

Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund

P.O. Box 151439 San Rafael, CA 94915 415-331-1982

August 9, 2018
By E-Mail to:
sm101DEIR_
EA_comments
@dot.ca.gov

Yolanda Rivas
Office of Environmental Analysis
Department of Transportation, District 4
P.O. Box 23660 MS 8B
Oakland, CA 94623-0660

Re: U.S. Highway 101 Managed Lanes Project RDEIR

Dear Ms. Rivas:

The Transportation Solutions Defense and Education Fund, TRANSDEF, is an environmental organization focused on reducing the climate impacts of transportation. In our DEIR comment letter of January 19, 2018, incorporated herein by reference, we criticized Caltrans' blatant refusal to comply with CEQA. We reiterate those comments, and offer several new ones on the recirculated DEIR ("RDEIR"). Page citations are to the RDEIR unless otherwise noted.

Like the DEIR staff before it, the RDEIR staff has apparently received instructions from management to simply pretend TRANSDEF has not commented on the project. The RDEIR shows no signs that our comments have ever been read. Nonetheless, we have in our possession a 3/19/18 email from yourself, indicating receipt of our comments.

TRANSDEF's Alternative

In our DEIR comments, TRANSDEF proposed a 2+ HOV Build/Convert alternative:

To surmount the problems identified in the analyses that resulted in these alternatives being rejected, TRANSDEF has created its own alternative that we request be studied in the Revised DEIR: HOV 2+ Convert a Lane Plus Add a Lane. To fully utilize the new facilities, this Alternative includes two operational elements: a well-funded express buses deployment and a strong promotional campaign encouraging smartphone-based real-time ridematching.

The two HOV lanes will provide adequate capacity for the carpoolers identified by the travel model, as well as offer capacity for those motivated by the campaign, by the free-flow of traffic, and by its accompanying travel time advantage, to shift modes. When VTA sees the outcome of the study in the revised DEIR, it may well decide to modify its HOT lanes project to be compatible with it.

Because the travel model cannot evaluate the effectiveness of a proposed public campaign, this alternative will need an off-model adjustment that assumes that the campaign adds 5 percentage points to the carpool mode share...

The TRANSDEF Alternative overcomes all the operational negatives identified for Alternative 2: Excessive HOV demand, lower speeds and unreliable travel times. (1-5.) In addition, we are confident that appropriate modeling would demonstrate a significant reduction in VMT and GHG emissions. CEQA was designed to force unwilling agencies to study alternatives with lower impacts and higher benefits--exactly what is proposed here.

To gain the full benefits of a shift in the cultural expectations about driving, a large-scale public promotional campaign is needed. That, in turn requires a larger project scope, a Peninsula-scale HOV network. Creating change this profound simply cannot be accomplished with a one-county project. Model a continuous HOV lane throughout San Mateo, San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties. In addition, include the conversion of a mixed flow lane into HOV-2 for the entire length of I-280 in the three counties.

This alternative will test the potential for a very large mode shift to carpooling and transit. The proposed logical termini for the proposed Project can then serve as an early phase of a larger buildout. The Alternative would include the following elements: rigorous and ongoing enforcement of HOV occupancy rules, and HOV operational hours that cover all routinely congested time periods.

For purposes of studying this alternative, determine whether any laws or regulations govern conversions from mixed-flow to HOV. If any exist (and we are unaware of any), assume they have been amended to permit the conversion. Demonstrating in an EIR the potential benefits of conversion is essential before deeply held attitudes can be changed. (If any legislative actions are necessary, this project prerequisite would be identified in the Statement of Overriding Considerations as the responsibility of another agency, the Legislature.)

Greenhouse Gas Analysis

The RDEIR's understanding of operational GHG emissions on p. 3-26 is severely flawed. While an individual vehicle's emissions are represented by Figure 3.1-2, this is irrelevant. The question that hasn't been answered is "What are the cumulative impacts of moving more vehicles faster past a point?" As speeds increase, more vehicles are

moving, producing an entirely different curve. (Please note: The undersigned received an acknowledgement from the authors of this figure's cited paper.)

Citing MTC's regional plan is hardly a convincing source for environmental activists, who have consistently identified MTC as the region's chief promoter of unsustainable policies. The 2017 ARB Scoping Plan makes it clear that SB 375's per capita emissions reduction targets (cited on p. 3-27) are not adequate to meet SB 32 targets:

In its evaluation of the role of the transportation system in meeting the statewide emissions targets, CARB determined that VMT reductions of 7 percent below projected VMT levels in 2030 (which includes currently adopted SB 375 SCSs) are necessary. (Scoping Plan, p. 101, emphasis added.)

As our Sierra Club colleagues have noted, average daily speeds are entirely irrelevant. Congested periods represent an entirely different operational scenario than free-flow periods in the middle of the night. We flat-out disbelieve the model results showing that VMT increases by nearly 20%, while speeds remain stable. The emissions projection produced by this methodology is junk--worthless scientifically and as substantial evidence. The question not being answered here is: "What are the congested period speeds?" That's the only metric that matters.

With wildfires raging around the State, the time has long since passed for the kind of equivocation found in the CEQA Conclusion. It is profoundly incorrect for the DEIR to conclude:

Since the proposed project would result in a reduction in GHG emissions for the Design Year 2040 compared to Existing Year, the project would align with policies to keep the State on a trajectory for progress in reducing emissions toward 2050 reduction goals. (3-32.)

This is Absolutely Incorrect. The trajectory of an 80% reduction is so utterly different from a 7% reduction trajectory that the two are in no way comparable. If the entire globe reduced emissions at the latter rate, the icecaps would melt long before reductions ever started making progress. The project's trajectory will obviously impede the State's progress towards its SB 32 target. That is a Significant and Unavoidable Impact, requiring consideration of alternatives and feasible mitigations.

In addition, the reduction of vehicle emissions has already been accounted for in the Scoping Plan. It is double-counting by Caltrans to claim the project benefits the State's GHG emissions reduction efforts. In fact, it sets them back. It is the role of MPOs and Caltrans to reduce VMT. This project supports a very substantial increase in VMT. This project is heading in the wrong direction.

As we stated in our DEIR comments, the provision of SOV facilities in the guise of Managed Lanes will do the opposite of "increase commuters' incentive to carpool, vanpool, or take buses." (3-32.) The projections of 35-58% increases in HOV use are unprecedented in regions like ours. What validation has been done with the model to ensure that this is a reasonable output? It is obvious to us that this is nonsense, or highly misleading. In comparing HOV use to No Build, is there any kind of meaningful comparison that can be made?

It is highly ironic that the RDEIR mentions SB 391 as requiring "the CTP to meet California's climate change goals under AB 32." (3-36.) Caltrans senior management killed the draft CTP where staff attempted to do just that, and replaced a strong climate change direction with a status quo approach that fosters this very project.

This highway project is not consistent with Caltrans' Strategic Management Plan. It contains no feature that will result in a lowered VMT per capita, and because the planning for it assumes a growing population that will continue to drive alone in the same proportion as now, it arguably will exacerbate the State's ever-increasing VMT.

Conclusion

Perhaps what's most offensive about this DEIR process is the deliberate way Caltrans is closing its eyes and ears to comments from the public, so that it can maintain Business as Usual. Public comment is the very heart of CEQA. Listening could help shift the agency in the direction of sustainable transportation, so that Caltrans can stop playing the role of dinosaur, about to be made extinct by history.

Without having studied the TRANSDEF alternative, Caltrans is unable to make the findings necessary to certify the EIR. The DEIR and RDEIR are not legally adequate when a feasible alternative that reduces environmental impacts has been proposed but was not studied.

Sincerely,

/s/ DAVID SCHONBRUNN

David Schonbrunn,
President