

A Coalition for State Support for Public Transportation

December 15, 2008

The Honorable Darrell Steinberg
President pro Tempore, California State Senate

The Honorable Karen Bass
Speaker of the California State Assembly

The Honorable Dave Cogdill
Senate Republican Leader

The Honorable Mike Villines
Assembly Republican Leader

RE: 2008-09 State Budget – Californians Need Better Public Transit Options

Legislative Leaders:

We the undersigned organizations, representing millions of Californians, urge you to **reject** the Governor's November budget proposal that would further drain this year's State Transit Assistance (STA) program and permanently eliminate this critical program in future years. These are the latest in a string of attacks on public transportation, which—according to analysis by TransForm and California Transit Association—has already suffered nearly \$1.7 billion in cuts in the 2008-2009 state budget. In the last two budgets combined, nearly \$3 billion in dedicated public transportation funds have been redirected to help balance the General Fund's deficit.

The governor's "November Revise" proposes to reduce the STA program from \$306 million to \$75 million-- a 75% cut. Furthermore, the Governor proposes to **permanently** eliminate the STA program beginning in 2009-10. We urge you to **reject** these proposals. The State's vital interest in spurring economic growth is best served by *more* robust transit systems, not by crippling local transit operations and terminating state support altogether. As described below, additional raids on the STA will cost more jobs, further weaken service at a time when greater numbers of Californians are relying on transit, and erode California's ability to meet its global warming and air pollution reduction and public health goals.

State Transit Assistance Program (STA) Provides Jobs

Public transportation supports California's economy by providing permanent, green jobs. The American Public Transportation Association (APTA) has repeatedly demonstrated that every \$1 invested in public transportation projects and services generates approximately \$6 in local economic activity because of retail and housing development near transit hubs. The State Transit Assistance program is critical to keeping California moving. STA provides the only ongoing source of state funding for public transportation operations. These funds pay for fuel and the salaries of men and women who operate the buses and trains; loss of these funds means cutting jobs and service. While STA funds complement other local sources of operating funds, many agencies report that STA provides up to 15-25% of their operating budget. Local transit agencies simply cannot continue to raise fares to make up for the state shortfall. Transit agencies around the state are struggling to meet the growing demand for service created by the skyrocketing price

of gasoline over the last two years. Even though gas prices have dropped in the past few months, an over-dependence on petroleum means that price spikes and higher fuel costs overall are expected as global demand rises. Providing accessible and reliable transportation choices will help protect California's economy despite rising and volatile fuel prices.

More Californians Rely on Transit in 2008

More Californians are riding transit than at any time since World War II – over 1.5 billion passenger trips were provided last year by local transit systems. According to a data recently released by APTA, transit ridership has grown in many California cities by 20-to-25% compared to last year, with many new middle class riders choosing buses and trains instead of their cars and trucks. High gas prices and heightened awareness of global warming mean that more people are turning to public transportation to meet their travel needs. California cannot build a 21st century transit system on a 1960's budget.

Public Transportation Essential to Meeting California's Global Warming Reduction Targets

Better and more frequent transit service are essential to help California reduce its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions without compromising access or mobility. Public transportation use in California already reduces carbon dioxide emissions by nearly 3.6 million metric tons annually according to a recent CalPIRG study. Cutting public transportation funding now will set California back in its drive to dramatically reduce emissions. In addition, public transportation helps reduce other health-threatening air pollutants. APTA's data also shows that public transportation use produces 95 percent less carbon monoxide and about half as much carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides per passenger mile, compared to private vehicles.

We recognize that the state-supported transit program must do its part in the current economic crisis, just as many other state programs have done. We also recognize that you face many challenges in balancing California's budget. But the state already diverted more than \$1.67 billion in dedicated public transportation funds in the 2008-09 budget—a cut of 70% compared to historic state law—a disproportionate share of state deficit solutions. These cuts have rested squarely on the backs of the millions of Californians who can least afford additional severe cutbacks in public transportation services, particularly the elderly, disabled, middle class commuters and school children.

Our organizations have come together in an unprecedented coalition because of the dire need to protect public transit funding. We are ready to work with you as you address the long-term mobility, economic development, and environmental quality needs of this state. In the meantime, we again urge you to retain the \$306 million for the STA program that remained in the adopted 2008-09 State Budget, and to reject the Governor's proposal to eliminate the STA program altogether. We simply cannot spur economic growth, reduce global warming emissions or improve air quality and protect public health without an on-going state commitment to public transportation.

We look forward to working with you to protect California's future. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Tina Andolina
Planning and Conservation League

Bob Allen
Urban Habitat

Bob Balgenorth
State Building and Construction Trades
Council, AFL-CIO

Barry Broad
California Teamsters Public Affairs Council
California Conference Board, Amalgamated
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Los Angeles Metro

Josh Shaw
California Transit Association

Ryan Wiggins
End Oil/Communities for Clean Ports

Michael R. Wiley
Sacramento Regional Transit District

Cc: Members of the California State Legislature
Mr. Curt Augustine, Deputy Legislative Secretary, Office of the Governor
Secretary Dale E. Bonner, Business, Transportation & Housing Agency
Mr. Will Kempton, Director, Department of Transportation
Mr. Michael C. Genest, Director, Department of Finance
Mr. Brian Kelly, Policy Director, Office of Senator Steinberg
Mr. Brian Annis, Senate Budget & Fiscal Review Committee
Ms. Carrie Cornwell, Chief Consultant, Senate Transportation & Housing Committee
Mr. Art Bauer, Principal Consultant, Senate Transportation & Housing Committee
Mr. Ted Morley, Transportation Consultant, Senate Republican Caucus
Ms. Rocel Bettencourt, Consultant, Senate Republican Fiscal and Policy Office
Mr. Craig Cornett, Office of Speaker Bass
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Ms. Janet Dawson, Chief Consultant, Assembly Transportation Committee
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Mr. Chris Holtz, Senior Consultant, Assembly Republican Fiscal Office
Mr. Edmund G. Brown, Attorney General