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Ellen O. Tauscher
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
10th District, California

December 5, 2008

ORIGINAL:
Copies:

Board Clerk
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Ms. Mary Nichols
Chair, California Air Resources Board
P.O. Box 2815
Sacramento, CA 95812

RE: Higher priority for land use and transportation in the AB 32 Scoping Plan

Dear Ms. Nichols:

I write to urge you to support a higher target for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions linked to local land use decisions in the Draft AB 32 Scoping Plan.

I applaud your leadership on addressing climate change and believe that the precedent set by California is essential for helping Congress design proven, effective policies for addressing climate change at the federal level. Thus, I offer my comments on the Draft AB 32 Scoping Plan not only because I want to ensure the very best plan is adopted for California, but also because I want to set a high bar for federal legislation that will follow California's example.

Land use and transportation are critical to addressing climate change

Transportation is the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions in California, responsible for 38% of the state's emissions. Local land-use decisions heavily influence transportation patterns. Low-density development results in longer commutes and more automobile dependence, while compact, mixed-use, walkable development patterns allow people to drive less and reduce their GHG emissions. Evidence from regions around California and the nation shows that residents of walkable neighborhoods near transit drive 25-40% less than people in low-density, car-centric communities.

Smarter growth is good for California's economy and reducing oil dependence

The AB 32 Scoping Plan is a major opportunity to provide leadership and set policy direction not only to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also to address other pressing needs for the state. My constituents are asking for relief from high gas prices and are concerned about our country's oil dependence. One of the best ways to address these issues is to shorten commutes by building homes close to jobs and expanding transportation choices. A July 2008 poll by the Public Policy Institute of California found that 81% of adults now favor encouraging local governments to change land use and transportation patterns so that people can drive less.

California's housing market has responded to this changing demand. In the Sacramento region, one of the hardest hit by the recent housing meltdown, the share of new residential construction that is small-lot or attached has exploded from 20% to 70% of the market over the last three years. Prioritizing land use and transportation in the AB 32 Scoping Plan will help unleash this market demand and accelerate more transportation options for California commuters, while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Plan should set a higher target for land use and transportation

The Draft Scoping Plan would be improved with a more ambitious reduction target for local land use decisions. Evidence around the country and California proves that smart growth and public transportation are a winning combination to reducing global warming pollution.

I urge you to adopt a higher target for the land use and transportation sector, one that reflects the importance of land use as a primary driver of California's GHG emissions. Changing land use patterns is a long-term endeavor, and the reductions from smarter planning will accumulate over time. The 2020 target is a milestone on the way to the much more ambitious 2050 target, and we need to start making significant changes now if we are to achieve the very large emissions reductions required by 2050. Therefore it is critical that we lay the foundation between now and 2020 by setting a higher target.

Your leadership on global warming policy demonstrates that California has the potential to make AB 32 the most comprehensive and effective climate change strategy in the nation. Because AB 32 will not only determine California's climate change future but will also shape national policy, it is imperative that California get it right. I urge you to affirm the importance of smart growth and public transportation by adopting a higher target and a more robust role for this sector.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen O. Tauscher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ellen O. Tauscher
Member of Congress