



CITY OF PALM DESERT

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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL

November 26, 2024

The Honorable Toks Omishakin
Secretary, California State Transportation Agency
400 Capitol Mall, Suite 2340
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Draft 2024 CAPTI Actions Comment Letter

Dear Secretary Omishakin:

On behalf of the City of Palm Desert, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the California State Transportation Agency's (CalSTA) Draft 2024 Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI) Actions.

Specifically, the City of Palm Desert opposes draft actions proposing to:

- Deprioritize highway and road investments within the Senate Bill 1 (Beall, 2017) gas tax funding program guidelines; and
- Codify CAPTI Guiding Principles in statute.

Palm Desert is uniquely positioned within the Coachella Valley, serving as both a regional hub and a vital contributor to the area's economy through tourism, retail, and service industries. Our city faces distinct challenges that make personal vehicle use an unavoidable necessity for most residents and visitors. Currently, SunLine Transit Agency's limited public transportation offerings are unable to meet the region's needs, with infrequent service and insufficient coverage leaving large portions of our population underserved.

Highway and Road Investments Are Critical for Regional Growth

Congestion relief remains a critical priority for our community, particularly as Riverside County's population is expected to grow by 17% to 3 million residents over the next 25 years. Key transportation corridors, such as Interstate 10 and State Route 111, are already experiencing significant strain. Redirecting SB 1 funds away from highway and road improvements to meet Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) neutrality goals will disproportionately burden our residents and local economy. For example, tourism generates significant traffic to destinations such as the El Paseo Shopping District, and without ongoing road infrastructure improvements, both visitors and residents will face longer travel times and higher costs.

Palm Desert is also home to public and private colleges and universities, including California State University, San Bernardino Palm Desert Campus. As the city aspires to secure a free-standing CSU campus, we anticipate further increases in vehicle transit along these key transportation corridors. Supporting highway and road investments will be critical in accommodating this growth while maintaining accessibility for students, faculty, and the broader community.

Equity and Access Considerations

Palm Desert is deeply concerned about the equity implications of these proposals. Many service workers, including those in hospitality and retail, commute from surrounding areas using personal vehicles due to the lack of viable transit alternatives. Roadway pricing and a reduced focus on highway improvements

risk compounding the challenges faced by these individuals, many of whom are from low-income or disadvantaged communities.

Premature Codification of CAPTI Principles

We urge CalSTA to delay codifying CAPTI Guiding Principles into statute until a more comprehensive analysis of their impacts is conducted. The Coachella Valley's unique geography, car-dependent infrastructure, and rural-urban dynamics present challenges that one-size-fits-all state policies fail to address. A broader understanding of how these principles affect regional economies, mobility, and equity is essential before committing them to law.


Flexibility and Collaboration Are Essential

While Palm Desert acknowledges the potential benefits of CAPTI initiatives such as VMT mitigation banks and revised rural project guidelines, these measures must be implemented alongside flexible policies that reflect the realities of our region. For example, establishing reliable public transit infrastructure capable of meeting CAPTI's goals will require decades of investment. In the interim, road and highway improvements must remain a priority to ensure that immediate transportation needs are met.

We strongly recommend preserving the integrity of SB 1 program funding for road and highway projects and refraining from codifying CAPTI principles at this time. Instead, we encourage CalSTA to collaborate closely with local jurisdictions like Palm Desert to develop pragmatic solutions that balance long-term climate goals with present-day transportation demands.

Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact Todd Hileman, City Manager, at (760) 346-0611 or hileman@palmdesert.gov. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,


Karina Quintanilla
Mayor, City of Palm Desert