

Sierra Club Debate

I'm DS, President of TRANSDEF, an environmental non-profit focused on reducing the impacts of transportation on climate change. Roughly half of GHG emissions in CA come from motor vehicles. While the state has succeeded in reducing the carbon content of fuel, and required more fuel-efficient engines, it has utterly failed to turn around the trend towards ever more driving in the state. As a result, GHG emissions from transportation are increasing, while most other sectors are decreasing. This means the state's goals to reduce GHGs won't be met.

TRANSDEF has been on the same message for 25 years: the region needs to greatly reduce solo driving. MTC, the region's agency for transportation finance, has been the chief obstacle to that policy direction. That's because its Commissioners are local elected officials, who stubbornly oppose change. While MTC is the worst, CCTA is a close runner up.

Let's start with the big picture of why TRANSDEF opposes Measure J. It's because CCTA sees no need to change its priorities in response to climate change. Even though the 2017 Countywide Transportation Plan showed VMT increasing 28% and GHG emissions increasing by a like amount, that didn't trigger a rethinking.

In 2016, I wrote a ballot argument that stated: "Contra Costa needs a transformative 21st Century plan for mobility in the future. Measure X is NOT that plan." CCTA obviously learned a lesson from that experience. They titled their 2020 Transportation Expenditure Plan "A Transformative Plan for Contra Costa's Future." While they figured out that they needed to greenwash themselves, they weren't willing to listen to our advice, and actually transform the status quo.

As a result of this tax, it's fair to say that very little will change: solo driving drops only by a tiny percentage, despite a 27 increase in population by 2040. VMT goes up by 28%. That's a disaster, both because of the congestion it causes, and the GHG emissions released. While congestion is no longer considered an environmental impact under CEQA, increased VMT is.

CCTA is hiding the fact that Measure J is a tax increase. Getting the ballot designation J will encourage many voters to believe they are extending the existing Measure J, which runs until 2034. That's why we are assisting in a lawsuit challenging multiple aspects of how CCTA is presenting this measure.

We assert that Measure J fundamentally misrepresents the congestion relief that the measure would deliver. Any normal person would think that the measure is promising to reduce current levels of congestion. They would be wrong.

As a result of our lawsuit, we forced CCTA's lawyers to publicly expose the rotten core of the agency's planning. They wrote: "In other words, although overall

congestion will increase due to normal population and growth, the 2017 CTP improvements studied by the DEIR will reduce that congestion."

This is an agency and a political class that are unwilling to acknowledge the end of the suburban dream. Instead, they insist on doubling down on what hasn't worked. CCTA admits that congestion actually gets 166% worse by 2040, compared to 2013. CCTA's official response is that congestion will be better with Measure J than if we did nothing. As we wrote in 2016: "Let's do more to stop future congestion than just watch it get worse."

"The reason congestion gets so much worse is because the number of cars on the roads will grow much faster than the roads themselves. You can't pour 5 gallons of water into a four-gallon jug. Measure J's "Growth Management Program" supports a development pattern that makes practically every new resident commute by car. That's not a plan to relieve congestion!"

The answer is to change the pattern of future development away from suburban sprawl, and towards transit-oriented infill. That's what SB 375 requires, which is why MTC and CMAs like CCTA have fought its requirements so hard.

From an environmental standpoint, there's no way to square Measure J with the Club's transportation policies that prohibit support of highway widening. So, there's no way to endorse this measure.

The question before you, then, is whether the Club will exercise its environmental leadership to tell voters that CCTA needs to change its priorities before the Club can endorse any CCTA measure. I urge you to vote to recommend the Club oppose the measure, to send CCTA a powerful message: the era of highway projects is over.

"They say they're going to "Get Contra Costa Moving again." If they could actually "reduce traffic on our roads and highways," they'd have done it long ago."