



March 29, 2019

The Honorable Jim Beall, Chair
Senate Transportation Committee
State Capitol, Room 2209
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Support for SB 526: State Mobility Action Plan for Healthy Communities

Dear Chair Beall and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the undersigned health and medical organizations in California, we are writing to express our support for Senate Bill 526 (Allen). SB 526 addresses a critical and growing suite of health concerns. The legislation intends to provide a platform for addressing insufficient progress toward achieving the goals of California's Sustainable Communities Strategies.

California's landmark pollution control programs have driven tremendous progress in cleaning up the air, yet we know that too many Californians are still overly burdened by air pollution. The American Lung Association's *State of the Air* reports have shown California communities continue to dominate the lists of the most polluted cities in the United States.¹ Transportation sources are the leading contributor to the pollution burdens that impact Californians' health and quality of life, including through increased risk of asthma attacks, emergency room visits and hospitalizations, lung cancers, heart attacks and strokes, and premature death. Growing evidence shows that pollution levels along busy highways may be higher than in the community as a whole, increasing the risk of harm to people who live or work near busy roads, who are often lower income

¹ American Lung Association. State of the Air 2018. www.stateoftheair.org. Eight of the top ten most ozone-polluted cities in the United States are in California, as are seven of the most particle-polluted cities in the nation.

communities.² Transportation also represents the dominant source of climate pollution in California.

Unfortunately, climate change impacts, including extreme heat events, drought and wildfires that ratchet up unhealthy air will continue to grow without effective actions to clean up transportation pollution, estimated to be \$15 billion annually from passenger vehicles alone.³ The latest data show that California's transportation carbon pollution actually *increased* in the latest inventory review, while overall carbon pollution declined to achieve our 2020 climate targets.⁴

Beyond respiratory health impacts of traffic pollution, transportation and land use decisions can have major impacts⁵ on many other elements of our health. In short, land use and transportation decisions are public health decisions. When communities are designed in ways that increase vehicle miles traveled and dependence on motor vehicle travel for even the most basic of daily needs, public health can suffer. Potential impacts of auto-oriented development can include increased rates of chronic illness, such as obesity and diabetes, certain cancers, increased risk of pedestrian and bicyclist injury, and lack of access to nutritious food and recreational opportunities. The negative impacts can add to the already high burden of health inequalities caused by unsustainable planning decisions. Conversely, the California Department of Public Health's Climate Change and Health Equity program notes that a wide range of health benefits can accrue via changes in land use patterns and reductions in vehicle miles traveled, including improvements in physical activity, mental health, access to needed services and safety, along with reductions in chronic disease rates and local air pollution burdens.⁶

In November 2018, the California Air Resources Board released a stunning "Progress Report"⁷ on the limited impact that a decade of implementation of California's Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act (SB 375, 2008, Steinberg) has had on real-world transportation and land use choices. In response to SB 375, California's Metropolitan Planning Organizations and Councils of Governments have worked to research, develop and adopt Sustainable Communities Strategies with the goal of reducing per capita greenhouse gas emissions from passenger vehicles, and the California Air Resources Board has approved those plans with the expectation that per capita greenhouse gases would decline to achieve regional-specific targets established for 2020 and 2035. Still, the needed changes in driving, housing, land use and other changes did not follow.

Unfortunately, the Progress Report highlights that harmful transportation emissions continued to rise and a significant toll will be taken on Californian's health, equity and transportation options due to the lack of progress in realizing the many benefits envisioned through successful implementation of Sustainable Communities Strategies:

² American Lung Association. Living Near Highways and Air Pollution. <https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/outdoor/air-pollution/highways.html>; Disparities in Disparities in the Impact of Air Pollution. <https://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/outdoor/air-pollution/disparities.html>

³ American Lung Association in California. Clean Air Future: Health and Climate Benefits of Zero Emission Vehicles. October 2016. <https://www.lung.org/local-content/california/documents/2016zeroemissions.pdf>

⁴ CA Air Resources Board. Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory/CARB Staff presentation, February 21, 2019. <https://www.arb.ca.gov/board/books/2019/022119/19-2-8pres.pdf?ga=2.233735132.310266654.1551731620-161321336.1440783070>

⁵ Institute for Local Governments. How Planning and Community Design Affect Health. <https://www.ca-ilg.org/hn-online-guide/how-planning-community-design-affect-health>

⁶ California Department of Public Health Climate Change and Health Equity Program website. Accessed March 6, 2019. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OHE/Pages/CCHEP.aspx#>

⁷ CA Air Resources Board. 2018 Progress Report. California's Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act. https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2018-11/Final2018Report_SB150_112618_02_Report.pdf

“With *emissions from the transportation sector continuing to rise* despite increases in fuel efficiency and decreases in the carbon content of fuel, *California will not achieve the necessary greenhouse gas emissions reductions to meet mandates for 2030* and beyond without significant changes to how communities and transportation systems are planned, funded, and built...*Lack of progress to date puts California at risk of not achieving the important public health, equity, economic, mobility, housing, and other benefits that SB 375 SCSs are expected to deliver.*” (p.5.) [Emphasis added]

Importantly, Senate Bill 526 addresses the key conclusions of the Progress Report and requires the creation of an interagency working group to develop and implement a State Mobility Action Plan (MAP) for Healthy Communities to ensure the state’s environmental, equity, climate, health and housing goals are being met. This MAP for Healthy Communities will include stakeholder involvement through at least four public meetings throughout the State, and broad representation among relevant state agencies, including the State Department of Public Health. The work of this panel would be communicated to the Legislature by December 31, 2020 and updated every four years.

The bill would also create a review and data collection process to ensure that CARB has adequate information to evaluate regional plans and whether transportation investments made within those plans result in increased or decreased vehicle miles traveled. If the plans continue to show that progress toward achieving regional targets is not being made, the bill would also update the guidelines for the state transportation improvement plan to ensure that higher priority would be given to projects that reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions in jurisdictions of those regions that are found to be failing to meet its 2035 targets.

As noted above, projects that reduce vehicle miles traveled can yield a wide range of public health benefits, from improved air quality to reduced rates of chronic illnesses and mental health. For example, one recently published study projected significant reduction in cardiovascular disease and diabetes with increases in active transport in the City of Los Angeles.⁸ Similarly, providing priority to greenhouse gas-reducing projects to achieve climate policy goals supports public health and ensures that investments made today do not lock in generations of unhealthy consequences.

In order to secure the public health, equity, affordable housing and transportation and mobility choices envisioned by SB 375, and to ensure California remains on track to reducing harmful pollution and attaining health-protective climate standards, real changes must be made to our transportation system and investments. Because we are not on track to achieve the promise of healthier communities and critical climate pollution goals, we support Senate Bill 526.

Sincerely,

⁸ Will Nicholas, PhD, MPH, Irene Vidyanti, PhD, Emily Caesar, MPH, MSW, and Neil Maizlish, PhD. [Routine Assessment of Health Impacts of Local Transportation Plans: A Case Study From the City of Los Angeles](#). Am J Public Health. 2019;109:490–496.doi:10.2105/AJPH.2018.304879

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