900 Paramount Road

 Oakland California 94610

 July 10, 2010

Mary Nichols

Chair, California Air Resources Board

P.O. Box 2815

Sacramento, CA 95812

Subject: MTC: Need for a more Assertive Program

Dear Ms. Nichols:

It is my understanding that CARB has embarked upon a program designed to “influence California transportation spending and policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, oil consumption and vehicle miles traveled”. If so, it’s welcome news.

As a transportation engineer and public transit advocate, I have followed Bay Area transportation development closely for many years. The record is not a pretty one.

MTC’s rhetoric is as politically correct as it gets. MTC reports, mission statements, discussion papers, power point presentations, environmental documents and regional plans are replete with all the right phraseology. All the buzz words about global warming, greenhouse gas reduction, VMT reduction, the need to curb sprawl, etc. are there. Based upon the rhetoric, it might appear that under MTC aegis the Bay Area is busily engaged in doing its part to bring down the GHG emissions.

Unfortunately, when one looks at how the capital projects are initiated and defined, and how the capital money is allocated, it all breaks down. There has been…and continues to be… a singular lack of connection between MTC’s rhetoric and its infrastructure development program. Following are three aspects of the problem:

 1.) Despite the rhetoric, MTC remains determined to continue expanding Bay Area freeways. One current indication of this is embodied in Mr. Heminger’s letter of July 2, 2010: <http://apps.mtc.ca.gov/meeting_packet_documents/agenda_1519/4_AB744Update.pdf>

MTC’s HOT lane program encompasses no less than 300 lane miles of new Bay Area freeway. MTC claims that adding freeway lanes would reduce GHG emissions. Despite this claim it remains obvious to most observers that building more highways would conflict with the climate-changing objectives MTC professes to endorse. MTC’s HOT lane program would not “move us in the right GHG direction.”

 2.) MTC’s Director refers to MTC analyses which he says “consistently show….that infrastructure, by itself, does not do much for reducing GHG emissions.”

Given MTC’s program, why would it?

Most of MTC’s current capital program is devoted to widening highways and wasting transit dollars on large and largely useless boondoggles (e.g. the BART extensions - all destined to promote sprawl; the Oakland Airport Connector; San Francisco’s virtually useless Central Subway, and the Doyle Drive replacement - over twice as wide as it needs to be).

Projects like these do not lead to reduced GHG production.

 3.) When transportation funds are diverted to counterproductive highway expansions and wasteful pet local projects, dozens of large and small projects of greater merit languish for the lack of funding. Examples of how the Bay Region’s transportation funding could be better used abound. For instance:

* dozens of existing overpasses and bridges still need seismic upgrading,
* with improvements, the ridership of San Francisco’s Muni Metro system could be increased by thousands of riders a day,
* other long overdue bus route improvements would do the same for Muni’s bus service,
* the long-awaited Caltrain extension to downtown San Francisco would reduce the need for people to drive into San Francisco from the South,
* a BART/Amtrak transfer station in West Oakland would ease congestion on I-80,
* Passenger rail service extended across a new Dumbarton Rail Bridge would provide a badly needed second Bay rail crossing,
* an independent operational and marketing analysis of the AC Transit system would lead to a major increase in AC Transit ridership.

It appears that in this region we have lost sight of a vital factor: People who can afford to drive (too many to ignore) will not reduce their driving and increase their transit-riding until there is a public transit alternative in place that is both well-integrated and reliable. These are obtainable objectives, but it will take a concerted regional transportation planning effort to achieve them. Unfortunately, for most its 39 year history MTC has failed to take the steps necessary to develop an effective and attractive network of BayArea public transit services.

Given the weakness of Bay Area regional transportation planning, it is not surprising that Bay Area infrastructure additions have failed to meet expectations. Unfortunately, instead of acknowledging past mistakes and adopting a new approach, MTC continues to this day with its time-honored practice of brokering deals among local political cabals and “working with” highway agencies. Our regional transportation agency justifies this passive approach by contending that no matter what it builds, GHG emissions won’t be affected.

The Bay Area needs a more assertive and forward-looking regional transportation program.

Sincerely yours,

Gerald Cauthen, PE

510 208 5441

Cautn1@aol.com

cc James N. Goldstene

 Douglas Ito