



SONOMA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION & LAND USE COALITION

April 10, 2017

Mary Nichols, Chair
California Air Resources Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Target Scoping Plan Update -- Comments

Dear Ms. Nichols:

The Sonoma County Transportation and Land Use Coalition has worked with local and regional officials since 1991 to improve public transit and to encourage compact growth within our cities. Actions by local authorities are essential to reduce the “carbon footprint” of cities. Therefore, we urge you to provide understandable guidance and protocols to enable the thousands of people concerned with local transportation and land-use planning to act more quickly and effectively. You have previously received our joint comments on this subject (9/27/16) and our own comment letter (12/13/16). We take this opportunity to highlight some of our recent experiences.

When we interviewed candidates for a recent city council election, one of our questions was: “What steps should be taken to reduce driving?” We heard a good answer: “Improve bicycle safety.” However, when that city’s officials were introduced to the proposed climate action plan, the council members discussed planting more trees and bio-char landscaping. The most significant sector—transportation—was ignored, in part because the plan didn’t say: “In each of the next 5 years we need to achieve a 6% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in this city.” If the State sets annual amounts by which greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles need to be reduced, and makes success a condition of funding for desired projects, local officials are likely to give the transportation sector needed attention.

We have also seen how a legal challenge can unnecessarily delay action on local climate action plans. Many cities in Sonoma County postponed all consideration of implementing plans when a suit was filed, even though no court order required any delay. In the City of Sonoma, citizens were sufficiently informed to walk policy makers through the details of the case, and they found that most of the proposed actions would not be affected by the lawsuit. That city has moved forward, but other cities have not done so. A contingency process defined by the ARB regarding litigation could be helpful.

Finally, we note that communities with ample parking lots will not become walkable without appropriate changes in their budgets. The Climate Action Plan for our county devotes less than three pages to “Funding and Financing” its implementation.^a It holds out the hope of “regional investment” but expects each entity to manage the funding of its own projects. It

^a Climate Action Plan 2020, pp. 4-14 to 4-16

would be helpful to have State guidance that appropriately prioritizes funding for transit, sidewalks, and other needed improvements to make communities more walkable.

For example, Santa Rosa CityBus recently completed a long-range transit plan to make the buses run more frequently on more convenient routes. The City is looking for up to \$7 million annually in the next few years implement the plan. However, preliminary discussions showed that elected officials feel pressure to remedy the deferred maintenance of roads accepted into the public network. The recent financing focus for transit, pedestrian and bicycle modes in this county could be at risk.^b

As the ARB develops its direction to regional planning organizations, it is also important to send understandable messages to the local policy makers that will be critical actors in reducing the “carbon footprint” of cities. We earnestly hope you can provide the needed guidance and protocols that will energize the numerous entities concerned with local transportation and land-use planning. If you have questions or wish to discuss our experiences further, please contact Steve Birdlebough at: scbaffirm@gmail.com (707) 576-6632.

Sincerely,


Steve Birdlebough


Willard Richards, Chair

^b Since 2009, 60% of the revenue from two voter-approved “self-help” sales tax measures in Sonoma County has paid for rail, bus, bike and pedestrian projects. Measure M, passed in 2004, is a ¼ cent sales tax that funds transit, bike/pedestrian projects, and roads. Measure Q, passed in 2008, is a ¼ cent sales tax to restore passenger rail service and establish a bicycle/pedestrian pathway along the route in Marin and Sonoma Counties. It has not yet been determined whether transit will continue to be a major focus of sales tax funding when these measures have run their course.