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December 9, 2021

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor
State of California
State Capitol
Sacramento, California 95814

RE: Request Your Immediate Attention to Urgent Transportation Needs in Riverside County

Dear Governor Newsom:

As Chair of the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), I was pleasantly surprised by your December 5, 2021, I-15 Expansion Project (Expansion Project) announcement to tackle traffic congestion at the California-Nevada border. My fellow Commissioners and I agree with your assessment that congestion leads to economic burden, with impacts to working families and goods movement vital to the nation. Governor Newsom, we need your help in Riverside County to bring congestion relief to our highway system with the same level of commitment and collaborative spirit you brought to the Expansion Project.

Riverside County, like the California-Nevada border, also has longstanding traffic issues that we have worked to address. While we appreciate the state's assistance to date, we frankly need much more. We need a proactive partnership and strategy from the state to bring traffic relief to this region. As Nevada Governor Steve Sisolak reached out to you with a call, I am reaching out to you so that I can share our concerns, demonstrate our obstacles, and seek a solution to our longstanding traffic congestion issues that require the state's focus. The well-being and prosperity of our disadvantaged communities depend on it, as do the state and national economies. While multimodal transportation systems are vital to future mobility, roads and highway expansion cannot be discounted as a tool that helps keep our people and goods moving.

According to a Wall Street Journal article published earlier this year, the Inland Empire effectively tied the Phoenix region in 2020 for the biggest gain in households from migration nationwide. Riverside County is at the heart of this population growth and is home to two of the state's top ten city growth rates. Since 2000, about 15,000 homes have been built in the City of Eastvale, making up 92 percent of its housing, and its population grew to 70,000 from 4,000. In addition, we are home to two cities identified as having one of the ten longest commute times in the United States. Growth like this is taking place across the entire region. Over the past 30 years, the population of the Inland Empire has grown by 78 percent to 4.6 million, more than twice as fast as the state during that same time.

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Population growth is not the only driver of the region's traffic congestion nightmare. Our roads do not just move people, they move goods. 40 percent of the nation's goods travel through the Inland Empire by truck and train. As freight and goods movement accelerate to historic levels to serve the rest of the state and the nation, inland residents are left to compete for limited space on our highway networks. This congestion and corresponding frustration lead to reduced productivity, less time with family, poor mental health, and the worst air quality in the country.

RCTC is working to deliver a suite of multimodal transportation solutions that will connect our diverse communities, offer mobility choices, promote economic prosperity, reduce traffic congestion, streamline goods and freight movement, and secure a climate-resilient future across Riverside County. Our residents have approved local sales tax measures to provide dedicated funding for transportation projects to meet these goals, but progress has been slow. Due to underinvestment in our region from state and federal governments, we are still programming and constructing projects that were promised to voters 19 years ago.

RCTC has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in transportation projects to provide congestion relief along the I-15 corridor in Riverside County. Earlier this year, RCTC completed the \$472 million I-15 Express Lanes project, adding two express lanes to I-15 in both directions, from State Route 60 to Cajalco Road in Corona. Part of the project's overall goal was to reduce traffic congestion. While the project alleviated congested bottlenecks, other chokepoints were not relieved, particularly to the south. RCTC is conducting studies to add a non-tolled lane to southbound I-15 from the Cajalco Road on-ramp in Corona to the Weirick Road off-ramp in Temescal Valley, a distance slightly less than one mile. As with the Expansion Project, a small fix like this will make a world of difference. However, this project will not be complete until late 2025 at the earliest. Thankfully, Caltrans joined a local interagency task force to come up with an interim solution. The I-15 Interim Corridor Operations Project will add a temporary lane by allowing crews to strengthen the roadway shoulder pavement to handle traffic loads and restripe lanes at non-standard widths. This project will be operational for a three-year period until improvements for RCTC's I-15 Corridor Operations project are constructed in this area.

It can be difficult to look to the future when we face such a dramatic backlog of projects. Nevertheless, RCTC is also planning next-generation projects that give residents meaningful alternatives to driving while streamlining freight and goods movement. In partnership with Caltrans and the Federal Rail Administration, RCTC is working to bring daily passenger rail service between the Coachella Valley and Los Angeles. The proposed 144-mile rail service is the kind of once-in-a-generation, regionally transformational project that will take vehicles off the road, reduce carbon emissions, improve our air quality, and support our economy—benefiting low-income and disadvantaged communities along the route. The cost to construct this project is \$1 billion, and RCTC cannot deliver this and other transformational projects like it without state investments at levels this region has never seen before.

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Riverside County's longstanding congestion issues are not unlike those at the California-Nevada border. What sets our region apart though, is the millions of Californians who live and work right here, and the state and national economies that hang in the balance as this vital freight and goods movement gateway sinks further into dysfunction. As Chair of RCTC, I truly appreciate all the help we have received from the state thus far. Our work with Caltrans to advance the I-15 Interim Corridor Operations Project and proposed daily passenger rail service to Coachella Valley are excellent examples of solutions-based partnerships. To truly make a difference for our disadvantaged communities and the overall economy and environment, we require your direct attention, collaboration, and investment.

I look forward to continuing this conversation with you. Please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Jan Harnik
Chair

CC: The Honorable Rosilicie Ochoa Bogh, Senator, District 23
The Honorable Melissa Melendez, Senator, District 28
The Honorable Richard D. Roth, Senator, District 31
The Honorable Chad Mayes, Assemblymember, District 42
The Honorable Eduardo Garcia, Assemblymember, District 56
The Honorable Sabrina Cervantes, Assemblymember, District 60
The Honorable Jose Medina, Assemblymember, District 61
The Honorable Kelly Seyarto, Assemblymember, District 67
The Honorable Randy Voepel, Assemblymember, District 71
The Honorable Marie Waldron, Assembly Republican Leader, District 75
The Honorable David Kim, Secretary, California State Transportation Agency
Toks Omishakin, Director, California Department of Transportation
Michael Beauchamp, District Director, California Department of Transportation, District 8