May 27, 2021

SANDAG Board of Directors
401 B Street
San Diego, CA 92101

RE: San Diego’s 10 Big Moves to Transportation Justice

Respected Chair Blakespear and Board Members,

The San Diego Transportation Equity Working Group (SDTEWG), a coalition of the undersigned community-based organizations and partners rooted in equity and environmental justices (EJ), ask that the 10 Big Moves to Transportation Justice be included in the 2021 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). They represent the priorities that frontline communities have identified through a community-driven process and reflect a vision that will advance the best transit solutions for all San Diegans.

The 10 Big Moves to Transportation Justice & Status Update Based on the 5/28/21 Draft RTP

1. An Environmental Justice Centered RTP: Ensure the projects included in the 2021 RTP prioritize environmental justice (EJ) communities as identified by CalEnviroScreen (CES) by listing the projects that will directly benefit EJ communities, outlining immediate benefits via projects that will be implemented by 2025 in EJ communities, and making all public communication easy to understand by the public in order to promote meaningful engagement.

   **Status:** We ask that an equity specific project list be included in Appendix A: Transportation Projects, Programs, and Phasing document.

2. Improve the Bus System Now: Develop a bus system that is fast, frequent, reliable, and accessible by increasing frequency on popular lines, especially overcrowded ones. This should be done immediately as a way to introduce the public to a new transit era with short-term and long-term solutions. It should be done by providing MTS with the necessary financial support for implementation. EJ communities cannot afford to wait 10-20 years for solutions. We need immediate improvements while the big infrastructure projects are being planned.

   **Status:** We request more clarity in Appendix A: Transportation Projects, Programs, and Phasing that provides a list of specific improvements to the bus system. Currently, the document only describes changes to bus frequency in planned key corridors. Bus improvements are one of the most affordable ways to immediately increase connectivity, reduce toxic air pollution and greenhouse gas (GHGs) emissions in the region.

3. Blue Line Express: Fund the planning, environmental, engineering, and capital for the additional Blue Line track that allows express, 24-hour service, and additional frequency enhancements. Rail-grade separations should only move forward with the addition of a third track that eliminates conflict between the Blue Line and freight. The Blue Line is the
backbone of our transit system. It has the highest ridership and is one of the best-performing transit lines in the San Diego region. However, it is overcrowded, has limited frequency, delayed connectivity, and no 24-hour service.

**Status:** The information listed needs to be clarified. It is unclear if the double/third tracking included in Appendix A refers to an additional track that will provide express connectivity from the border to downtown San Diego.

4. **24-Hour Service by 2025:** Provide 24-hour service on popular transit routes to connect late night and early morning workers to their jobs by 2025. Participants of the Elevate SD 2020 community engagement efforts ranked this as their highest priority.

**Status:** The information listed needs to be clarified. Appendix A includes local bus route enhanced frequencies to ten minutes in key corridors but does not state if that would result in 24-hour service. Simultaneously, Chapter 2 includes all-day services from 20-22 hours per day for rail and rapids, but it excludes local bus routes and a clear implementation schedule.

5. **Purple Line Serves Central City Heights:** Fund the planning, environmental, engineering, and capital for the Purple Line as a rail line that connects EJ communities in central City Heights and South Bay to Sorrento Valley.

**Status:** According to the SANDAG staff, the alignment includes central City Heights in the 2050 RTP with a 2035 implementation. However, it should be listed in the document, demonstrate that the project phasing prioritizes central City Heights and the South Bay region, and a 2035 project completion.

6. **Youth Opportunity Passes (YOP):** Provide no-cost transit passes for all youth 24 years old and under in order to ensure generations of lifelong transit riders and encourage significant mode shift. Connect youth to school, work, internships, and other early-career opportunities.

**Status:** We ask that it be accelerated for a 2023 implementation rather than the current delayed plan to implement in 2027.

7. **Electrify Bus Fleet by 2030:** Fund the implementation of California’s Innovative Clean Transit rule to accelerate the electrification of the bus fleet ten years before mandated by the California Air Resources Board. We cannot afford to wait 20 years to reduce GHGs.

**Status:** We ask that the transition to zero-emission buses be accelerated for a 2030 completion with the support of recently approved state and federal funding sources. In addition, all the rapid bus route expansions listed should be implemented with ZEBs. According to Appendix A, the plan includes $75 million for zero-emission buses and infrastructure by 2025 and $250 million by 2035.

8. **Identify Anti-Displacement strategies:** Fund anti-displacement efforts to protect vulnerable communities living near transit corridors by developing an anti-displacement strategy that
includes affordable/low-income housing and preservation of naturally occurring existing affordable housing, community ownership, and tenant protections.

**Status:** SANDAG staff has expressed interest in an anti-displacement study. We request an update on the status of the anti-displacement study.

9. **Bathroom network:** Develop a bathroom access plan and provide MTS with funding for a clean and accessible bathroom network open at all major transit stations.

**Status:** It is unclear if a bathroom network is included in the capital operations budgets. The 2021 Regional Plan states that “mobility needs to be widely accessible, affordable, easy to use, and tailored to a person’s individual needs. In short, *mobility* must be viewed as a basic human right". State-of-the-art bathrooms are *mobility* and key to a successful transit system.

10. **Emergency Ready Transit System:** Fund the planning and implementation of a transit emergency response strategy to provide safety particularly to EJ communities during community-wide emergencies. EJ residents are more likely to live in proximity to hazardous land uses that frequently result in fires and neighborhood emergencies. Simultaneously, frontline communities are also most vulnerable in the face of climate disasters.

**Status:** Not included in the RTP.

EJ communities are at the frontlines of toxic air pollution and the nearing climate disaster. The RTP is the region’s biggest opportunity to dramatically address the course of climate change in the region. According to SANDAG, transportation represents 41% of the region’s GHG emissions and only 7% of low-income residents have access to fast and frequent transit. Simultaneously, San Diego has the seventh-worst ozone pollution in the U.S, and EJ communities are disproportionately impacted. Inadequate investment in the mass transit system harms our most vulnerable communities’ health and quality of life.

The RTP should include assertive and prompt policy solutions by 2025 because the climate emergency is here. The RTP is a visionary document by nature, however, it must outline immediate benefits to improve the region’s economy, quality of life and sharply reduce air pollution and GHGs in EJ communities. Communities that suffer the brunt of environmental harm cannot wait any longer for prompt relief.

Sincerely,

**The San Diego Transportation Equity Working Group (SDTEWG)**

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