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NATURAL RESOURCES
WATER, PARKS AND WILDLIFE

March 30, 2021

The Honorable Phil Ting
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
State Capitol, Room 6026
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Richard Bloom
Chair, Assembly Budget Subcommittee on Resources & Transportation
State Capitol, Room 2003
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Improving California's Sustainable Community Strategies

Dear Chairs Ting and Bloom:

The Legislature has a unique opportunity to invest this year to dramatically improve the achievement of California's greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals and improve the quality of life for many Californians. I respectfully request appropriations be made in this year's budget to begin the implementation of AB 1147; my bill which seeks to invest in large and transformative vehicle miles traveled (VMT) reduction projects at the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) and transformative active transportation projects at the Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

California has consistently fallen short in reducing GHGs in the transportation and land use sector. In 2018, the Air Resources Board (ARB) released a report evaluating SB 375 implementation and found that California was not on track to meet the GHG reductions expected under SB 375 for 2020, with emissions from statewide passenger vehicle travel per capita increasing and going in the wrong direction. In the report, the ARB concluded that, "so far, all [regions] – acting rationally within the state's current structure of incentives, political forces, and policy restrictions – have not been able to enact the magnitude of change needed."

There are many strategies to reduce GHG from the transportation sector, but making communities more walkable, bikeable, and with increased access to public transportation must be part of the equation. By making the investments I request below, we can set California on the course to meet its VMT reduction goals and avoid the cumulative emissions impacts of continuing to promote land use and transportation policy that increases VMT.

I would like to request the following appropriations related to this matter:

- \$250 thousand to the SGC to expand the scope of the report required by my AB 285, Chapter 605, Statutes of 2019, to include a convening of state, regional, local partners to review barriers and make recommendations for meeting VMT GHG targets;
- Two positions at the ARB for increased workload to implement AB 1147 and support the Sustainable Communities Strategy Program; and,
- \$250 million to the SGC to create the SCS Block Grant Program. The SCS Block Grant Program is for completing the necessary planning to identify transformative VMT reducing projects and carry out those projects. The SCS Block Grant Program plans should be able to demonstrate significant VMT reduction, be developed with community partners and have a strong equity component to help all Californians.

In addition, at the recent California Transportation Commission meeting out of a total of 454 Active Transportation Program applications, only 41 projects were chosen for funding. Commissioners stated that additional funding is needed for the program to provide VMT reduction benefit and the strong public health and safety co-benefits of the program. I support their request and advocate for additional funding for the Active Transportation Program and for that funding to be used on innovative pilot projects identified in AB 1147 such as bicycle highways and the 15-minute city concept.

Reducing VMT generates many benefits, including alleviating traffic congestion, reducing air pollution, reducing GHG emissions, reducing our dependence on foreign oil, improving public health through increased exercise, and enhancing interactions within our communities. The pandemic has increased our understanding about how important these benefits are. California will not achieve the necessary GHG emissions reductions without significant changes to how communities and transportation systems are planned, funded, and built.

This year may be the best opportunity in a lifetime to make those significant changes. For all the reasons stated, I urge you to appropriate the funding requested above for this important purpose.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Laura Friedman". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

LAURA FRIEDMAN, Chair
Assembly Committee on Transportation