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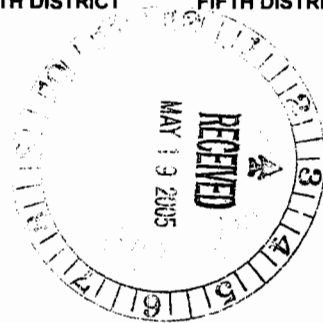
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May 18, 2005

Santa Cruz County Regional
Transportation Commission
1523 Pacific Avenue
Santa Cruz, CA 95060



RE: COMMITTEE FOR A COMPREHENSIVE
TRANSPORTATION FUNDING PROGRAM

Dear Chair Pirie and Members of the Commission:

As you know, these are extremely difficult times for our local transportation system. While federal funds are still available, they are very limited. In addition, the State has withdrawn most of its funds, even for State highways, as it concentrates on economic recovery and other priorities. Meanwhile, the cost of improvements continues to grow, as do the problems. As a community, we have been left more and more to our own resources. However, in order to activate these resources, we need strong community consensus which, thus far, has eluded us.

In my view, there is a good deal of community agreement regarding our transportation problems--traffic congestion on our streets and highways, physical deterioration of our roadways, and insufficient funding of alternatives to the single driver automobile trip. Our major disagreements reside in the proposed responses to these problems.

Last November, the Commission majority's attempt to achieve sufficient community consensus on its proposed range of transportation projects failed miserably at the polls. Although there are different interpretations as to why the ballot measure failed, it is clearly true that the emphasis of Measure J was, primarily, an attempt to raise the funds for widening Highway 1 and most of the money that would have been collected was destined for that project. For many in the community, this indicated mistaken priorities by the Commission.

Moreover, and perhaps even more critical in the Measure's overwhelming defeat, was the context of divisiveness in which the election took place. The focus throughout the campaign seemed to be on what people didn't like, rather than what they did like. Voters who wanted the highway widened didn't vote for the measure because it contained funding for the train. Many voters

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who didn't like the highway widening voted against it because alternatives to the automobile were given short shrift. As was evident just in the correspondence received by the Commission, the emphasis was mainly on opposition, not support. However we may explain exactly why Measure J failed, I think we would all agree that its failure represented an extreme lack of agreement on what transportation projects, if any, should be funded with local taxes.

A transportation tax measure requiring a two-thirds vote can only be passed, especially in an politically engaged community like Santa Cruz, when there is general consensus about its proposed projects. If such a measure is to pass in the future, we must find some way to move from a context of divisiveness to a context of cooperation and compromise.

The Commission has a long history of commitment to pursuing a broad range of transportation options. Even in the wake of Measure J's defeat it continues to do this. While the EIR for the Highway 1 widening project continues to move forward, so does the project to acquire the Union Pacific rail line. The recently adopted Regional Transportation Plan is another example of the Commission's desire to support a full spectrum of transportation alternatives. I think we must build on this commitment to inclusiveness as we try to develop an effective response to the transportation problems we face. Focusing on any one project is quite likely to be self-defeating.

The purpose of this letter is to suggest an approach that attempts to end the extreme divisiveness in the community regarding transportation projects and their funding and begins to move us in a more positive direction. In order to do this, I think we must focus on developing a genuinely inclusive process, not on what the outcome of the process should be. This approach requires that there be no predetermined results identified at the outset, beyond the goal of developing a comprehensive transportation funding program. If the Commission attempts to initially burden this process with a "required" project that must be approved, I believe it will be doomed from the outset. Commissioners are all generally aware of each other's priorities and, ultimately, the Commission will make the decision whether to proceed with a ballot measure or not. I would hope that we could start with the good faith belief that an open, fair process will result in a proposal that we can all live with.

My suggestion is that the Commission establish a broadly representative committee to develop a comprehensive transportation funding program. This committee would include representatives from the Commission, the cities, the County, and a balanced representation from the full range of participants in the transportation debate. For example, the committee should include representatives both supporting and opposing highway

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widening and passenger rail service, as well as those with special concerns, such as transit and paratransit services. No particular perspective should dominate. And because any comprehensive program will require a super majority vote at the polls, I believe that we should require that any plan coming from the committee should have super majority support at the committee level. It is certainly unlikely that a plan for the ballot would be successful if it were not supported by two-thirds of the committee.

The Commission would ask the committee to finish its work, if possible, in time for the November, 2006, election but would need to recognize that no firm dates can be realistically set.

In order not to further overburden our staff with this assignment, I would suggest that the Commission hire a consultant to assist the committee and facilitate its decision making. I would suggest that, because of her experience with these measures elsewhere, we ask Eileen Goodwin to provide this help.

Do I think that with this approach all the participants will get everything they want? Obviously not. Will most of the participants get enough of what they want to support the program? That would be the goal. It will clearly be an extremely difficult process, but if we are to develop a strategy to achieve a two-thirds vote for a sales tax measure, I don't see any other way to get there.

If the Commission supports this approach, I would recommend, as the next step, that the Commission appoint a subcommittee of four members to meet over the next month to consult with members of the community on this proposal, develop a refined statement of the committee's tasks and structure, and prepare a list suggesting what the membership should be. The subcommittee would report back to the Commission at our next meeting.

In conclusion, I recommend that the Commission express its intention to move forward with forming a committee to develop a comprehensive transportation funding program generally along the lines suggested in this letter and that we appoint a subcommittee to further develop this proposal as outlined above.

Sincerely,

Mardi Wormhoudt

MARDI WORMHOUDT, Supervisor
Third District

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