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VIA OVERNIGHT MAIL AND U.S. MAIL

Glenn Campbell, Principal Transportation Analyst
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550 South Main Street
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RE: Orange County Transportation Authority 2006 Long-Range Transportation Plan Draft
Program Environmental Impact Report

Dear Mr. Campbell:

The Attorney General of the State of California submits the following comments regarding the Orange County Transportation Authority ("OCTA") 2006 Long-Range Transportation Plan ("Plan") Draft Program Environmental Impact Report ("DPEIR"). The Attorney General provides these comments pursuant to his independent power and duty to protect the natural resources of the State from pollution, impairment, or destruction in furtherance of the public interest. (*See* Cal. Const., art. V, § 13; Cal. Gov. Code, §§ 12511, 12600-12; *D'Amico v. Board of Medical Examiners*, 11 Cal.3d 1, 14-15 (1974).) These comments are made on behalf of the Attorney General and not on behalf of any other California agency or office. While these comments focus on some of the primary issues raised by the Draft PEIR, they are not an exhaustive discussion of all issues.

I. Introduction

The Plan is described as being OCTA's "blueprint" for maintaining and improving Orange County's transportation network, including freeways, roadways and bus and rail systems through 2030. The Plan focuses much of its attention and planned spending on freeways and roadways, with a much smaller emphasis on public transit. Consequently, the Plan forecasts huge increases (approximately 45%) in vehicle miles traveled ("VMT") per day in the coming years. The environmental analysis in the DPEIR fails to adequately analyze air quality impacts and contains no analysis at all of the impact of the Plan on climate change, both in violation of the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA"), Pub. Resources Code §§ 21000, et seq. Orange County is one of the most populous counties in the State, in one of the worst air quality regions in the country. The environmental and public health concerns raised by the projected

increases in vehicular travel under the proposed plan deserve, and CEQA requires, serious and thorough environmental analysis.

II. The DPEIR Should Discuss The Plan's Impact On Climate Change.

Despite the Plan's heavy reliance on vehicular travel and improvements to freeways, roads and streets, and the acknowledged increase in vehicle travel that the Plan will encourage, the DPEIR never analyzes one of the most important environmental impacts of vehicle emissions--greenhouse gases and resulting climate change

Climate change results from the accumulation in the atmosphere of "greenhouse gases" produced by the burning of fossil fuels for energy. Because greenhouse gases (primarily, carbon dioxide("CO₂"), methane and nitrous oxide) persist and mix in the atmosphere, emissions anywhere in the world impact the climate everywhere. The impacts on climate change from greenhouse gas emissions have been extensively studied and documented. (*See* Oreskes, Naomi, *The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change*, 306 *Science* 1686 (Dec. 3, 2004) [review of 928 peer reviewed scientific papers concerning climate change published between 1993 and 2003, noting the scientific consensus on the reality of anthropogenic climate change]; J. Hansen, *et al.*, *Earth's Energy Imbalance: Confirmation and Implications*, *Scienceexpress* (April 28, 2004) (available at <http://pubs.giss.nasa.gov/abstracts/2005/HansenNazarenkoR.html>) [NASA and Department of Energy scientists state that emission of CO₂ and other heat-trapping gases have warmed the oceans and are leading to energy imbalance that is causing, and will continue to cause, significant warming, increasing the urgency of reducing CO₂ emissions].)

In California, the state government has acknowledged the true environmental impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on climate change. Governor Schwarzenegger, in his Executive Order S-3-05 issued on June 1, 2005, recognized the significance of the impacts of climate change on the State of California, noting that "California is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change." The Order goes on to itemize a litany of the direct impacts that climate change and the increased temperatures resulting from the increased presence of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, will have on the state:

- "[I]ncreased temperatures threaten to greatly reduce the Sierra snowpack, one of the State's primary sources of water;"
- "[I]ncreased temperatures also threaten to further exacerbate California's air quality problems and adversely impact human health by increasing heat stress and related deaths;"
- "[R]ising sea levels threaten California's 1,100 miles of valuable coastal

real estate and natural habitats;" and

- “[T]he combined effects of an increase in temperatures and diminished water supply and quality threaten to alter micro-climates within the state, affect the abundance and distribution of pests and pathogens, and result in variations in crop quality and yield.”
Executive Order S-3-05, June 1, 2005.

The California legislature, also recognized all of these severe impacts resulting from climate change, as well as a “projected doubling of catastrophic wildfires due to faster and more intense burning associated with drying vegetation.” (Stats. 2002, ch, 200, Section 1, subd. (c)(4), enacting Health & Saf. Code § 43018.5) In the particular realm of vehicular travel and emissions from cars and truck, the California legislature went on to recognize that “passenger vehicles and light-duty trucks are responsible for *40 percent of the total greenhouse gas pollution in the state.*” (*Ibid.*, subd. (e)(emphasis added).)

Despite the increasing attention that governments, climate scientists, environmentalists, and other members of the public are rightfully directing to the issue of climate change, OCTA does not even mention the issue in its long term transportation plan, which is meant to cover the next quarter century. The DPEIR never once mentions carbon dioxide, climate change or global warming, and mentions greenhouse gases only by passing reference, when discussing other emissions, without explaining either the importance, or the projected impacts, of greenhouse gases.

Under CEQA, an environmental impact report must identify and focus on the “significant environmental effects” of a proposed project. (Pub. Res. Code § 21100(b)(1); Cal. Code Regs., Title 14, §§ 15126(a), 15126.2(a), 15143.) “‘Significant effect on the environment’ means a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in the environment.” (Pub. Res. Code § 21068). CEQA also provides that the CEQA guidelines “shall” specify certain criteria that *require* a finding that a project may have a significant effect on the environment:

“(1) A proposed project has the potential to degrade the quality of the environment, curtail the range of the environment, or to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals.

(2) The possible effects of a project are individually limited but cumulatively considerable. As used in this paragraph, “cumulatively considerable” means that the incremental effects of an individual project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects.

(3) The environmental effects of a project will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly.”
(Pub. Res. Code § 21083(b).)

In other words, if these criteria are present with regard to a project’s impacts on the environment, they must be considered in an EIR. The Plan under consideration in this DPEIR, with its projected 45% increase in vehicular miles traveled by the year 2030, when considered in light of the severe impacts cars and trucks have on the level of greenhouse gas emissions in this state, clearly “has the potential to degrade the environment.” (*See ibid.*, subd. (b)(1).) Moreover, the cumulative effects of this project on greenhouse gas emissions, when taken in consideration with the impacts statewide of increased population and vehicular travel over the next quarter century, are undeniable. (*See ibid.*, subd. (b)(2).) When considering the impacts of climate change on California, it is impossible to ignore that the impacts of this project will have either direct or indirect effects on human beings. (*See ibid.*, subd. (b)(3).) Given the scope of the Plan (both in years, and geographically), the projected increase in vehicle travel it calls for, and the fact that it covers one of the most heavily populated regions in the State, there is no question that the impacts of this Plan on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change may, and likely will, have significant cumulative environmental impacts for California. These impacts should have been considered and analyzed in the DPEIR.

There *could* be such analysis in the DPEIR; the data is obtainable. Carbon dioxide emissions from cars can be quantified. The California Air Resources Board has information that could be applied to the projected increase in VMT. The impacts could be assessed as to their cumulative impact on climate change, assuming (as is highly probable in this Plan) that there would be a considerable impact from the increase in CO₂ resulting from the increased VMT. (*See Cal. Code Regs.*, title 14, § 15130(a) [“an EIR shall discuss cumulative impacts of a project when the project’s incremental effect is cumulatively considerable.”] *See also Cal. Code Regs.*, title 14, § 15065(a)(3) [“‘Cumulatively considerable’ means that the incremental effects of an individual project are significant when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probably future projects.”].)

Moreover, the Plan could include mitigation for these impacts. The Governor has recognized, “mitigation efforts will be necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation efforts will be necessary to prepare Californians for the consequences of global warming.” (Executive Order S-3-05, June 1, 2005.) Increased public transportation, increased support of alternative fuels and technologies, the purchase of carbon offsets (or mitigation “credits”), installation of electric vehicle charging stations, and other affirmative steps to reduce the transportation impacts of CO₂ could be considered as potential mitigation projects. These are real, achievable and available mitigation measures that could be considered when OCTA

recognizes its obligations to analyze greenhouse gas emissions and their impact on climate change as part of its long term transportation planning.

III. The DPEIR Does Not Adequately Discuss The Plan's Impact On Air Quality.

The DPEIR's discussion of air quality fails to address potentially serious impacts on Orange County and the South Coast air basin. In the DPEIR chapter on air quality the drafters concluded that there would be no significant unavoidable adverse long-term air quality impacts from the Plan (see DPEIR, 4.1-17 through 4.1-20), that the plan would have a neutral effect on air quality (see *id.*), and that the only potentially significant impacts relate solely to regional and local short term impacts from the construction of individual projects (e.g., construction of individual road widening, or lane building projects anticipated under the Plan). (*See id.* at 4.1-21 through 4.1-23)¹. The DPEIR bases these optimistic conclusions on a comparison of the future, year 2030, emissions under the Plan to the emissions budgets of the federally mandated, local Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP), prepared by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) and projected for 2030. The DPEIR finds that the Plan's emissions are within the projected emissions for the AQMP in 2030, and thus there are no significant impacts. The fundamental basis on which all of the DPEIR's assumptions rests, however, is that by the year 2030, "better fuels" and "improved emission controls" will result in overall emission reductions from vehicles. (See DPEIR at 4.1-18.) There are a number of things wrong with this analysis.

First, the comparison fails to analyze all phases of this 24-year project. The CEQA Guidelines require that an EIR consider "all phases of a project when evaluating its impact on the environment." (Cal. Code Regs., title 14, §15126.) The huge emission reductions anticipated in the Plan by the year 2030 as an anticipated result of "better fuels" and "improved emission controls" will surely take some time. The DPEIR must look at the all phases of the 24-year project time frame, not just 2030, to discern if the project will have significant impacts on health and air quality. The DPEIR contains no analysis of whether the impacts on air quality in the "in between" years, before all of the "better fuels" and "improved emission controls" have been implemented, will be significant; there is no way to discern, from the information available in the DPEIR what the emissions during those years will be.

Second, there is no detailed comparison of the project with the emissions budgets of the AQMP. The DPEIR states that "[c]umulative impacts were assessed by comparing projected vehicle emissions in 2030 to the emission budgets established in the local AQMP." (DPEIR at

¹These impacts, according to the DPEIR, would be addressed through mitigation measures, but the mitigation measures include no monitoring requirements.

4.1-16.) Nowhere in the document, however, is a detailed comparison shown to the public, nor is there any indication of how the project emission budgets compare year by year with the AQMP emission budgets. This failing is linked to the failure to consider “all phases” of the project, but displays as well the fundamental lack of detailed information in this DPEIR. The conclusory statement that “the impacts were assessed,” without any backup, is not sufficient disclosure for the public to make its own evaluation, and, in fact, this lack of information precludes the informed decision making and public participation required by CEQA. (*See* Pub. Res. Code § 21061; Cal Code Regs, title 14, § 15121(a) [an EIR is an informational document which will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally].) The purpose of an EIR, inter alia, is to provide public agencies and the public in general with detailed information about the effect of the proposed project on the environment. (Pub. Resources Code § 21061; *Laurel Heights Improvement Association v. Regents of the University of California* (1988) 47 Cal.3d 376, 391.) An EIR should, when viewed as a whole, provide a reasonable, good faith analysis of known environmental impacts. (*Al Larson Boat Shop, Inc. v. Board of Harbor Commissioners* (1993) 18 Cal.App.4th 729, 749.)

Third, the air quality appendix does not contain any actual useful emissions data or modeling to allow the public to evaluate the accuracy or appropriateness of the model. Appendix B, Air Quality, contains only summary tables of the results of some computer modeling performed by OCTA for criteria pollutant emissions. The tables may represent various alternative scenarios (perhaps for the proposed Plan and for some plan alternatives; it is not clear), but there are no explanations of the assumptions and data (or “inputs”) that went into the modeling program that produced these results. There is no explanation of what the various summaries (or “outputs”) represent. Without an explanation of the data inputs for the modeling done to support the DPEIR, or an explanation of what the summaries show, it is impossible for the public or the public agency decision makers to make informed decisions. (*See* Pub. Res. Code § 21061.)

Fourth, the toxics analysis is inadequate. In its discussion of impacts on hydrology and water quality, the DPEIR acknowledges that there will be “new roadways in undeveloped areas” under the Plan. (DPEIR at 4.7-11.) In its discussion of toxic air contaminants, however, there is no discussion of the impacts of those “new roadways in undeveloped areas” which will expose new populations to both criteria and toxic pollutants. There should be a risk assessment in order to draw valid conclusions about public health, and such an assessment should be done for each phase of the project (just as with the overall air quality assessment). The DPEIR recognizes that diesel emissions are a known carcinogen, but limits its analysis of cancer risk from the project to construction emissions and to the expected situation in 2030. The DPEIR does not consider the cancer risks resulting from the operation of current and new roadways, expanded freeways, etc. In Health & Safety Code Section 39606(b), the Legislature recognized the special susceptibility of children and infants to air pollution, and the DPEIR itself recognizes that there are particularly

sensitive receptors (DPEIR at 4.1-16), yet the DPEIR makes no effort to evaluate the project's effects on them.²

Fifth, where the DPEIR does provide some mitigation for the few significant air quality impacts it does recognize (related to construction), the document makes no assignments, not even tentatively, of responsibility for enforcing them through mitigation monitoring. The DPEIR recognizes only two categories of potentially significant impacts on air quality: Short-term (construction) regional impacts (from a number of construction-related activities and materials) and short-term localized impacts (from construction vehicles which are sources of carcinogenic pollutants and diesel exhaust). (*See* DPEIR at 4.1-21 through 4.1-23.) With regard to the construction impacts, the DPEIR acknowledges that "a large number of the projects in the [Plan] would involve extensive construction or reconstruction" and that it is "very likely" that some of the projects would be under construction at the same time. (DPEIR at 4.1-21.) Notwithstanding the acknowledged significant air quality impacts the construction activities are expected to produce, there are no monitoring requirements for the list of mitigation measures that the DPEIR says "should be considered" when EIR's are prepared for the individual projects. Likewise, there are no monitoring requirements incorporated in the mitigation measures to address the emissions from construction equipment. Moreover, Chapter 7, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, does not indicate any monitoring actions, or responsible implementation agencies for the proposed mitigation measures. (DPEIR at 7-1 through 7-34.)

OCTA is required to "provide that measures to mitigate or avoid significant effects on the environment are fully enforceable through permit conditions, agreements or other measures." (Pub. Res. Code § 21081.6(b).) The DPEIR should disclose and discuss such mitigation monitoring measures, or at least make tentative assignments of responsibility for enforcing them, so that the public can take these proposed measures into account.³

Finally, given the inadequacies and lack of detail in the air quality impacts analysis it is not appropriate for all future projects contemplated under this Plan to be able to "tier" off of a

²In addition to these failures to address toxic air contaminants, in the chapter on Hazardous Materials, the DPEIR does not examine the indirect effects of the 45 % increase in VMT, such as increased cancer risk from benzene and other petrochemical toxic emissions released from gas stations, increased refinery emission, and the like.

³In addition, the Plan should contemplate, discuss and disclose whether funding for the mitigation measures it will require is or will be available.

document as deficient as this DPEIR.⁴ The DPEIR states “[t]he lead agencies for individual projects may use this PEIR as the basis of their regional and cumulative analysis.” (DPEIR at 2-13.) The deficient analysis of the air quality impacts would make any meaningful project-level analysis of regional and cumulative of air quality impacts for an individual project nearly impossible. For example, it is possible that a project-level EIR could be prepared next year for a project such as a lane-addition to a freeway. Based on “tiering” from this DPEIR, the planners of such a project would have only the conclusory statements regarding air quality impacts in the year 2030 from this DPEIR upon which to base cumulative and regional impacts analyses in their EIR, whereas the new hypothetical freeway lane might be operational in 2009. There would be no analysis of the cumulative and regional impacts of that project for years 2009 through 2029. While this example pertains only to the air quality analysis, the other failings of the DPEIR discussed below also contribute to the inappropriateness of allowing future project level EIR’s to “tier” off of this deficient CEQA document.

IV. The DPEIR Contains Many Other Inadequacies.

In addition to the failure of the DPEIR to adequately address air quality, and to address greenhouse gas emissions impacts at all, the DPEIR is inadequate in a number of other areas.

A. The DPEIR Does Not Contain An Adequate Description of the Project

Chapter 2 of the DPEIR, is titled “Project Description” and it does contain a list of the projects that the Plan envisions. The description, however, is lacking. The list of projects contemplated under the plan includes one-line, bullet-point descriptions of various freeway and interchange improvements, lane additions and ramp construction projects that will make up the improvements to freeways under the Plan. (There are also one-line, bullet-point descriptions of the other planned projects.) Despite the fact that the primary focus of projects and spending under the Plan is on freeway construction projects, however, the Project Description does not contain any maps or visual drawings of the Plan’s contemplated improvements. It is very difficult to ascertain what the impacts on the ground will be from the brief descriptions of the planned projects. Guidelines indicating areas of disturbance, or footprints, for planned projects should be included. From the descriptions in the DPEIR, an understanding of the true impact of the Plan is not possible.

⁴“Tiering’ or ‘tier’ means the coverage of general matters and environmental effects in an [EIR] prepared for a policy, plan, program or ordinance followed by narrower or site-specific [EIRs] which incorporate by reference the discussion in any prior EIR . . .” (Pub. Res. Code §§ 21068.5.)

The public should be able to understand from the DPEIR what implementation of the Plan will mean to their communities and their surroundings in physical terms. "Only through an accurate view of the project may affected outsiders and public decision-makers balance the proposal's benefit against its environmental cost, consider mitigation measures, assess the advantage of terminating the proposal (i.e., the "no project" alternative) and weigh other alternatives in the balance. An accurate, stable and finite project description is the *sine qua non* of an informative and legally sufficient EIR." *County of Inyo v. City of Los Angeles*, (1977) 71 Cal.App.3d 185, 192-193.

B. The DPEIR Does Not Contain An Adequate Analysis of Alternatives.

The alternatives considered in the DPEIR consist entirely of plans that envision varying degrees of funding, as opposed to plans that envision alternative mixes of various transportation improvements or projects. The four alternatives to the Proposed Plan are:

- (i) the No Project (Baseline) Alternative, which "includes projects and programs that have secured funding, have been assessed for their environmental impacts, and have been approved to be implemented" (a small sub-set of the projects in the Proposed Plan) (DPEIR at 5-4.);
- (ii) the Constrained Alternative, which is "a set of projects and services that can be completed within the County's traditional revenue sources for transportation improvements" (a sub-set, larger than the No Project Alternative sub-set, of the same projects that are included in the Proposed Plan) (DPEIR at 5-11, 5-17);
- (iii) the Balanced II Alternative, which "includes all of the projects from the Proposed Plan with the exception of the High Occupancy Toll (HOT) projects proposed along [SR 91, including the direct connectors between SR-241 and the SR-91 toll lanes]" (DPEIR at 5-29); and
- (iv) the "Unconstrained" Alternative, which "includes projects and services that could be implemented . . . if funding was not an issue." (DPEIR at 5-43.)

It is clear from the alternatives considered that the planners looked only at alternative levels of funding that would allow variable numbers of projects off a master-list of desired projects, and not at alternatives designed to provide alternative levels of environmental impact, or a different master-list of projects. For example, nowhere does the DPEIR consider a potential alternative that changes the balance of spending to focus more on improvements to mass transit services rather than on improvements to freeways and roadways. The decision to focus so much attention on freeway upgrades was pre-determined by the planners' view that the only solution to

increased congestion is to build more freeways. The planners exhibit this view when they explain that “the projections for 2030 indicate that vehicle miles will increase faster than population and employment, mostly due to longer trips or commutes. In short, freeway capacity must grow to meet future freeway travel demand.” (DPEIR at 2-5) This conclusion ignores the obvious alternative viewpoint: some of the increased travel demand might be more properly diverted to mass transit solutions, as opposed to simply concluding that increased freeway capacity is the only solution. Based on a review of the Plan “objectives” to increase mobility, protect transportation resources and enhance the quality of life (see DPEIR at 2-3), other types of alternatives – alternatives that examine variable mixes of modes of transportation as opposed to just variable mixes of dollars – that still met the objectives of planners could have been considered.

Given that the impacts on the environment from the proposed Plan are projected to be significant, such alternatives should have been considered. One of the purposes of the discussion of alternatives in an EIR is to diminish or avoid adverse environmental effects. (*See Laurel Heights Improvement Ass’n v. Regents of Univ. of Cal.* (1988) 47 Cal.3d 376, 403 [discussion of only three alternatives, where planners claimed they had already ruled out other alternatives as infeasible, was inadequate]; Pub. Res. Code § 21002 [EIR should consider alternatives which would substantially lessen the significant environmental effects].)

C. The DPEIR Does Not Contain Adequate Discussion of Biological Resource Impacts.

The DPEIR does not quantify the biological resource impacts that it recognizes will be more significant under the proposed Plan than under the No Project alternative. (See DPEIR at 5-6 through 5-7.) Additional detail on the magnitude of direct impacts of the project must be provided for the Proposed Project and all project alternatives. All of the proposed alternatives and the proposed Plan contain lists of the projects they include. The Program EIR should make an attempt to quantify the impacts. Instead, the DPEIR puts off the analysis of the biological resource impacts of all the projects until the EIR for the individual project is prepared. (*See* DPEIR at 4.2-22.) It is impossible to analyze the difference between alternatives on this subject, when the impacts have not been described.

D. The Plan And DPEIR Should Include Plans For Improving Air Quality And Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions In Its Discussion Of “Environmental Programs.”

The only “environmental program” contemplated under the Plan is a program for

augmenting urban runoff treatment and mitigation to create a “coordinated high-quality urban runoff program.” (DPEIR at 2-11.) As discussed in detail above, the impacts of the Plan on greenhouse gas emissions and the cumulative impacts of those emissions on climate change, warrant close examination in this DPEIR. Likewise, a plan like this one which places so much of its emphasis for transportation planning and spending on automobile and truck travel versus mass transit will likely result in greater emissions of criteria pollutants and toxic air contaminants than would an alternative that focuses on improving mass transit and *reducing* vehicular miles traveled. Given these considerations, the state of air quality in the South Coast air basin and the severe impacts climate change can inflict on the citizens of Orange County, it would be a responsible and reasonable planning measure to include some “environmental program” aimed at reducing the air quality and climate impacts of the proposed Plan. As mentioned in above, there are some easily implemented steps that might be considered, such as the purchase of mitigation credits. There are also programs that might encourage greater use of alternative technologies and fuels (e.g., electric and hybrid vehicles) or that might add incentives for increased use of public transit (enhanced employer managed discount programs that reward use of transit when compared with parking costs) that could be explored. This long term plan is an opportunity for OCTA to take a truly “visionary” role in shaping the transportation *and* environmental landscape of Orange County for the next quarter century. We hope that the opportunity will not be missed.

V. Conclusion

If you or your staff have questions regarding these comments, please contact me at 213-897-0628.

Sincerely,

/S/

KATHRYN W. EGOLF
Deputy Attorney General

For BILL LOCKYER
Attorney General