



August 26, 2009

Christopher Calfee, Special Counsel
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Proposed California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines

Dear Mr. Calfee:

The Environmental Council of Sacramento appreciates the opportunity to support the comments and suggestions made by Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (SABA) on the Proposed CEQA Guidelines. We commend CNRA for its initiative and work on updating the CEQA Guidelines to facilitate effective, consistent implementation of recent state legislation intended to address the threats posed by climate change. ECOS completely agrees with SABA that the many threats to California posed by global warming and the wholesale deterioration of our natural environment and our quality of life in California due to vehicle emissions and auto-dominated land use, call for more significant changes to the guidelines, especially as they relate to transportation.

The CEQA criteria that have been used in the past to evaluate environmental impacts related to transportation and traffic—i. e. Level of Service (LOS)—have been, in our view, not only inadequate but actually counterproductive to maintaining the environmental quality of our communities, regions and our state as a whole.

ECOS believes that implementation of the intent of CEQA would be substantially enhanced in crucial ways if the State were to follow the recommendation made by San Francisco's LOS Technical Working Group, which recently proposed to replace the current automobile LOS measure with a measure based on the Average Trips Generated (ATG) by a project, paired with a transportation impact mitigation fee (TIMF) and that projects that do not generate net new automobile trips would not be considered to have transportation impacts under CEQA.

For many Californians, our existing system of automobile transportation (mainly single-occupancy) provides some obvious (if narrowly conceived) benefits in the form of comfortable, high-speed, local and long-distance travel, along with some less tangible benefits, such as fashionableness and display of social status. But this same transportation system has also cost many Californians dearly. Each year thousands pay with their lives and tens of thousands more suffer life-long injury and disabilities as the result of the more than a half a million collisions occurring annually across this state. In addition, emissions from these vehicles are one of the primary causes of asthma and other life-threatening illnesses that affect the health and finances of tens of other California families. And, finally, it has now become clear that the entire environment of the planet is being put at risk due to the immanent prospect of abrupt climate change brought on by greenhouse gas emissions, 40% of which are generated by motor vehicles.

In fact, the ever-accelerating use of automobile transport over the last 50 years in California and around the world has been a primary contributor to each of the following severe problems now confronting our state and our planet:

1. **Climate change:** an increase in average global temperature so abrupt and so severe that it may well result in a collapse of land and marine ecosystems, wreck havoc upon worldwide crop production and raise sea levels to inundate coastal cities around the world
2. **Deterioration of air quality:** in some regions, such as our own Central Valley, increases in ozone and fine particulates sufficient to result in well documented increased morbidity and mortality rates for asthma, emphysema, and cancer in the region
3. **Land use patterns and transportation structures that discourage active mobility:** so much so that obesity and diabetes have become statewide and national epidemics, even among our children
4. **Annual pandemics of traumatic death and disabling injuries** due to more than half a million violent vehicle collisions in California.
5. **Land use patterns that unnecessarily reduce the amount of open space** available for agriculture and for wildlife habitat.

California has led the entire planet when it comes to obsession with the automobile and with the cultural and economic spin-offs fostered by the ubiquitous machine. California has also led the planet when it comes to recognizing the need for legislation to protect the natural environment from the pollution and destruction caused by industrialization— including that connected to production and use of the automobile and the streets and highways designed for its use. Recently a pre-eminent California transportation scholar published a book titled “Two Billion Cars,” which forecasts a continuing worldwide increase in

automobile ownership, led by China, India and other developing nations. Like Californians, people all over the world are paying with their lives. Worldwide, more than one million people die each year and fifty million are injured as a result of vehicle collisions. A study by the Harvard School of Public Health predicts that by 2020 these collisions will be the third largest contributor to the burden of total global disease and injury.

At the same time, transportation-generated CO2 emissions continue to expand and currently contribute at least 40% of California's total annual greenhouse gases. As the destructiveness of the automobile upon the environment becomes increasingly clear, it becomes increasingly imperative and urgent that California fully recognize and respond effectively to this threat.

The impact CEQA has had in California and nationally has been very significant, as both its supporters and its opponents are quick to point out. CEQA has played a crucial role in guiding public policy making and in redirecting public and private enterprises toward more sustainable approaches to development and production. It is clear that without CEQA, California in 2009 would be a far different and less sustainable, less livable place for its 35 million residents. Thus it is a crucial matter if some dimension of environmental quality is threatened but, due to too narrow an interpretive framework, CEQA guidelines do not provide a means for recognizing that dimension.

We believe that the impact of auto-dominated transportation on the physical safety of human beings is very significant dimension of environmental quality which has been overlooked for far too long.

As the SABA letter points out, when it comes to the impact of the auto on the physical safety of human beings, CEQA has not been applied in a way that accounts for the real and very significant collision-related injury impacts caused by projects and policies which produce increased use of automobiles.

Changes in policy and/or proposed projects which result in immediate or cumulative significant increases in automobile use—without mitigations that would fully offset the types of impacts listed here above—inherently exceed the thresholds of significance for environmental impacts that CEQA was established to define and defend.

As SABA pointed out in its letter to CNRA on CEQA update, in the past transportation and land use projects have been evaluated using only a single, inadequate transportation criteria—i.e. level of service, commonly referred to as LOS. And that criteria has had a very narrow definition, related solely to the speed at which an individual motor vehicle can travel. This approach not only fails to capture and analyze the real human safety problems associated with high-speed automobile transportation, it actually encourages “solutions” which exacerbate those real problems—i.e. road widening, which is intended to reduce

congestion and which inherently increase speeds and results in increases in deaths and injuries. The direct causal connection between increases in the numbers of high-speed auto, truck and motorcycle trips and the number of traffic fatalities and injuries has been researched and documented so thoroughly as to be beyond dispute. Moreover, the risks of death and injury to those who need or desire to use streets and roads via other mode of transportation, such as bicycling and walking, are even more impacted by increases in speed and numbers of motorized vehicles. Thus, the "improvements" (as judged by LOS criteria) very negatively impact the opportunities for healthier mode choices.

By changing the CEQA criteria for assessing transportation-related impacts from LOS to ATG the State and local jurisdiction would be provided with a far more effective means of assessment of the true potential of any project or development to create or expand life-threatening impacts, be they the long-term effects of climate change or the more immediate increases in collision-generated fatalities, injuries, and disabilities.

We strongly urge CNRA to amend the CEQA guidelines to include requirements that all projects, programs, and policies that would likely result in increased motor vehicle trips be analyzed for their potential to impact the health and safety of roadway users, as explained here above, using the criteria of ATG rather than LOS.

Sincerely,

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