

RAFT

Regional Alliance For Transit
Founded 1992

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September 30, 2009

Chairman Steve Kinsey and Members
Programming and Allocations Committee
Metropolitan Transportation Commission
101 Eighth Street
Oakland, California 94607

Dear Chairman Kinsey and Committee Members:

At your last meeting, Chairman Kinsey asked for a discussion of why Commission staff think the Freeway Performance Initiative will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The Regional Alliance For Transit is very much interested in the subject, as improved transit will likely be important if a reduction in automobile vehicle miles travelled in the Bay Area is to be realized.

Two years ago, the Sightline Institute published a short paper on the topic of freeway capacity increases and greenhouse gas emissions. The link to the paper is:

http://www.sightline.org/research/energy/res_pubs/analysis-ghg-roads

As an introduction, a summary of the paper is enclosed with this letter. The conclusion is, generally, "if you build it, they will come." Making driving more convenient in the past has led to increased VMT and therefore increased carbon emissions. RAFT sees no reason to think this iron law will be broken in the Bay Area; it certainly has not been in Los Angeles County, which has a much more built-out freeway system than here.

RAFT encourages the Committee to push back funding of the Freeway Performance Initiative. Perhaps if it is delayed long enough, it may be dropped from the next Regional Transportation Plan as SB 375 compliance comes into its own. RAFT also thinks it is time to bring forward expenditures on the Climate Initiative. Now would be an excellent time to begin a comprehensive educational campaign that brings out the advantages of walking, biking, carpools and transit, along with trip chaining, over single occupancy car trips.

RAFT members would be happy to meet with you to discuss these issues in more detail.

Sincerely,

original signed by M. Williams

for RAFT

cc: Environmental Quality Committee, State Senate
Joint Policy Committee

RAFT Summary—

Increases in greenhouse-gas emissions from highway-widening projects

October 2007

By Clark Williams-Derry, Research Director, Sightline Institute

Road-building proponents often suggest that adding lanes to a highway will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. By easing congestion, they argue, new lanes will reduce the amount of fuel that vehicles waste in stop-and-go traffic, leading to lower releases of climate-warming gases from cars and trucks.

Over the short term—perhaps 5 to 10 years after new lanes are opened to traffic—this argument may hold some slim merit. But considering the increased emissions from highway construction and additional vehicle travel, adding one mile of new highway lane will increase CO₂ emissions by more than 100,000 tons over 50 years.

At current rates of emissions, 100,000 tons of CO₂ equals the 50-year climate footprint of about 100 typical US residents.

Because future traffic volumes, vehicle technologies, and land use patterns are inherently uncertain, these estimates should be taken as rough approximations. Yet under almost any set of plausible assumptions, widening a highway in a congested urban area will substantially increase long-term greenhouse gas emissions.

CO₂ emissions from building one lane-mile of urban highway, over 50 years (tons):

Construction, building materials, and maintenance	3,500
Net congestion relief	-7,000
Additional vehicle travel on the facility	90,000
Induced vehicle travel off the facility	30,000–100,000
Total tonnage increase	116,500–186,500

Source:

http://www.sightline.org/research/energy/res_pubs/analysis-ghg-roads