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Washington, DC

UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS:  
BRIEFING ON *OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE ENERGY SECURITY AND THE  
ENVIRONMENT THROUGH TRANSPORTATION POLICY*

TESTIMONY OF LARRY F. GREENE  
SACRAMENTO METROPOLITAN AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

Senator Boxer and committee members:

My name is Larry Greene. I am the Executive Director of the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District, one of 35 local air districts in California. Our primary mission is protecting public health by reducing air pollution through a range of programs including incentives for the early introduction of clean equipment, promoting clean and healthy transportation alternatives and implementing state and federal regulations that relate to air quality. I also have the privilege to serve this year as the Co- President of the National Association of Clean Air Agencies.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. In my brief comments I will highlight how I believe federal transportation policy can help with the significant challenges facing the air quality and transportation communities today and in the future.

The Sacramento region includes all or part of Sacramento County and five surrounding counties with a combined population of over 2 million. The region is a federal non-attainment area for both ozone and fine particulate pollution. In Sacramento, the major driver for non-attainment (and the related public health impacts) is emissions from the transportation sector including, trucks, cars, planes, trains, and construction equipment. In 2008, for the two air pollutants contributing to ozone formation, 89% of the nitrous oxide emissions and 63% of the reactive organic gas emissions were from the transportation sector. To attain federal health standards for air quality, we must continue to steadily reduce these emissions over time. The state of California also estimates that almost 40% of the statewide greenhouse gas emissions come from transportation. A variety of tools are needed to address this high percentage of transportation emissions.

One key federal policy for protecting air quality has been conformity under the Federal Clean Air Act. Each State Implementation Plan developed to meet air standards establishes a conformity budget for air emissions from transportation projects. This puts a cap on emissions and encourages the use of innovative strategies to reduce emissions. This key program should remain in place as an important element in improving national air quality.

There are other programs that have played important roles in reducing pollution from vehicles such as the development of cleaner technology for engines and requiring the use of cleaner fuels. For each of these strategies there are both federal and local components. Local agencies like our district have been leaders in providing incentive programs to assist business in installing cleaner on and off road engines. The Federal Diesel Emissions Reduction Act has been of great assistance in this effort and must be continued. While these programs are important, new thinking has emerged on ways to ensure that the investments we make in transportation enhance the livability of communities, conserve community financial resources and meet the needs of changing population demographics.

Our agency has been proud to partner with the Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) on their regional Blueprint Plan. The SACOG Blueprint offers an outstanding win-win example of effective transportation planning. The key is creating development patterns that are sustainable over time, support walking and bicycling and that reduce on the average the length of commutes. The Blueprint process visualizes where to make the best investments with federal and local transportation money, identifies congestion hotspots, and supports both the transit and air quality plans for the region. With the cooperative efforts of our local governments, the Blueprint vision is being implemented in current land use decisions and was the matrix upon which the latest regional Metropolitan Transportation Plan was developed. Another element to be considered is that rural towns and agriculture must be full partners in regional planning. A study called the Rural-Urban Connections Strategy is underway at SACOG to ensure that they benefit in ways that enhance and support their communities.

Using this regional modeling process to highlight the best infrastructure and project mix in the regional transportation plan resulted in an overall increase in density around transit assets such as light rail stations, a better jobs housing balance in the region and far less use of agricultural land for development. For air quality, the new plan provided a 1.6 tons/day reduction in emissions over the previous plan. This was 15% of the reductions needed to meet the regional 2009 8-hour SIP submission.

It is critical that the upcoming transportation reauthorization bill support and promulgate such programs so that they become a common element in regional planning across the US. The federal program should require regions to develop plans that outline the most effective use of funding to support sustainable community growth. The program should require collaboration between air quality and transportation organizations when developing and evaluating targets. It is also important that funding be provided to enhance planning and modeling resources, and to provide incentives for higher quality planning efforts.

In closing it is critical that transportation reauthorization support new ideas to further the goals of cleaner air, sustainable communities, reducing congestion, and wise use of financial resources. A collaborative process between air and transportation communities will be important in meeting these goals.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to the committee.