, population outpaced road capacity by a factor of ten thousand to one. Both measures would most likely prove to be completely inaccurate in their ability to predict real world traffic flow and congestion conditions.

**WHEN IS A STATE HIGHWAY NOT A HIGHWAY?**

Most statistics regarding the growth of California’s highway system focus on state-owned highways. But the so-called “state highway system” itself proves to be a poor measure for gauging the growth in California’s road capacity. “State highways” are really just those roads that are owned and operated by the State of California (Caltrans, the California Department of Transportation), a mere 13 percent of all lane-miles in the state’s overall road system. A majority of the total mileage owned by Caltrans, and thus comprising the state highway system, are actually two lane roads like Highway One on the Pacific coast and function as both local streets and main streets for many small towns throughout California.

The state highway system does include Interstate highways (I-5, I-80, I-10), US routes (US 50, US 101, US 395) and other numbered state routes with the familiar rounded green shield. Yet it doesn’t include other freeways and expressways under the jurisdiction of city and county governments. The state is also often “shedding” segments of its system (especially two lane roads that function as local streets) and turning them over to local government control, a move that will appear as a loss of overall state highways when the roads themselves still exist but merely shift to a different jurisdiction.

A much more useful classification for different types of roadways is provided by the Federal Highway Administration based on usage, design and traffic levels. From largest to smallest the classifications include: Interstate highways, other freeways and expressways, principal arterial streets, major collector streets, minor collector streets, and finally local streets. The state highway system includes all the Interstate highways and some pieces of every other type of classification of roadway.

Simply measuring the increase in available roadway space in terms of its length (by the number of miles) and its width (by the number of lanes, so that the combined measure produces total “lane-miles”) is no longer viewed as the best gauge of the true overall capacity of a road network to handle traffic. Contra Costa County recently completed a multi-billion project to reconfigure the Interstate 680 and state highway 24 interchange to increase the capacity of the two highways to handle traffic flow without adding any new significant increases in the number of total lane-miles. A highway construction project in Cincinnati, Ohio, will actually decrease the number of lanes in a massive inter-

change between several highways near downtown, while at the same time increasing the ability of the interchange to handle traffic through a more efficient design.

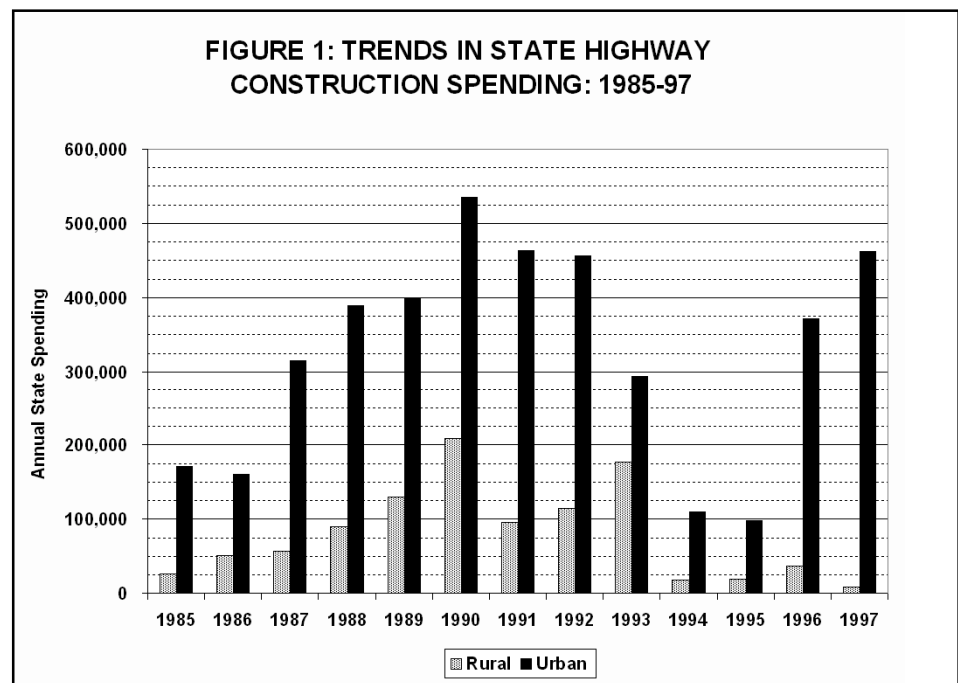
### *The Need for Better Performance Measures*

Comparing population or the increase in driving with roadway capacity growth may not necessarily answer the question as to how much expansion the transportation system needs, especially since lane-mile increases may not take into account efficiency measures that improve the capacity a given facility. In addition, measures of congestion vary widely, making assessment of problems difficult.

More sophisticated measures of roadway supply and traffic demand are obviously needed. Agencies should agree on common measures and indicators of congestion that can be produced, published and monitored on a regular basis. State, regional and local transportation agencies need to track and publicize better data on the overall capacity of streets and highways that incorporate ongoing efforts to improve traffic flow through maximizing efficiency and operations.

### *Trends in Highway Construction Spending*

Another common assertion in the transportation debate is that California has not spent any significant money on highway construction in recent years. While Chapter Five provides more detail on overall transportation spending trends in California, a closer look at expenditures by the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) shows that, in addition to the agency's commitment to operational and system efficiency improvements, a significant expenditure of funds is still dedicated to physical capacity expansion. The vast majority of these expenditures are made in the state's metropolitan areas, and have been growing after a downward trend recorded in the early 1990s due mostly to seismic upgrade programs. As a result of this increase in spending on new construction and widening projects, California has added more than 3,200 lane-miles of state highway since 1987.



### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> California Transportation Commission, Inventory of Ten Year Funding Needs for California's Transportation System, May 1999.

<sup>2</sup> California Research Bureau; Federal Highway Administration

# Chapter Three: The Underlying Causes of Traffic Congestion

The underlying causes of congestion are far more complicated than many traditional interests have historically been willing to admit. The ability of available roadway space—the most traditional method of measuring supply or capacity as expressed in lane-miles—to meet traffic demand as measured in vehicle miles traveled, is just one of a set of several underlying factors that research has found contribute to traffic congestion. From this research and from a growing body of experience in both the United States and overseas, it is apparent that traffic congestion is a symptom of a much larger problem, a problem that includes:

- **The Lack of Affordable Housing.** The lack of affordable and mixed-income housing near employment centers, and the imbalance between jobs and housing, creates the notorious two-hour commutes between places like the Central Valley and the Silicon Valley or Lancaster and Los Angeles. California is now home to seven of the ten least affordable housing markets in the country.<sup>1</sup>
- **Sprawling Patterns of New Growth.** Poorly planned sprawling development and land use patterns and zoning codes that separate uses further and further apart require people to travel longer distances. Many short trips that until recently had been made by walking from home to school, between commercial establishments, from work to lunch, are now made by vehicle trips that often occur at similar times and lead to peak hour congestion around intersections and along freeways. Indeed, recent research by the U.S. Department of Transportation found that only 13 percent of the increase in driving is attributable to population growth. The remainder has been a result of a steady growth in the number of trips taken and the length of trips, both primarily products of low-density suburban development that requires ever greater levels of dependency on driving.

To make matters worse, not only does the typical suburban development model—characterized by low-density cul-de-sacs, wide, high-speed arterials, and massive intersections—make traffic management difficult, it also makes it less cost-effective for transit to serve scattered destinations and makes walking or bicycling both inconvenient and dangerous.

- **Changes in Home to School Travel.** Whereas more than half of all kids walked or bicycled to school in the 1950s, that number has now fallen below 10 percent as streets have become more dangerous due to traffic. Combined with the loss of school bus service, the resulting trend has been an overwhelming increase in parents driving their children to school, clogging local roadways during critical peak hours. An estimated 20-25 percent of rush hour traffic on local streets and roads is now attributable to the school commute.
- **Fiscal Incentives Promoting Sprawl.** Local governments increasingly rely on “big box” commercial developments to generate local revenues through increased sales taxes. Such commercial highway strip development has proven to be incredibly inefficient from the perspective of traffic flow, generating many peak hour trips that tie up intersections for hours at a time. Numerous short vehicle trips between retail stores, services, and fast food outlets are now replacing what used to be walking trips between shops on smaller neighborhood streets and even more recently were walking trips made between stores inside shopping malls.

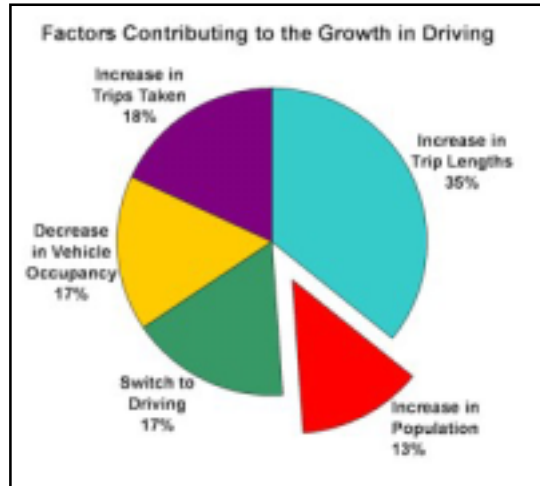
Furthermore, fiscal incentives favoring commercial development over residential due to the promise of sales tax revenues has created a vast imbalance between jobs and housing in communities through-

out California, requiring long distance commutes between the workplace, stores, other errands and home.

- **Economic Disincentives For Greater Efficiency.** The skewed pricing signals given to travelers appear to make highway travel, even at the most congested periods of the day, entirely free, while public transit and commuter rail are often perceived as too expensive. While tolls and peak hour congestion pricing are politically unpopular and must be handled carefully to ensure social equity, their absence as a traffic demand management tool greatly exacerbates roadway congestion problems.

*Build It And They'll Come*

A growing body of research has shown that widening highways is only a temporary solution at best to the complex problem of traffic congestion. Indeed, research has pointed to a phenomenon known as “induced traffic” that suggests new and wider highways actually create additional traffic, above and beyond what can be attributed to rapid population increases and economic growth. In larger metropolitan areas, drivers will often abandon carpools and public transit when additional roadway space is made available through highway widenings or new road construction, thus creating additional trips and more traffic. In the longer term, the promise of more convenient transportation access allows commuters to live further from work, increasing development pressures and thus fueling even more traffic demand. (It should be noted that any form of transportation can produce this effect; whether it was “streetcar suburbs” at the turn of the 20th century or new commuter trains attracting Silicon Valley workers to live in the Central Valley with the promise of a more convenient commute.)



**TABLE 9: REGIONAL IMPACTS FROM “INDUCED TRAFFIC”**

Metropolitan area (UZA)	Forecast annual growth rate in VMT (on freeways & arterials), assuming current growth trends	Forecast annual growth rate in VMT (on freeways & arterials), with no growth in roadway capacity	Percent of total VMT growth attributable to “induced traffic”
Bakersfield	9.00%	6.80%	24.60%
Fresno	5.80%	5.10%	12.40%
Los Angeles	-0.01%	-0.80%	100.00%
Sacramento	3.30%	1.50%	54.60%
San Diego	1.30%	0.40%	72.60%
San Francisco-Oakland	0.60%	-0.40%	100.00%
San Jose	1.30%	0.30%	73.60%
AVERAGE	3.00%	1.60%	45.20%

**Note:** VMT = vehicle miles traveled or overall mileage driven; Los Angeles and San Francisco have negative growth in VMT when no lane miles are constructed, thus 100% of growth is attributed to the induced travel effect. Source: Robert Noland, 2000.

The Federal Highway Administration has recently concluded that this phenomenon of “induced traffic” does in fact occur quite frequently in metropolitan areas throughout the United States. Another detailed study has also concluded that traffic in the Bay Area and Los Angeles would actually decrease if no new highway expansion took place. It also determined that two-thirds of the growth in traffic in San Jose and San Diego in the coming decades will be attributable to induced demand.

A recent study conducted by the U.C. Berkeley Institute for Transportation Studies concluded that 90 percent of all new highway capacity added to California’s metropolitan areas is filled within four years, and 60 percent-70 percent of all new county-level highway capacity is filled within two years. This, authors Mark Hansen and Yuanlin Huang explain, means an additional highway lane-mile constructed in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles or San Diego regions would increase traffic by 10,000-12,000 vehicle-miles traveled per day; in Sacramento and Stockton would equate to 7,000-8,000 additional VMT; and in smaller but nonetheless rapidly growing areas like Modesto, Merced, Monterey and Bakersfield would translate into an additional 3,000-6,000 VMT per day. The authors conclude:

“Our results suggest that the urban state highway lane miles added since 1970 have, on the whole, yielded little in the way of level of service improvements. Consistent with previous work, we find that increasing highway supply results in higher vehicle miles traveled (VMT). An induced traffic impact of such magnitude must be considered when assessing road capacity enhancements, whether in a broad policy context or on a project specific basis.”

Several other reports in recent years have pointed to similar conclusions. In 1998, the Legislative Analyst’s Office revealed the results of its own research on the issue and cautioned policymakers about the promise of relying solely on new highway construction in order to reduce traffic congestion throughout California:

“New road capacity will typically lead to new traffic, especially in urban areas, because people and businesses benefit from the mobility that the transportation system provides and seek to use it to their benefit... Ultimately, road use will increase, leading to congestion of new road capacity. For this reason, expansion of the existing transportation will rarely alleviate congestion permanently; however, by restraining demand this tendency can be offset and existing congested roads, as well as new roads, can be made to operate efficiently.”<sup>2</sup>

The growing belief that induced traffic largely offsets any short-term congestion relief gains also led authorities in the United Kingdom to cancel more than 70 planned highway construction and road expansion projects in the 1990s alone. Similar experiences have been reported by transportation officials in Germany, Holland and Japan. Many of these countries have retooled their transportation programs to incorporate a more balanced approach to managing traffic congestion as well as a new emphasis on growth management techniques, more compact development patterns, and other land use strategies as a way of beginning to combat what officials and experts see as the underlying cause of increasing traffic volumes.

### *Cost-Effective Congestion Management*

Combine the phenomenon of “induced traffic” with the fact that more than 50 percent of all freeway

traffic jams are caused by construction-related delays or traffic accidents, and it becomes clear that what California needs is a far more sophisticated approach in trying to manage congestion. Other states have utilized a diversity of strategies including better real-time traveler information technologies, peak-hour congestion pricing, coordination of transportation and land use goals, telecommuting, staggered work hours, strong financial incentives promoting ridesharing and vanpooling, and better traffic incident management.

The experience of other states and countries in attempting to solve traffic congestion problems, in addition to the evidence provided by growing bodies of research, are absolutely critical lessons for policymakers. There is an overwhelming temptation at any level of government to want to believe in both the quick fix to a problem like traffic congestion as well as to hope that by simply throwing more money at it, the problem itself will disappear. But the futility of trying to build our way out of congestion is an emerging reality that has led many other industrialized countries to dramatically alter their approach to transportation. Instead, many states and other countries are beginning to favor more balanced and cost-effective approaches that rely on a diversity of solutions and a more sophisticated overall approach to traffic management.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> National Association of Home Builders.

<sup>2</sup> California Legislative Analyst's Office, "Developing and Funding an Efficient Transportation System," March 1998

# Chapter Four: The Role of Public Transit

While a majority of all trips in California are made by private automobile, public transit is rarely credited for the vital role that it plays in reducing congestion and providing mobility for the state’s urban and suburban population. More than twelve million state residents aren’t even licensed to drive, and public transit has become a necessity for a large segment of the state’s elderly and lower-income populations. Public transit carries over 1.2 billion passengers a year in California, seven times the number of annual airline passengers at the state’s 14 largest airports.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Californians actually drive less than the average American, are less likely to have a driver’s license than the average American, own fewer vehicles per person than the average American, and ride transit more than the average American.

TABLE 10: CALIFORNIA'S DEPENDENCE ON PUBLIC TRANSIT			
ITEM	UNITED STATES	CALIFORNIA	CALIFORNIA'S RANK
Annual Miles Driven Per Capita	9,522	8,482	40th
Registered Vehicles Per Capita (per thousand)	754	745	32nd
Percent of Population Licensed to Drive	68.4	62.8	46th
Percent of Driving Age Population Licensed	88.8	83.1	45th

Source: 1998 Highway Statistics, Federal Highway Administration; American Public Transit Association

## *Transit's Role in Reducing Congestion*

While transit serves many purposes, one of the most important of which is to provide critical access and mobility for transit-dependent and lower-income residents statewide, it also reduces the pressure on critical commute corridors by offering a convenient alternative to driving alone. Indeed, travel corridors where public transportation is a reliable option during peak hours are extremely popular: transit carries 38 percent of all trips in the San Francisco Bay Bridge corridor, 30 percent of all trips into central Los Angeles, and 18 percent of trips into San Diego.<sup>2</sup> While Bay Area traffic is already notorious for its backups, residents got a taste of what life would be like without BART when a systemwide strike in 1997 literally ground the area’s freeways to a halt. Another recent study found that without transit, Los Angeles would have to build 1,400 new freeway lane-miles to handle the traffic, the San Francisco Bay Area would need to increase its freeway capacity by 50 percent, and San Diego would see an additional 35,000 cars on the road.<sup>3</sup>

While the debate over the success of the state’s HOV lane program continues unabated, a tremendously cost-effective public transit option lies in the utilization of the state’s existing 925-mile HOV lane network by express commuter buses that could provide reliable and convenient service while bypassing traffic tie-ups. A new study of the potential for express buses in the Bay Area, combined with other transit improvements and economic incentives, concluded that such a package could result in an annual increase of 110 million transit trips and a concurrent 20 percent decrease in traffic congestion.<sup>4</sup>

## Providing Mobility for the Transit-Dependent

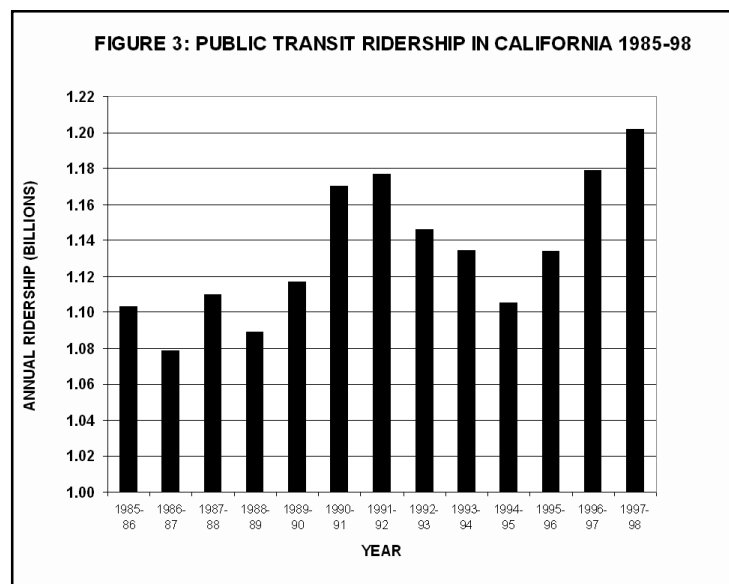
Transit also provides an essential service for the working poor in urban areas, and is literally a lifeline for many residents in lower-income communities throughout the state. Consider the following:

- The Los Angeles bus system alone carries twice as many passengers as all of the commercial airlines in the state combined; 76 percent of riders on Los Angeles County MTA's buses have no access to a car.<sup>5</sup>
- As federal and state welfare reform rules impose strict new guidelines and schedules, tens of thousands of former welfare recipients will be entering the job market and become dependent on some form of transit to ensure their ability to find work. Over 90 percent of former welfare recipients have no access to a car.<sup>6</sup>
- According to the 1990 U.S. Census (the most recent year for which numbers are available), the average income for California commuters driving alone to work was \$50,094. Those riding in a two-person carpool averaged an income of \$45,206, and those taking the bus had an average annual income of \$33,071.
- According to the 1990 U.S. Census, the average annual income for a two-car household in California was \$44,218. The typical household with access to just one vehicle averaged an annual income of \$23,449. Households without access to any vehicle earned an income of just \$10,865.
- 48 percent of riders on Los Angeles County MTA's buses have household incomes less than \$15,000.<sup>7</sup>

## Public Transit Spending and Trends in Ridership

Chapter Five provides more detail on transit spending, but in general public transit agencies have increased spending on transit services since the mid-1980s. This has been due primarily to the cost of compliance with two significant federal laws passed in the early 1990s: the Clean Air Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). To comply, transit agencies had to begin to purchase new cleaner fuel buses and retrofit buses with wheelchair lifts, rather than spending new funds on operations. At the same time, in the mid-1990s, the federal government slowly eliminated transit operating assistance funds, a major source of operating assistance for many of California's transit agencies. The two federal mandates combined with federal budget cuts to public transit coincide with a loss of ridership among all transit agencies in California in the mid-1990s (Figure 3).

Despite this dip, ridership on the state's 200 largest public transit systems has grown by nearly ten percent overall since 1985. Yet, this aggregate number masks large individual fluctuations among the hundreds of transit systems across the state. Some transit agencies have lost passengers. Those that have lost the most tend to be those that have either raised fares or reduced service. AC Transit in Alameda and Contra Costa counties lost 32 percent of its ridership since 1982 in the wake of several rounds of service cutbacks, including a round of



massive night and weekend service cuts in the wake of federal budget cuts in the mid-1990s. The Los Angeles County MTA bus system has lost 13 percent of its ridership since 1990, after it raised fares from \$.50 a ride to \$1.35.

On the other end of the scale, there are agencies experiencing major increases. Since 1982, the Orange County Transit District has seen a 90 percent increase in bus passengers, San Diego Transit has had an 87 percent increase in its bus patronage, and the San Francisco Peninsula's Caltrain has experienced a 66 percent increase in commuter rail ridership.

### *The Challenges Ahead for California's Transit Systems*

Despite a general resurgence in patronage since the early 1990s, and gains in overall passenger ridership that among some systems has been significant, California's public transit agencies still face many challenges that must be dealt with in order to remain competitive and provide meaningful service. Among the issues that public transit officials, transportation agencies and local and state lawmakers must face in the years ahead:

- *A commitment to provide transit service to those who most need it.* Public transit provides a convenient choice for commuters in several select areas, but it also serves as a lifeline for millions of low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities throughout the state. New and existing transit service should meet certain cost-effectiveness criteria, but the social benefits of providing equal access to jobs and opportunities for those who don't drive or can't afford to must be adequately reflected in any cost-benefit calculations. The largest declines in passenger ridership statewide in recent decades have been among the systems serving the greatest percentage of lower-income individuals and communities of color: AC Transit in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, San Francisco's MUNI, and the Los Angeles County MTA.
- *Adding new service as a result of strict cost-effectiveness, social equity and demand criteria, rather than what's eligible for available funding sources.* As will be discussed in chapter five, the complexities and eligibility criteria attached to available funding sources all too often dictate the type of service that transit agencies end up providing. More often than not, that means that capital-intensive projects often win out over "softer" expenditures like adding night or weekend bus service or implementing new express bus service that utilizes existing HOV networks. Different transit technologies work better in different situations, but objective criteria should decide these choices rather than politics or funding eligibility. This is, of course, out of the hands of most transit agencies and under the jurisdiction of state and federal lawmakers, and may entail increased access to funds that can be used exclusively for operations and maintenance activities.
- *Integrating services, becoming more flexible and being smart about marketing.* One of the biggest problems with getting new customers to use transit is lack of both convenience and information. The San Francisco Bay Area alone has 28 transit agencies with 28 different schedules and 28 ticketing systems. As information technologies drive the new economy, so too could they provide a much needed boost for transit patrons by providing schedule and fare information, service that's timed and coordinated between different agencies and universal tickets. Technologies may also play a significant role in rethinking traditional fixed route bus service, with the advent of "smart shuttles" that could provide door-to-door service and generally make transit more flexible, convenient and customer responsive.
- *Influencing and coordinating land use plans.* Currently, transit agencies mainly react to the land use decisions made by the local communities they serve, even when those decisions make

the efficient provision of transit difficult or nearly impossible. More coordinated regional and local planning and earlier input and review by transit providers in planning and community designs could significantly improve the ability of new developments to support effective transit service.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Transit Operators and Non-Transit Claimants Annual Report 1997-98, State Controller's Office.

<sup>2</sup> California Public Transit: Report to the California Legislature and Governor Gray Davis; California Transit Association and the California Association for Coordinated Transportation. March 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Camph, Dollars and Sense: The Economic Case for Public Transportation in America, June 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Bay Area Transportation and Land Use Coalition, "World Class Transit for the Bay Area," January 2000.

<sup>5</sup> APMG, Study of the Role of the State in Mass Transportation, January 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Surface Transportation Policy Project, U.S. Department of Transportation.

<sup>7</sup> APMG, Study of the Role of the State in Mass Transportation, January 1998.

# Chapter Five: Trends in Transportation Spending

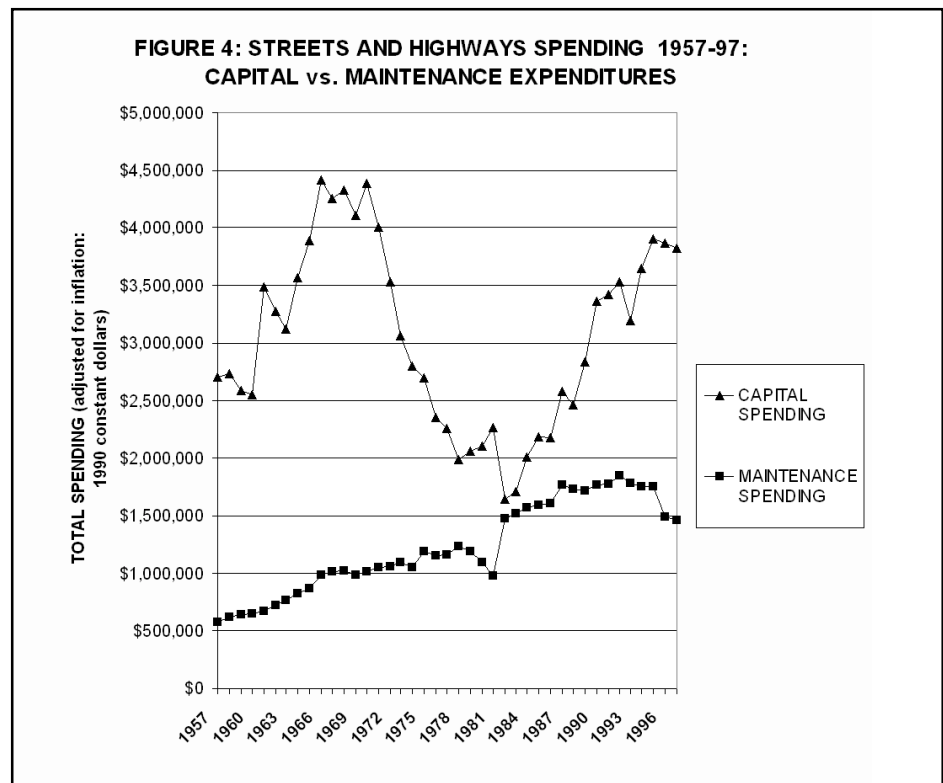
How we raise funds and what we spend them on has a profound impact on how our transportation network functions, how efficiently it performs, what it looks like, and even how people travel. Unfortunately, both our state and national system of transportation finance is complicated even for policymakers to understand. What follows is a brief explanation of transportation finance mechanisms, in addition to several key issues that are important to understanding California's transportation funding picture.

## *Transportation Revenues and Expenditures*

Transportation funding is unique when compared to many other publicly funded programs in the United States in that historically it has been supported by "user fee" financing, notably taxes on gasoline and other vehicle-related programs. California is no exception to this, and has since the 1920s relied primarily on state gasoline taxes to fund road construction and maintenance statewide. For various reasons, this historical trend began to shift in the 1990s with an increasing reliance on statewide bonds and county-level sales taxes.

California still receives most of its transportation revenues from the current state gasoline tax of 18 cents per gallon. This tax produces a little more than \$5 billion a year in transportation revenues, accounting for nearly half of all roadway-related revenues in the state. The federal government also levies an 18.3 cent per gallon tax on gasoline. California receives roughly \$2.4 billion a year in federal highway funds and \$500 million in public transit funding. Additional sources of revenue for transportation statewide include local county sales taxes (levied in 16 of the state's more populous counties and worth about \$1.7 billion annually), bond receipts, local general fund monies, local property taxes, and road and bridge tolls.

A significant piece of the revenue and spending puzzle is funding for local street and road maintenance. There is currently a tremendous disparity between funding for bigger ticket projects on the state-owned highway system, at the expense of funding for repairing local roads and streets. The state-owned highway system comprises only 13



percent of the state's entire road network. The local street and road network comprises 83 percent of the state's entire 373,000+ lane-miles of roadways, and 41 percent of it is in serious need of repair. Yet in 1997, spending on the state highway system averaged \$62 per lane mile and spending on the local streets and roads network averaged just \$7 per lane mile. Kings, Yolo, Glenn and Humboldt counties are now literally reverting paved roads back to gravel due to the cost of maintenance.

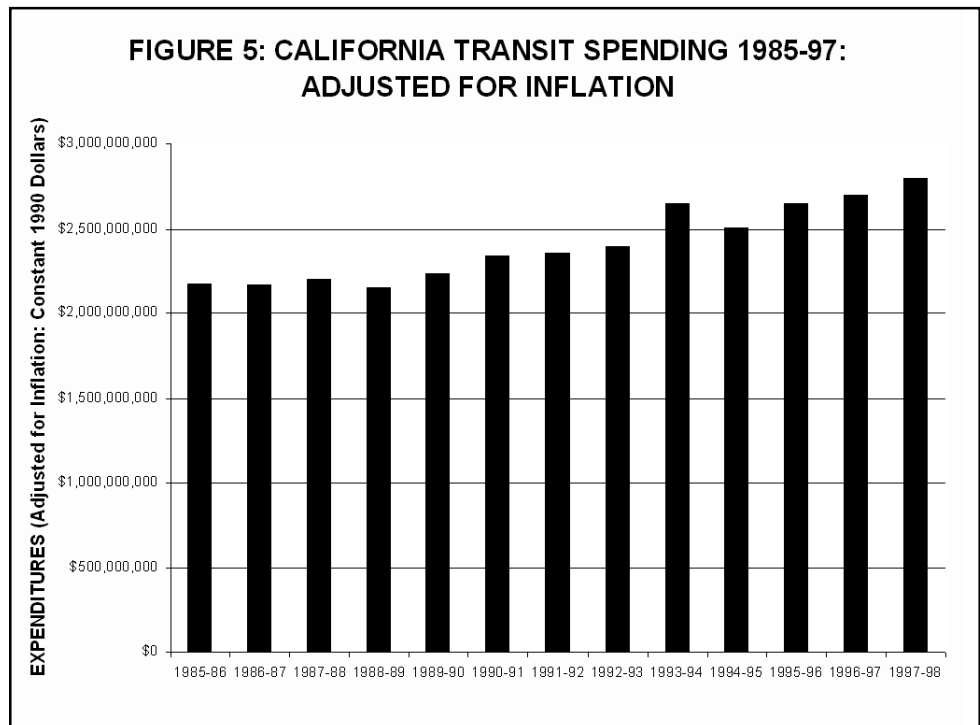
In 1990, the cities' and counties' share of the statewide gasoline tax revenues fell from 49 percent to 23 percent, translating into even greater inequities between local street and road-spending and funding for state-owned highways.

Funding for public transit was historically kept quite separate from street and highway financing, until recently. Many of the local streetcar, trolley and motorbus services that operated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, both in California and nationwide, were often largely privately financed, with some support from local public funds. Federal funding for public transit systems arrived much later than it did for highways, with the first smaller grant programs starting in the 1960s and annual federal appropriations for local public transit beginning in the 1970s.

Today, California's public transit systems are funded by a wide range of sources, many of which fluctuate dramatically from year to year. The largest single source of revenue is passenger fares, which comprise 28 percent of all operating revenues and 23 percent of total transit revenues including capital grants.<sup>1</sup> Transit is also funded by a portion of the statewide sales tax (roughly 20 percent of all revenues), federal grants (roughly 13 percent of all revenues), countywide sales taxes (12 percent), local transit district sales taxes, property taxes, general fund monies and other local and state grants.<sup>2</sup>

As noted in the previous chapter, transit agencies saw the elimination of federal support for operations in the mid-1990s. Along with the loss of federal operating assistance, transit agencies are severely hampered financially by state laws prohibiting the expenditure of state gas tax revenues or bonds on the day-to-day operations of transit services. This has created a Catch-22 for transit agencies: growth in capital expenditures, or the ability to buy train cars and buses for public transit systems, but a loss of revenue with which to operate those trains and buses.

It has also fueled a disparity between urban and suburban services. There has been increased funding for commuter systems that need to buy equipment to serve largely wealthier, suburban populations, but cutbacks to urban bus transit systems that don't need much new equipment, but require much more funding for repair, maintenance and operations.



### *Why Transportation Doesn't Pay For Itself*

There are often debates about which form of transportation is subsidized, and which form of transportation pays for itself. The fact of the matter is that no form of transportation really pays for itself. Passenger fares cover only a portion of public transit operating costs depending on the system and its type of service. So-called highway “user fees” also fall short of covering the costs of the road and highway network. A 1994 U.S. Congressional study found that highway-related taxes only covered between 53 percent and 68 percent of the total cost of highway programs when factoring in the external costs of road congestion, accidents and injuries, highway patrols, and air quality impacts to public health.<sup>3</sup> Airlines also rely on subsidies in the form of airport construction and maintenance, airport access by off-site transportation improvements, fuel subsidies, and impose massive external costs in the form of noise and air pollution. Amtrak actually covers a majority of its operating costs through passenger fares, but will face an uphill battle when attempting to become financially self-sufficient in 2002 as mandated by Congress.

The reality is that the subsidy debate is often counterproductive. There are public transit proposals that don't merit any public subsidy because they don't make sense, there are highway projects that would prove to be a waste of money if built, and there are even toll road facilities that never pay for themselves as promised and need an eventual bailout with public financing. A far better test for whether transportation investments are worthwhile is the development and implementation of a broad range of performance measures and cost-effectiveness criteria.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Transit Operators and Non-Transit Claimants Annual Report 1997-98, State Controller's Office

<sup>2</sup> All numbers are for 1997-98

<sup>3</sup> American Public Transit Association, Transit Fact Book 1998; original study conducted by U.S. Office of Technology Assessment.

# **Chapter Six: The Need for a Vision: It's Not If We Grow, It's How**

As we deal with transportation finance issues, there is a great need to reform the decision-making process by which most transportation projects are chosen in the first place. There are currently requirements for both short-range (4-year) and long-range (20-year) transportation plans statewide and in every region in California. But the plans themselves often contain little foresight and few incentives to do anything more than “predict and provide,” and staple together lists of politically popular projects from various jurisdictions. The past quality of these plans has led to major battles in the debate over new transportation funding. Public interest groups often don't support increases in transportation funding precisely because they don't trust the overall plans from which the agencies are likely to pull their projects.

These plans, and the 20-year long-range plans in particular, present a tremendous opportunity to more actively involve local elected officials and the general public in deciding on a vision and goals for their region, and to coordinate growth and transportation decisions that can make more efficient use of transportation infrastructure. Indeed, the task of reforming the transportation planning process may be even more important than any plan to raise new funds for transportation projects. It's not simply a matter of how much money agencies spend, it's also how they spend it. Pumping more money into a system that is flawed to begin with, and perpetually expanding transportation infrastructure to serve inefficient land development practices, is unlikely to be able to deliver the full range of transportation choices Californians require, or to allow the state ever to catch up on maintaining even its existing systems.

## *The Gap Between Transportation and Land Use Decisions*

One of the more important realities in California's decision-making processes is that the decisions regarding how and where to grow, and the equally important choices in terms of how to provide mobility and access to relevant destinations, are made separately. While land use authority has historically been a hot button issue in the United States, the separation between local land use decisions and regional and statewide transportation planning decisions has been one of the greatest barriers to successfully managing traffic demand in conjunction with sustainable commercial and residential growth. As the 1998 LAO report on transportation describes:

“Transportation demand is also influenced by local land use decisions that determine the locations of new housing and jobs, and which in turn determine whether communities will be compact and densely populated or sprawling and sparsely populated. Land use in many of California's communities is defined by lower-density development and ever-expanding urban boundaries that make pedestrian, bicycle and transit travel impractical, and that increase trip length and VMT (vehicle miles traveled). Coordinating land use and transportation policies is made more difficult because many large urban areas include several city and county jurisdictions, and land use decisions of one jurisdiction can impact traffic in other jurisdictions.”

## *The Costs of Current Growth Patterns*

Suburban sprawl has tremendous implications for how and even if California can indeed handle its projected population increases and housing, jobs, and transportation needs in the next forty years. The

amount of land consumed—much of it in the form of productive farmland or valuable open space—as well as physical infrastructure that current growth patterns require per capita comes at a tremendous cost both economically as well as environmentally.

Consider the experience of Los Angeles, where between 1970 and 1990 the population grew 45 percent but the developed land area grew 300 percent. If these types of development trends continue, in the next twenty years, areas like the Central Valley will lose much of its productive farmland and yet experience levels of traffic congestion similar to those faced by Los Angeles commuters today. The American Farmland Trust in a recent study found that the current model of growth and development for the Central Valley threatens to consume a million acres of prime farmland by 2040, reducing farm and ranch profits by \$5 billion annually and requiring such massive amounts of new transportation and other public infrastructure that it will run city and county budgets into a \$1 billion deficit.<sup>1</sup>

*Smart Investments*, the 1999 California Debt Affordability Report released by State Treasurer Phil Angelides, warned policymakers that the state cannot financially afford the fiscal costs that are the byproducts of such poorly planned low-density development. The report asserts:

“Present patterns of growth are consuming our open space at a rate even faster than our population growth. These patterns of expansion are not sustainable fiscally, economically, environmentally, or politically. Fiscally, the State and local governments cannot afford to meet the demand for transportation, public works and other services needed to connect increasingly far-flung communities...

‘Sustainable development’ accepts the reality that we will experience growth and asks how best to direct this growth without destroying the quality of life which is a critical factor in stimulating private investment. Sustainable development means that land uses support transportation options beyond more freeways and roads; a better mix of housing in communities and neighborhoods; locating jobs near housing and balancing job growth with new housing; land use designs that bring homes, schools, workplaces, services and retail shops closer together; communities centered around civic spaces...and protection of environmental resources.”

### *Linking Land Use and Transportation Decisions: The Regional Approach*

Several metropolitan areas like Minneapolis, Atlanta, and Portland, Oregon, have adopted the bold strategy of coordinating transportation, land use and even local government revenues through regional cooperation. As the historic boundaries of cities, counties and even states mean less and less in an age of global markets, electronic commerce and increasing individual mobility, the importance of regional economies and regional approaches to economic development, housing and transportation has been increasingly acknowledged. Regardless of how regional decision-making is structured, the lesson increasingly appears to be that transportation policies as well as a host of other program areas are best coordinated at the regional level, while still recognizing local land use authority.

Fortunately, California has already begun to establish regional agencies as some of the more important decision-making bodies. As described above, California currently has 48 regional transportation planning agencies (RTPAs) that make decisions on the majority of federal and state transportation funding, thanks to recent changes in federal and state laws, the most recent of which was Senate Bill 45 signed into law by Governor Pete Wilson in 1997.

The regional transportation planning agencies now not only program funding, but also develop long-range transportation plans that can provide an arena for creating a broader vision for future growth and a public debate better alternatives for both land use patterns and transportation infrastructure needs.

In the San Diego metropolitan region, San Diego Mayor Susan Golding recently urged the area's regional transportation planning agency to take advantage of the development of their 20-year transportation plan as a means of striking a new approach to the region's growth, development and transportation needs. In the words of Mayor Golding:

“We need to learn from our past and design our future with a new approach. Ever widening freeways may be a short term help but will never get us where we need to be 20 years from now and beyond. We now know that for transit corridors to be successful, development along the corridor has to occur to bolster the density enough to maybe make transit desirable and used in the future.

Today I am proposing that we immediately engage in an update [of the 20 year regional transportation plan] that would incorporate a new way of thinking about accomplishing the same goal of diminishing traffic congestion and increasing transit ridership without increasing the amount of pavement.”

#### *Models for More Cost-Effective Growth Patterns*

Long-term transportation plans are ideal venues not only for proposing alternative models of growth and transportation needs, but can also be a tremendously productive process for determining how cost-effective different models of growth will be. The American Farmland Trust recently analyzed competing models of growth for California's Central Valley and determined that the more compact “smart growth” alternative could save municipalities 500,000 acres of farmland and actually net valley towns and counties a \$200 million surplus in public costs due to a more efficient use of land and transportation infrastructure.

Other voluntary efforts at modeling different growth alternatives have produced similar results: more compact growth that makes more efficient use of existing infrastructure usually costs less than the current models of “sprawl.” A comprehensive effort in the San Francisco Bay Area to develop an alternative growth scenario, combined with better economic incentives promoting carpools and public transit, determined that a more compact growth scenario for the nine-county Bay Area would reduce traffic by 6 percent (vs. a 32 percent increase in the existing plan), decrease average travel times by 13 percent, save 150 square miles of open space, cut carbon monoxide emissions by 6900 tons annually, and eventually reduce infrastructure costs by as much as \$25 billion.

#### *A Common Vision: The Fresno Growth Alternatives Alliance*

One example of such a broad-based approach to developing a regional vision—and that has great relevance for other high growth areas around the state—is the effort currently being undertaken by a diverse coalition known as the Fresno Growth Alternatives Alliance. Comprised of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce, the Fresno County Farm Bureau, the Building Industry Association of the San Joaquin Valley, the American Farmland Trust and the Fresno Business Council, the Alliance took it upon themselves to craft a common agenda and a vision for where Fresno County should be heading in the next 30 years when facing a possible tripling of its population and an ever-increasing strain on

its valuable agricultural resources.

The process of producing the report itself represents a landmark attempt to bring together interests who have been seen as traditionally benefiting from low-density suburban sprawl in order to clarify common ground and begin to see the problem as a choice between many different models of development, rather than simply “no growth” vs. “pro growth.” Indeed, the authors conclude that it isn’t simply population increase that is the biggest drain on both natural and financial resources:

“Over the years, it has become apparent that growth patterns actually play a more important role in causing urban sprawl than population growth itself. Replacing urban sprawl with more efficient patterns of growth on the urban edge and directing growth inward through infill development and neighborhood revitalization can accommodate the same number of people on much less land. Controlling or changing population trends is nearly impossible; but it may be possible to change patterns of growth, especially if a grassroots consensus for better land use planning can be developed among local stakeholders and decision makers.”

Among the agreed-upon recommendations of the Alliance, published in its 1998 report entitled “A Landscape of Choice: Strategies for Improving Patterns of Community Growth,” were:

- provide incentives for compact growth which provide for amenities such as bike paths and neighborhood parks as densities increase;
- preserve and enhance existing pedestrian and transit-oriented neighborhoods;
- create mixed use zone districts that encourage residential, commercial and office use on the same site
- encourage an orderly outward expansion of new urban development while providing for new towns that create new patterns of compact growth
- create a forum in which regional land use planning can be achieved.

California is truly at a crossroads in deciding not only how we’re going to grow, but just as importantly how we’re going to pay for that growth. The type of transportation investments and policies that the state pursues will likely be a critical component in shaping that growth, and will significantly impact what our communities and our quality of life will be like in future decades. While there are many uncertainties in this equation, one thing appears definite: we must dramatically change our planning and decision-making frameworks at the state, regional, and local levels, or we may indeed be doomed to failure. There may well be a strong case for increased funding for transportation state-wide, particularly for congestion management, public transit and local street and road maintenance projects. But if that’s all we accomplish—spending more money on transportation—we’ll have slapped an even higher price tag on a system that won’t address the core issues and needs of California’s communities because it will have once again treated only the symptoms and ignored the larger root causes of the problem.

## Endotes

<sup>1</sup> “Future Urban Growth in California’s Central Valley,” American Farmland Trust, October 1995

# ***A New Transportation Agenda for California***

If California is going to effectively manage its transportation problems in the coming decades and provide cost-effective infrastructure improvements that promote more sustainable growth, then it must craft a bold new transportation decision-making and evaluation process. The following recommendations, if implemented, could go a long way in allowing us to better manage traffic congestion, provide more convenient and reliable transportation options for Californians of all ages and abilities, reduce infrastructure costs for taxpayers and increase the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of our present and future transportation systems and services:

**(1) Provide Incentives For Healthier Mixes of Jobs and Housing Near Existing Services.** One of the shortcomings of the current debate surrounding traffic congestion in California is the notion that transportation-based problems must naturally have transportation-based solutions. In fact, some of the more promising strategies for addressing congestion and the growth in traffic have nothing to do with transportation. In the Silicon Valley, nine new jobs are being created for each housing unit produced.<sup>1</sup> The complete imbalance between jobs and housing, combined with astronomical housing costs in the Bay Area, force many employees to locate hours away. New incentives for ‘infill’ housing can both increase housing affordability as well as relieve the burden on the regional freeway system.

One promising market-based solution is the newly unveiled Location-Efficient Mortgage (LEM) in Los Angeles and the Bay Area that allows lenders to factor in lower transportation costs associated with more walkable neighborhoods near public transit (transportation is often the second highest personal expense behind housing). This allows prospective homebuyers to qualify for higher mortgages and thus provides a financial incentive for consumers to locate close to existing jobs and other services.

**(2) Make It Cheaper to Avoid Congestion.** While congestion costs Californians nearly \$2.8 billion annually, transportation and road pricing signals are often skewed so as to make sitting in traffic appear free to the individual. Phone and electric companies discovered long ago that a far more cost-effective provision of service is achieved by charging higher rates during peak periods and far lower rates during off-peak periods. For transportation facilities, this translates into bridge, freeway and parking charges that variable depending on the time of day—the worse the congestion, the higher the toll. Not only can this even out demand and improve system efficiency, it can also provide a new revenue source for transportation programs through the more traditional user fee approach.

At the same time, increased tolls or parking charges are usually highly unpopular with both the public and political leaders. These programs could thus be offset by reductions in commuting costs for avoiding peak-hour congestion. There are in fact many programs currently available that California isn’t taking full advantage of, like tax-free transit vouchers through the IRS tax code that can make public transit virtually free for employees as well as employers. California could also fully implement a “parking cash out” program that allows employees to give up a free parking space offered by the employer (and tax deductible for both) in return for the equivalent cash value. And finally, state lawmakers have several proposals for tax credits and other incentives for employees who telecommute or work non-traditional hours, the most promising of which should be explored and implemented.

**(3) Design Transportation Facilities That Provide More Travel Choices.** The concept of Universal Design holds that facilities should be designed for all potential users regardless of ability. Yet just as buildings and public facilities were designed to the exclusion of people with disabilities until very recently, so to was our transportation system designed for several decades with the singular purpose of facilitating only one mode of travel—the automobile. Communities like Pleasant Hill in Contra Costa County, planned and built in the mid-twentieth century, were designed without sidewalks due to the belief that pedestrians would soon be obsolete. While consumers are beginning to increasingly demand safer and more convenient bicycle and pedestrian facilities for themselves and their children, transportation agencies have been slow to respond.

Yet designing all transportation facilities to both safe and convenient for those traveling by foot, bicycle, wheelchair, walker or stroller can play a tremendous role in boosting traffic safety, improving quality of life, protecting public health, as well as reducing local traffic congestion. Despite the trend towards scattered development patterns and low-density growth, nearly half of all personal trips are still three miles or less. Local and regional transportation plans should include goals to increase levels of walking and bicycling, improve access and mobility for the disabled, children and seniors, and reduce bicycle and pedestrian injuries and fatalities. At a minimum, any new transportation funding source should include a ten percent set-aside for community enhancements to construct bicycle and pedestrian facilities and protect the environment.

**(4) Coordinate Transportation, Growth and Land Use Decisions.** Unfortunately, transportation and land use decisions are often mired in a vicious cycle whereby local governments assume certain types of growth and development are going to occur, and a regional transportation agency commits funding to provide the new infrastructure—a move that then ironically induces much of the growth to take place. Local governments also all too often compete against one another for precious public resources, new job growth, and commercial development that brings in sales tax revenues. Meanwhile transit agencies are hard-pressed to meet the service demands of continued sprawl, the needs of those who can't drive go unmet, and traffic congestion increases again.

As recommended in the 1998 Legislative Analyst's report on transportation, the Legislature should direct the Governor's Office of Planning and Research to investigate and report on the impact of land use policies on transportation, and recommend state and local policies that would more effectively coordinate decision-making processes. Such an analysis should examine particularly how to strengthen the linkages between the transportation planning process, economic development, air quality and congestion management planning, the regional fair share housing allocation process, and local land use, housing, and circulation elements, and how better to account for the impacts of individual jurisdictions' decisions on neighboring communities.

**(5) Collect Better Data and Establish Performance Measures.** Many in the private sector are familiar with the concept of establishing measurable goals and performance indicators that to a large degree reflect a company's mission and objectives. Yet performance measures have been slow to take hold among transportation professionals, largely due to arguments over just exactly what transportation agencies should be held accountable for. Furthermore, while data regarding highway usage is extensive, statistics regarding transit patronage, social equity and job accessibility, walking, bicycling, or road and street conditions, are extremely difficult to access or sometimes even non-existent.

Both Caltrans and the RTPAs should establish performance measures, including the following: (a) mode share for all trips including accurate pedestrian trip figures and goals for the amount of walking, bicycling, automobile and transit usage; (b) land consumption per capita; (c) vehicle miles traveled per

trip and per capita; (d) fatalities and injuries for each mode per mile traveled; (e) pavement condition and transit service and on-time performance; (f) percentage of jobs accessible by transit and by residents of lower-income communities; and (g) air quality. The agencies should prioritize and coordinate efforts to collect all data that is currently unavailable, and report all findings on an annual basis to both stakeholders and the public.

**(6) Use Transportation Funds As Incentives For More Cost-Effective Growth Patterns.** The current lack of coordination between transportation and land use is perhaps best illustrated by the case of the commute between Silicon Valley and the Central Valley. The vast imbalance between jobs and housing in Silicon Valley (nine new jobs for every one new housing unit) has helped drive up housing prices and has forced many workers into the Central Valley in search of more affordable homes. The transportation response to the problem of commuters trekking over 100 miles in each direction is to provide vast amounts of costly new infrastructure—in the form of both bigger freeways and a new commuter rail service between Stockton and San Jose—in order to facilitate the commute. Failure on the part of local agencies and officials to provide enough housing close in to jobs, has in this case manifested itself in the form of unbearable traffic congestion as well as the tremendous financial burden of trying to keep pace with the perceived need for costly new infrastructure.

Another possible response to this trend would involve action by state or regional transportation agencies to withhold valuable transportation funds from localities that aren't providing an adequate jobs-housing balance. Rather than promise each region, county and city a share of state and federal transportation funding based on a predetermined formula, agencies could instead base a substantial portion of their funding based on performance criteria that would reward localities for pursuing policies and programs that reduce the need for costly new infrastructure in order to serve two hour commutes. San Mateo County in the San Francisco Bay Area is pursuing just such a program, rewarding local governments who build affordable housing units within walking distance of transit an incentive of \$2,000 a bedroom in the form of new transportation funding.

**(7) Remove Program Barriers that Favor More Expensive Projects.** Unfortunately, there are many institutional barriers to fully implementing a “smart growth” strategy for transportation statewide. The multi-billion dollar State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) is one such barrier. Newly revised under Senate Bill 45 in 1997, the STIP is now largely under the jurisdiction of the RTPAs and county transportation agencies. While positive in many aspects, including more local control over transportation decisions, the STIP nevertheless still limits flexibility by favoring new construction over maintenance and operational efficiency projects, and larger highway and transit projects over smaller community improvements, traffic safety measures, and bicycle and pedestrian projects.

The Legislature should investigate opportunities to allow a wider range of transportation projects that increase supply, reduce demand and improve safety, to compete fairly in the STIP process. The STIP should also be more closely linked to long-range regional transportation plans and goals, and be required to adhere to stringent tests for meeting performance measures established by the region, rather than simply receive a rubber stamp. Additional barriers to funding include the State Constitution's Article XIX, which restricts state gas tax revenues to “fixed guideway transit” only, precluding expenditures on bus transit as well as transit operations and maintenance.

**(8) Prioritize maintenance and efficiency over new construction.** In the Central Valley alone, where population is expected to grow by 10 million people in the coming decade, new infrastructure needs based on a continued “low-density” suburban sprawl model are expected to top \$100 billion.

Add to that the fact that nearly 126,000 lane miles of roads and highways—roughly 40 percent of all pavement in California—is in need of repair, and it isn’t hard to understand why repairing and making better use of our existing infrastructure should be our top priority, from a fiscal perspective if nothing else. Every new lane-mile of highway we add to the existing system creates an even larger financial burden for future maintenance needs and diverts current rehabilitation funds that could be used to repair existing roadways. The State Highway Operations and Protection Program (SHOPP) should receive a much higher priority and funding percentage each year for projects that repair and maintain the state’s 50,000+ lane-miles of highways. Public transit operations and maintenance should also receive first priority, and maximum use of the new flexibility in federal transportation funding should be taken full advantage of by both Caltrans and the RTPAs.

**TABLE 11: AVAILABLE METHODS OF PROVIDING ACCESSIBILITY FOR CALIFORNIANS**

METHOD	1950s – 1960s	1970s-1980s	1990s – 21st century
Increase Supply	Freeway Expansion	Freeway Expansion / Public Transit Expansion / Amtrak/Commuter Rail	Freeway Expansion Public Transit Expansion Amtrak/Commuter Rail High Speed Rail
Manage Demand		Public Transit Usage / HOV Lanes / Ramp Meters	Public Transit Usage / HOV Lanes / Ramp Meters / Employer-Based Vanpools / Intelligent Transportation Systems / Incident Management/Tow Trucks / Peak Hour Pricing / Transit Vouchers / Parking Charges / Off Peak Freight Movement
Reduce Demand		Affordable Housing Strategies / Pedestrian Facilities / Bicycle Facilities	Mixed-Use Development / Transit-Oriented Development / Affordable Housing Strategies / Brownfields Redevelopment / Pedestrian Facilities / Bicycle Facilities / Telecommuting / E-Commerce / Location-Efficient Mortgages / Jobs-Housing Balance

**(9) Remove Fiscal Incentives That Subsidize Inefficient Growth.** The reality is that it’s cheaper in the short-term to develop productive farmland at the edge of California’s metropolitan areas than it is to build on a vacant lot closer in. There are many reasons for this, and most of them have to do with the structure of our tax codes, other related economic incentives, and local and state ordinances and regulations. Of course, one of the most notorious mechanisms that has promoted the now ubiquitous “big box” sprawl is the reliance of local governments on sales tax, and thus commercial development, since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978. Until this incentive is dramatically altered, the so-called “fiscalization of land use” will continue to favor retail developments over housing and other needed employment sectors, and exacerbate the imbalance between jobs and housing. The state and local governments should also remove unreasonable fiscal and legal barriers to the redevelopment of vacant urban lands and brownfields. The state should revise tax codes that penalize farmers and agricultural businesses by creating artificial incentives to subdivide farmland and develop it.

**(10) Create Regional Visions and Goals First, Plans and Projects Later.** All too often, so-called “long range transportation plans” are nothing more than a compendium of politically-driven project wish lists stapled together. Instead, both the State of California and regional and local agencies should help coordinate comprehensive transportation and growth management plans that truly lay out visions

and goals for what transportation efforts should achieve, and graphically illustrate the many alternative scenarios that are possible given varying growth and investment patterns. Project investments should then be selected to support these comprehensive plans.

The Business, Housing and Transportation Agency should update the California Transportation Plan with substantial local government and public input, including specific goals and visions for “smart growth” scenarios that would prioritize maximizing the use of existing infrastructure. The RTPAs already have 20-year plans required under federal law that should serve as the mechanism for the regional transportation planning process. These processes should be largely stakeholder-driven, including agencies, local elected officials and the public, and the resulting outcomes should guide all other programs and project lists, prioritized based on their ability to achieve the goals and visions of the plan.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> California Building Industry Association.

# ***Conclusion: The Need for State and Regional Leadership***

Finally, what's perhaps most important is a recognition that solving these problems will require strong leadership from the state level in addition to management, planning and eventual implementation at the regional and local levels. Getting there demands that every region in California step back from current assumptions, project "wish lists" and the status quo, and undertake some risky but visionary planning with strong public involvement that asks where each region wants to be in 20, 30 or 50 years.

Transportation policies must also recognize that congestion relief is just one of several goals that need to be addressed as we strive to improve the quality of life for all Californians. Transportation programs must work towards the goals of cleaner air, of providing access to jobs and services for the poor, disabled, and communities of color, of minimizing traffic-related fatalities and injuries, and promoting physical health and safe communities. Traffic congestion must thus be tackled within a broader context of economic, environmental and social goals and its solutions must be compatible and work in support of, rather than against, solutions identified for the broader range of issues.

These are absolutely critical lessons for policymakers to understand, since there is an overwhelming temptation at any level of government to hope for the "quick fix" to a problem like traffic congestion, and hope that by directing more financial resources into the existing decision-making systems the problem itself will disappear.

Unfortunately, the reality is that until several very important fiscal frameworks change, traffic congestion in California will likely never go away, regardless of how bold our political intentions are and how many billions of taxpayer dollars we're willing to dedicate to the problem. Among other things, the state needs the leadership necessary to successfully manage our existing transportation networks more efficiently, to establish sound performance criteria and measurements that reward smart growth practices with additional transportation funds, to relax local zoning codes and ordinances that mandate scattered development and low-density sprawl, and begin once again to allow different patterns of growth to occur, including mixed-use developments and more walkable neighborhoods.

There is clearly much at stake in the debate over transportation and growth. The two issues, inextricably linked, will undoubtedly have a profound impact on whether or not we can sustain the state's economic growth, improve public health, protect the environment, and maintain California's quality of life for many future generations to come.