

Transit as a Component of the Transportation Vision for Southern California

Good morning Mr. Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Marnie Primmer, and I am the Executive Director of Mobility 21, Southern California's transportation advocacy coalition. A consortium of business leaders, transportation providers, and others who care about the future of Southern California's transportation network we are dedicated to bringing increased investment to our region to fund needed transportation and transit improvements. We promote a regional, multi-modal vision for transportation, and work to bring consensus to what can often be a rather complex system.

Today I want to share with you the transportation future that Southern California has been working together to develop, and how this future is in jeopardy due to the lack of support for transit funding at the State level.

As you are well aware, voters in southern California counties have repeatedly voted to assess themselves a dedicated tax for transportation, including transit. Revenues from these sales taxes in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego Counties are projected to raise nearly **\$100 billion** over the next 40 years for improving our highways, local streets and roads, regional arterials, expand commuter rail service, develop new transit lines, enhance bus service, provide transit services to the elderly, disabled and transit dependent, and address growing environmental concerns due to the impacts of motorized vehicles and runoff. Ventura County, which does not currently have a self-imposed transportation measure, has plans to seek support from the voters in the near future.

Commuters in southern California have spoken at the polls to say solving congestion, providing transit, and developing a comprehensive transportation network that helps them travel both within their home county and around the entire region is a tremendously important issue. The business community has spoken by supporting these measures to help their employees get home to their families faster, and to increase productivity due to reduction in lost time sitting in traffic. Transportation agencies have worked to develop comprehensive plans that address the specific needs of their communities.

In the past, when the state has faced financial difficulties, it was assumed that these so-called "self-help" counties could cover the shortfall through their sales tax measures. In this economic climate that is just simply untrue. Sales tax revenues are down as much as 40% in some counties, and projections for what these dedicated sales tax measures will be able to provide for future transit funding are drastically reduced. A stable, meaningful commitment from the state is an absolute requirement to fulfill the promise of these transportation programs.

I'd like to give you a snapshot of what some of those plans look like across southern California, in essence what this new transit vision could mean for our region.

The key element of Orange County's Renewed Measure M transit program is improving the 100-year old Santa Fe rail line, known today as the Los Angeles/San Diego (LOSSAN) rail corridor, through the heart of the county. Then, by using this well-established, operational commuter rail system as a platform for future growth, existing rail stations will be developed into regional transportation hubs that can serve as regional transportation gateways or the centerpiece of local

transportation services. To support this backbone of rail travel, a series of new, well-coordinated, flexible transportation systems will be developed to help commuters with the “final mile” solution—getting from a transit station to their ultimate destination. These new regional connections will each be customized to the unique transportation vision the station serves using both creativity and good financial sense. OCTA envisions being able to use public-public and public-private partnerships to deliver these feeder systems, and transportation solutions for each transportation hub could range from monorails to local mini-bus systems to new technologies.

The new, localized transit programs will bring competition to local transportation planning, creating a marketplace of transportation ideas where the best ideas emerge and compete for funding. The plan is to encourage civic entrepreneurship and stimulate private involvement and investment. The guiding principles OCTA will use for all transit investments are value, safety, convenience and reliability. Each local transit vision will be evaluated against clear criteria, such as congestion relief, cost-effectiveness, readiness, connectivity, and a sound operating plan.

In terms of bus services, OCTA’s vision calls for more specialized transit services, including improved van services and reduced fares for senior citizens and people with disabilities, safety improvements at key bus stops and a network of community-based, mini-bus services to be developed in areas outside of the central county rail corridor.

These plans are currently being compromised by the absence of state funding for transit operations which has resulted in OCTA being forced to slash nearly 20% of its bus service this year, after seeing record ridership numbers only a year prior.

Transit operators in Riverside County have adopted a \$2.6 billion 10-year Transit Vision that will be substantially delayed without state funding for capital and operations. Riverside County has plans to extend commuter rail service and increase the frequency of trains on existing lines, introduce BRT, use intelligent transportation systems to provide traveler information, and expand park & ride facilities.

Prop 1B is providing for the capital needs for our operators for the next 2-3 years; however, once bond funding is exhausted there is no source of capital funding to implement the rest of the county's transit vision. The vision assumes modest, incremental increases in capital funding for the next ten years. A stable state source of capital funding is necessary. For example, the Riverside Transit Agency (RTA), which has the 2nd largest service area in the country, needs \$700m to operate Fixed and Dial-a-ride services, implement the planned BRTs, enhanced commuter link, transit centers, ITS projects and purchase about 80 new CNG buses for replacement and expansion in the next 10 years. Likewise, SunLine Transit in the Coachella Valley cannot implement of BRT on Highway 111, improved bus frequency on major routes, continue discounted fares for seniors, or construct transit centers without a long-term source of capital funding.

The volatile economy is also impacting transit operations. LTF is the major source of operations funding. With the dive of sales tax revenues, LTF is not providing enough revenue to operate existing service, let alone expand it to meet greenhouse gas and "sustainable communities" mandates. Wise financial management by local transportation agencies has resulted in modest reserves that can maintain most service for the short term. However, the day of reckoning will

come when these reserves will be depleted and serious eliminations of transit service in Riverside County will be eminent. BRT cannot be introduced into Riverside County, nor can commuter trains be run more frequently without funding for their operations.

A flourishing transit system in the Inland Empire can be a reality if the state supports capital as well as operations of transit service. We are already planning for the future; we have a vision, but we cannot implement it without a state role.

The San Diego region made a decision when they passed the TransNet sales tax program to not only fund new transit capital projects, but to also set aside enough of those funds to operate the new services into the future. However, when the operating funds for EXISTING services are cut as dramatically as they have been in recent years, it is difficult to justify having operating funds for new services. It almost puts the region in the position of having to “apologize” for planning ahead on the new services. To further complicate this, changing the use of the sales tax funds is very difficult because commitments were made to the voters when the Ordinance was passed. It puts pressure on the region to supplant existing funds with funds that were clearly approved as an augmentation to existing revenues.

In San Bernardino County, SANBAG is working to expand transit options in San Bernardino and Redlands. Over the last several years, SANBAG has been studying the feasibility of utilizing the Redlands Subdivision, a 9-mile railroad corridor extending between downtown San Bernardino and the University of Redlands, to introduce passenger rail service to this area. To date, studies have been completed which determined that the use of this route for passenger rail service is appropriate and feasible, and there are a number of good options for station locations. The agency hopes to expand transit options for commuters traveling along the I-10 corridor and use the existing rail right-of-way to help meet the growing local and regional travel markets. If successful, the project will reduce automobile trips, fuel consumption and pollution by providing alternatives to driving. This investment will also help SANBAG develop transit centers serving rapidly growing population and employment centers, and contribute to the economic recovery of the region. SANBAG hopes to maximize transit connections for riders by linking new transit with intermodal hubs, such as the E Street station.

SANBAG is now moving forward with the next step in the process to make passenger transit service on this corridor a reality – an Alternative Analysis (AA) Study. The AA Study is required in order to request funding from the federal government.

The AA study will identify several potential alternatives, including station location options, routes and vehicle technologies; evaluate and compare the costs and benefits of these alternatives; and recommend a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA).

As part of the Redlands Corridor AA, SANBAG is also preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment (EIR/EA) to evaluate the environmental effects of constructing and operating passenger transit service along this corridor.

SANBAG will evaluate the costs and benefits, as well as the environmental differences between several alternatives for the Redlands Corridor, including the use of different passenger transit service technologies, including light rail, commuter rail and bus rapid transit.

In Los Angeles County, the loss of State Transit Assistance funding has been significant – Los Angeles County should receive approximately \$90 million of STA monies annually. STA is the most flexible source of funding for Metro and the Municipal Operators. Funding flexibility enables operators in tough economic times to reallocate resources to where they are needed most. The consequences of this funding shortfall are devastating. Metro has a yet unresolved operating deficit of \$396 million for FY 2010-11 through FY 2013-14, which is mostly due to the loss of state transit funding. Transit agencies serve a segment of the population that is reliant on their services to reach employment, school, medical appointments, and other essential services. Cuts in transit funding adversely impact these riders most significantly, because they have no other options when service is reduced or eliminated.

With the passage of Measure R in 2008, Metro is positioned to make significant investments in expanding transit service. From new BRT lines, to better connections between transit modes, to new light rail and subway lines, Metro has transit improvements planned in every corner of Los Angeles County. However, the projects require funding assistance from our State and Federal partners. The loss of State funds and the State's inability to sell bonds will negatively impact Metro's ability to successfully implement Measure R projects.

While these are some specific examples of both the vision for our transportation future, and the key role that transit will play, let me leave you with three overarching reasons why transit funding should be an essential responsibility of the State.

Sustainability – with the increased population and employment growth projected for the state, public transportation needs to play an increased role if we are to create a sustainable transportation system. From what we hear locally, people are increasingly frustrated over our current system that does not provide residents with viable choices to single-occupant driving. People will and do use transit if the right kinds of services and frequency are provided. Having funding sources that are not stable leads to transit systems that people cannot depend upon. While many people will try transit, it is too easy to lose them if they find out it is not dependable and convenient. And once you lose a rider, it is very difficult to get them back.

Economic Development – with increased congestion statewide, we are hearing concerns raised by employers that they are having trouble recruiting people because of the difficulty in getting to their jobs. For larger employers that can shift their operations to other regions or states, the time and difficulty in commuting becomes one of the factors that existing and prospective employers look at in their location decision. While congestion is not going to go away, having time-competitive transit services in place can help keep California a location of choice for employers.

Greenhouse Gases – with the increased emphasis on reducing emissions, transit has an important role to play. We can talk all we want on the need to reduce emissions, but we have to walk the talk in implementing (and paying for) the solutions.

On behalf of the nearly 4000 members of Mobility 21 I want to thank you for this opportunity to address you today. We look forward to working with you as you seek ways to restore and increase the funding for expanding and enhancing transit options for all Californians.