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March 26, 2015

Anthony Foxx, Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590

SUBJECT: Beyond Traffic 2045 Report

Dear Secretary Foxx:

On behalf of the South Bay Cities Council of Governments (SBCCOG) in Los Angeles County, California, I would like to thank you for publishing and promoting the thought-provoking U. S. Department of Transportation report, “Beyond Traffic 2045”. It is an especially useful document in helping frame the federal, state and local challenges and policy options that we face on a daily basis in the South Bay which is geographic subregion of Los Angeles County approximately the size of Portland, Oregon.

THE SOUTH BAY - WHO WE ARE

The South Bay contains fifteen cities plus portions of the City of Los Angeles and unincorporated communities of the County of Los Angeles. The area is bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the south and west and generally by the City of Los Angeles on the north and east. Its name comes from its location on the south end of the Santa Monica Bay. It has a residential population of about 1 million with more than 425,000 jobs. Over 5 million daily trips either originate or terminate in the South Bay with approximately 65% of the trips made entirely within the sub-region. South Bay employment and population are expected to grow by about 10% in the next decade.

The South Bay began as a bedroom community for nearby aerospace and related high tech industries. Many of its residents work at the two global transportation hubs on its borders — Los Angeles International Airport to the north and the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to the south. The South Bay features a diverse demographic mix, a classically Southern California suburban culture, and a passion for providing a quality neighborhood-oriented environment. However, the sub-regional mobility network is highly stressed because its freeways are among the most congested in the region, it is under-served by transit, and viable rail transit service to the core of the South Bay is likely decades away. Furthermore, average trips in the South Bay are 7 minutes or less and 3 miles or under – too long to walk and too short for transit.

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN ACTION

Carson El Segundo Gardena Hawthorne Hermosa Beach Inglewood Lawndale Lomita
Manhattan Beach Palos Verdes Estates Rancho Palos Verdes Redondo Beach Rolling Hills
Rolling Hills Estates Torrance Los Angeles District #15 Los Angeles County

OUR STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS TRANSPORTATION

For the past decade, the SBCCOG has been developing state-of-the-practice programs to improve the maintenance and performance of our state highways and arterials. We have demonstrated innovative technology and land use strategies to address the future mobility challenges. We are currently involved in several groundbreaking transportation development programs for electric vehicle adoptions including neighborhood electric vehicles, slow speed lanes, active transportation, first and last mile transit, neighborhood-oriented-development strategies, vanpooling, car sharing, signal synchronization and intelligent transportation systems. We are assisting Metro with marketing its new ExpressLane toll project on the I-110 freeway between the South Bay and Downtown Los Angeles. We also are partnering with Metro on a California Strategic Growth Council-funded sustainability planning initiative that includes development of transportation and land use elements of Climate Action Plans for all of our cities and the sub-region. And, anticipating an increase in our aging population, the SBCCOG has recently initiated a senior services task force to determine how our local jurisdictions and social service agencies can work together to support programs that will allow seniors to age in place. To no surprise, the seniors have ranked transportation as one of their highest priorities.

Here is some additional information on our priorities:

Neighborhood Electric Vehicles

Our two year neighborhood electric vehicle project showed great promise for the secondary vehicle in a household. Of the 600,000+ vehicles in the South Bay approximately 280,000 are secondary vehicles (2nd, 3rd, etc.) The SBCCOG is targeting the secondary vehicle for local use neighborhood electric vehicles that can effectively address the very short trips that are taken in our area while significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. When a person is not going very far, the speed of the vehicle doesn't matter very much. We believe that these slow speed vehicles provide a mobility option for seniors and for first time drivers who mostly stay within their communities.

Slow Speed Lanes

Our suburban area is not very different than others. An analysis of the different subregions in LA County shows that a preponderance of non-commute short trips is common to almost all of them.

There are many new forms of transportation that are being made available through technology that are slower speed. Besides neighborhood electric vehicles, there are new concept vehicles being designed by vehicle manufacturers that go 35 mph or less. The Google self-driving car is a 25-mile-an-hour vehicle. Therefore, when considering the allocation of right of way on a street, the SBCCOG believes that instead of creating lanes dedicated to only bicycles, slow speed lanes should be designated so that all of these new technologies can be safely separated from larger, faster-moving cars and trucks.

Private Sector's Role

Understanding our vehicle trips and our goal to reduce secondary vehicles in households, the SBCCOG solicited car sharing companies to come to our area beginning three years ago. We were successful and have become the first multi-jurisdictional service area for car2go which rents their service by the minute and is targeted toward short trips.

The SBCCOG believes that the challenge for government is to encourage entrepreneurs who use technology to provide private sector transportation options while ensuring that new transportation options are safe and reliable. The success of these new services allows for and should trigger a re-assessment by public transportation agencies of the services that they are providing.

2045 VISION

Recently, the SBCCOG prepared a white paper for our members of our vision of neighborhoods in the South Bay in 2025. It includes our vision of mobility in 2025 which we have attached for your information.

A tangible vision for 2045 is very hard to imagine but the SBCCOG believes that the role of private sector entrepreneurial services will increasingly become a major part of our passenger transportation network. The public sector will continue to have the responsibility to provide regional services and to operate and maintain the systems that are in place. Those systems will include slow speed lanes which encourage those who can, to use their own vehicles which are designed for the short distances that they are going. And, of course, walking will be encouraged.

Interestingly, as we plan for 2045, the way people get around will be more closely aligned with the way goods move already – with the private sector providing much of the service and the public sector providing the infrastructure. Not only are long haul goods delivered by private sector trucks and trains but we are seeing that locally and especially with the growth of internet sales, product delivery to homes and neighborhood package lockers are increasing.

CONCLUSION

It is our hope that this letter has provided a brief overview of our understanding of and commitment to your vision as it applies to suburban areas. As you revise the 2045 Beyond Traffic document, we ask you to consider the differences between urban and suburban mobility and to request that you incorporate the significant distinctions between urban and suburban mobility challenges that are being discovered related to new technology, millennial lifestyle choices, an aging population, and a stressed suburban mobility infrastructure.

The South Bay has learned a great deal through our pilot programs. We would welcome the opportunity to explore with USDOT continuing our research as a test-bed for suburban mobility innovation and sustainability initiatives. We encourage you to become familiar with our subregion and our work.

Thank you again for your vision and advocacy of federal, state and local mobility partnerships and for this opportunity to comment. If you would like any additional information on our work, please contact our Executive Director, Jacki Bacharach @ jacki@southbaycities.org

Sincerely,

James Goodhart,
SBCCOG Board Chairman

Attachment