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November 18, 2022

Dina El-Tawansy
Director, California Department of Transportation, District 4
111 Grand Avenue
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Director El-Tawansy,

Thank you for your work to move Caltrans in a more sustainable and equitable direction. Caltrans' new complete streets policy, its increased willingness to allocate roadway space and priority to higher capacity public transit, and its exploration of highways-to-boulevards projects are important steps toward acknowledging that road safety and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation should be transportation priorities statewide.

I also appreciate the department's acknowledgment, through support of jurisdictions applying for the federal reconnecting communities grant program, of the harms that freeway and high-speed roadway construction has disproportionately caused to historically marginalized communities. These developments are all signs that Caltrans is taking its position seriously as an agency that accounts for all people regardless of the modes of transportation they use.

The transportation sector represents the single largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in California. According to the state's most recent pre-pandemic inventory, it accounts for 41%, or 171 million metric tons, of the state's Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO₂e) emissions.¹ In San Francisco, transportation accounts for 2.2 million metric tons CO₂e, or roughly 47% of emissions, based on the most recent pre-pandemic inventory.² Our freeway system carries high traffic volumes and thus, high concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions, other particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, brake dust, tire wear, and noise pollution. Many of the above pollutants are known to have serious health impacts that disproportionately harm marginalized communities. A recent meta-analysis even found that higher concentrations of fine particulate matter are associated with increased risk of dementia.³

¹ <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/ghg-inventory-data>

² <https://sfgov.org/scorecards/environment/greenhouse-gas-emissions>

³ <https://n.neurology.org/content/early/2022/10/26/WNL.0000000000201419.abstract>

Freeways in San Francisco have long separated low income communities of color in San Francisco. The continued existence of the remainder of the Central Freeway and Bayshore Viaducts straddling the Mission District, and the Interstate 280 spur cutting off the Bayview from much of the city, illustrates the vestiges of these discrepancies.

Recent events, including the passage of the Federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, with funding for the reconnecting communities program, have sparked conversations regarding the potential to remove, repurpose, or reduce the hyperlocal historical and ongoing impacts that high-capacity, high-speed vehicle facilities have had on our communities. In San Francisco, conversations have begun regarding the Central Freeway viaduct in particular.⁴ I have already publicly stated my support for the demolition of the mid-twentieth century Central Freeway viaduct structure.⁵

In addition to the Central Freeway, the Bayshore Viaduct poses similar pollution and safety-related issues and may be approaching the end of its useful life. Rebuilding these structures in place and/or widening the existing structures would perpetuate and intensify many of the previously outlined disastrous outcomes for the neighborhoods in which the viaducts currently exist. The transformational opportunities of removing these structures warrant serious consideration given the immense land use and housing potential: 7+ acres and 30+ acres of highly buildable center-city land around the Central and Bayshore viaducts, respectively. Adequate resources would be needed to work with Caltrans, city government, and the community at large to develop a range of replacement options for the aforementioned facilities, including those that offer transformative land use and livability potential, such as tunnel replacement and removal. Such planning would need to happen before the structures require replacement, which would require significant additional resource investment.

In other words, we should not be investing huge sums in these structures before we evaluate whether we should be retaining them in the first place.

I have the following questions related to the Central Freeway and Bayshore Viaduct, as well as other freeway structures in the city. The questions are related to plans for the structures and available funding — whether within Caltrans' budget or externally available through grant programs — that could be used for freeway removal planning work in partnership with local government and the community:

1. Has Caltrans developed any plans for the replacement or rebuilding of the Central Freeway and/or Bayshore Viaduct, even at a conceptual or preliminary level? How about for any other freeway structures in San Francisco?
2. What is the approximate remaining useful life and most recently reported condition for each component (i.e. the roadway deck, the support structure, etc.) of the Central Freeway and Bayshore Viaduct, respectively?
3. When have specific elements of the Central Freeway and Bayshore Viaduct structures been retrofitted, and if the structures are to be retrofitted or replaced, what would the time frame and expected cost for such projects be? A major repainting of the Bayshore and

⁴ <https://sfstandard.com/housing-development/forget-the-central-subway-whats-happening-with-the-central-freeway/>

⁵ https://twitter.com/Scott_Wiener/status/1569407711749763072

Central Viaducts is ongoing and will help prevent further damage to the structures. A full disclosure of other work that is planned or expected for the Central and Bayshore viaducts would be helpful for the public and decision makers.

4. What is the approximate useful life and most recently reported condition of the Interstate 280 Viaduct between the Highway 101 & Interstate 280 interchange and the 4th and King off-ramps (including off-ramp structures such as the 6th Street off-ramps)? What is the history of retrofitting for the various parts of the structures, and if the structure(s) were to be retrofitted or replaced, what would the time frame and expected cost for major retrofitting or replacement be?
5. What is the estimated cost of maintenance on the Central Freeway, Bayshore Viaduct, and Interstate 280 viaduct (both routine maintenance as well as heavier maintenance work), respectively?
6. Would Caltrans be willing to conduct a study to evaluate the future of the remainder of the Central Freeway stub, including an alternative that involves demolishing the existing structure and replacing it with a surface boulevard, maximizing land use potential for housing on state-owned parcels?
7. Additionally, would Caltrans be willing to assist the City and County of San Francisco in generating a more detailed understanding of freeways within the city? Currently, the city is engaged in an update to the Circulation Element of its General Plan. This equity-oriented, holistic update would benefit from Caltrans working collaboratively with the city to identify, in addition to the long-discussed and long-studied remaining Central Freeway spur, the most pressing and viable freeway replacement or redesign opportunities within San Francisco to address longstanding equity issues, reduce serious ongoing negative impacts, and offer transformational land use and housing potential.

I support Caltrans working with San Francisco to conduct the necessary work needed to identify alternatives to the existing Central Freeway spur — a dead-end facility that has been partially removed over time and for which a study has been explicitly called for in the city's existing General Plan. I further support Caltrans working with the city to identify other opportunities for other structures, especially including the Bayshore Viaduct and the Interstate 280 Spur. I support Caltrans working with the city to better understand what funding programs or internal funding sources are available for this work. Would Caltrans be willing to work on a Central Freeway alternatives study and assist the City and County of San Francisco in their general plan update work, including support in identifying relevant historical documents and funding for more work explicitly directed at reconnecting communities separated by freeway facilities?

Thank you for your time and response. I am happy to facilitate further conversation or meet with relevant Caltrans leadership as well to further discussion on the future of high-capacity vehicle facilities in San Francisco.

Sincerely yours,

Scott Wiener

Scott Wiener
Senator, 11th District

This letter is co-signed by the following organizations:



**KID SAFE
SF**



SPUR



**The Hayes Valley
Neighborhood Association**



**HOUSING
ACTION
COALITION**



**LIVABLE
CITY**
NON-PROFIT



**SAN FRANCISCO
YIMBY**

Streets for People
Bay Area 

multistudio

Cc Director Tavares

Reference: Specific structures noted in the letter are approximately identified in red below:

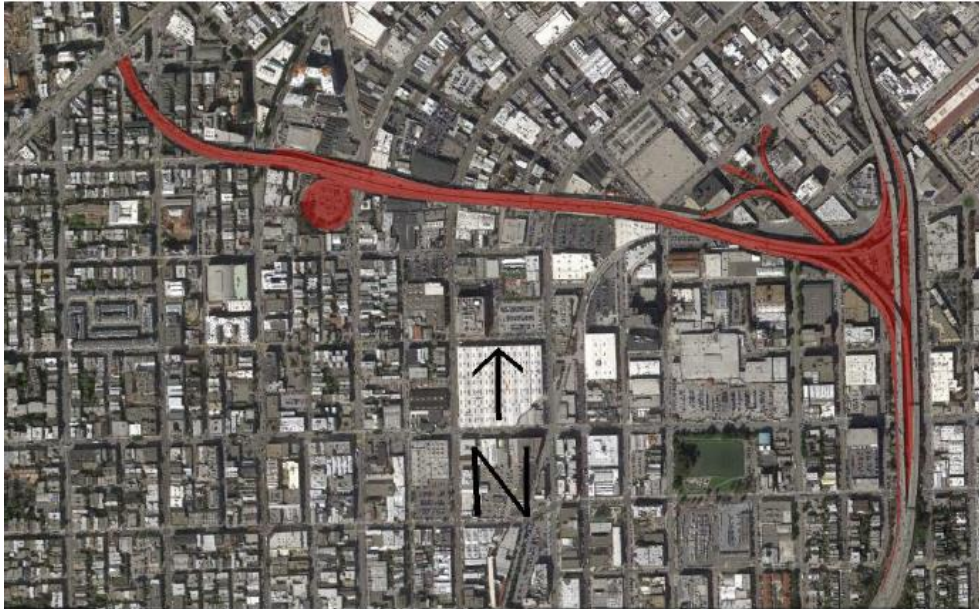


Figure 1: Central Freeway Spur Structure, between I-80/US 101 Mainline and Market/Octavia Streets

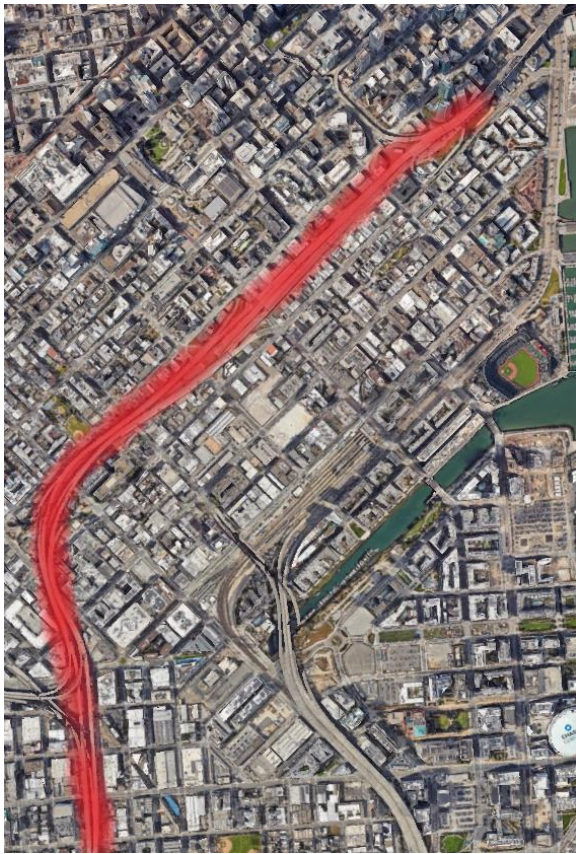


Figure 2: Bayshore Viaduct, between 17th Street & Bay Bridge



Figure 3: I-280 Spur, north of US 101/I-280