

Deborah Barmack, Executive Director
San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG)
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Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority - Board of Directors' Hearing Room

Good afternoon and thank you Senator Boxer, distinguished guests, and interested stakeholders here today.

I'm Deborah Barmack, Executive Director of San Bernardino Associated Governments. Let me add San Bernardino County's voice to the expressions of appreciation you've already heard for holding today's field hearing on reauthorization of the federal transportation act. This hearing is very timely and necessary.

Today I would like to call your attention to the significant investment in transportation improvements made by local transportation agencies in Southern California. Our discussion today occurs at a time when local contributions to financing of transportation infrastructure have reached an historic proportion. Nearly all of California's urban counties have successfully passed local, voter-approved transportation sales tax measures, initially intended to augment State and Federal transportation funding. According to the California Legislative Analyst's Office, fifteen years ago the investment made by local transportation sales taxes from these "Self-Help Counties" represented 26 percent of all investment in California's transportation infrastructure. Today, investments from Self Help Counties exceed 50 percent of the investments being made in transportation projects.

Today, these eighteen Self-Help Counties in California provide over \$2.98 billion annually to the improvement of our transportation network. In November, voters will be asked to vote on two additional new measures and renewal of four existing measures, which have the potential to generate an additional \$1.3 billion annually. And, as you know, California's Proposition 1B transportation infrastructure bond provided \$2 billion toward construction of goods movement projects. Californians have demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to contribute to the transportation network which serves our region and supports our national trade policies.

There are at least two issues which deserve consideration:

- 1) First, based on the current trend, the increased local investment in transportation has occurred at a time of decreased federal contribution toward transportation infrastructure - at a time when funding is critical to deliver ready projects.

The average federal contribution to overall transportation funding shrank from over 30 percent in 1990 to only 22 percent in the year 2000 and is continuing to decline. The decreased federal commitment to transportation infrastructure in California does not appear to be commensurate with federal responsibilities for the immense volume of international trade through our region. Nor does it appear to be commensurate with the cost to maintain California's portion of the Interstate highway system given the beating it's taking from interstate commerce. Specifically, as the federal policies for international trade agreements have resulted in an increase of goods coming through the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to other parts of the Nation, comparable federal policies for support for goods movements infrastructure has not been forthcoming. This disparity has resulted in a disconnect for transportation funding to provide new facilities, as well as to preserve and maintain the current goods movement system.

The federal National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, also known as the 1909 Commission, recommended that the average federal share of transportation funding nationwide should be 40 percent, or about double what we see today. It follows that Southern California, with the nation's largest intermodal freight corridor, should receive something above the average federal funding share.

- 2) The second issue is that, absent adequate federal funding in areas where federal responsibility is clear, the local and State transportation funds are being asked to fill the gap. This results in significant benefit the rest of the United States which enjoys cheap merchandise at the expense of Southern California's congested highways and deadly levels of goods movements-related air pollutants. We believe credit – in some form - should be given for local sales tax investments in the transportation network which serves the national trade policy. The State of California has stepped up at times with state-local partnership programs, and we urge federal consideration of similar programs which recognize both federal responsibility and local contribution to the goods movement network.

The Los Angeles/Inland Empire Corridor (LA/IE), comprised of the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura, represents the State's and nation's principal gateway to Pacific Rim import and export trade. The twin ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach along with the Port of Hueneme handle 44 percent of the nation's containerized imports and 86 percent of California's port throughput. Furthermore, those ports handle 90 and 83 percent of the state's total waterborne imports and exports, respectively, at an estimated value of \$313 billion in 2005.

Let me emphasize that the freight movement challenges posed by the nation's largest intermodal corridor are not limited to near-port areas. We in San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties are astride the corridor that carries nearly all the freight that moves from the San Pedro Bay ports to the rest of the United States. This equates to the highest rail volumes in the western United States, some of the US's highest freight truck volumes, and the nation's worst air quality to which truck and train emissions, a responsibility of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, are principal contributors.

I also want to bring to your attention that our sister agencies in the coastal counties, who you have already heard, have acknowledged the regional nature of our shared challenge. We have therefore enjoyed an unprecedented level of cooperation among our agencies – including the County Transportation Commissions, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, Alameda Corridor Transportation Authority (ACTA), Metrolink, and Alameda Corridor East Construction Authority. The collaboration was first established during the preparation of a Multi-County Goods Movement Action Plan, which then evolved into the “Southern California Consensus Group,” which included the same agencies and the South Coast Air Quality Management District. The Southern California Consensus group successfully prepared the Region's Trade Corridor Improvement Fund submittal to the State for Proposition 1B funding and advocated for a multi-County, systematic solution to a statewide goods movement infrastructure problem. We look forward to maintaining this cooperation continued planning efforts under the umbrella of the Southern California Consensus Group and Mobility 21.

Finally, I would like to commend you on your attention on the Southern California National Freight Gateway collaboration among these same regional agencies, the State of California, and the federal Department of Transportation, specifically the Maritime Administration (MARAD). MARAD has been very supportive of a multi-agency collaboration to address the infrastructure, community, and environmental challenges arising from U.S. international trade policy. Collaborative efforts of this kind almost certainly represent our best opportunity to bring all the necessary tools to bear on one of the United States' premiere transportation and environmental challenges.

I thank you for this opportunity to address you today.