June 18, 2014

Robert Cálix,
Transportation Planning Manager, Countywide Planning & Development
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
1 Gateway Plaza, Mail Stop 99-23-2
Los Angeles, CA 90012

RE: Metro Short Range Transportation Plan

Dear Mr. Cálix:

We thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Short Range Transportation Plan (SRTP). Transportation plays a vital role in the economic vitality of our region; it also plays an integral role in the livability of our communities and the health and well-being of our residents. Over the next ten years Metro will invest $88.2 billion in transportation infrastructure projects. Our comments are intended to ensure that these dollars are maximized to achieve state, regional, Metro, and County public health goals.

The Department of Public Health’s mission is to promote health and well-being, prevent disease, and protect the health of all Los Angeles County residents. As you may be aware, 24% of adults and 23% of children in the county are obese. Currently, nearly two-thirds of children and one-half of adults do not get recommended levels of physical activity. This contributes to the obesity epidemic and increases the risk for heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes, the leading causes of death in the county. The lack of physical activity results in billions of dollars in lost productivity and health care costs in our county.

Motor vehicle traffic (MVT) collisions are a leading cause of injury and death in Los Angeles County. Relative to vehicle occupants, people walking and bicycling are at increased risk for severe injuries when involved in an MVT collision. Furthermore, injuries to people walking and bicycling disproportionately affect two of our most vulnerable populations: children and the elderly. To reduce injury rates and combat obesity we need to offer more sustainable transportation options such as public transit and safer streets that allow residents to safely and easily get regular physical activity through walking and bicycling for transportation. Metro outlines an ambitious
and commendable plan for expediting public transit improvements in our region; however, more could be done to enhance investments in active transportation.

**Increase Action Transportation Funding**

We encourage Metro to increase the allocation for active transportation improvements in the SRTP. The joint work program between Metro and Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) calls for “exploring opportunities to expedite active transportation funding planned in the Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) to ensure local infrastructure is in place to support the expansion of the rail system at the time when new stations come online.” Yet, the SRTP allocates only $.5 billion (0.6%) of the $88.2 billion budget to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects and does not provide an explanation of how funds will be allocated over and above the biennial Call for Projects. This level of funding for active transportation is disproportionately low relative to the 19% of all trips in Los Angeles County that are currently made by walking and bicycling, and may not be sufficient to promote the growth in walking and biking that is urgently needed to reduce the burden of chronic disease in the county population.

**Include an Active Transportation Investment Plan**

Currently the SRTP includes a ten-year investment plan for transit and highway projects, but does not include a similar plan for active transportation. We encourage Metro to identify how active transportation projects will be funded over and above the biennial Call for Projects and therefore recommend including an investment plan for active transportation in the SRTP.

The active transportation investment plan should outline funding for first and last mile improvements at both proposed and existing transit stations. In April of this year the Metro Board adopted the First Last Mile Strategic Plan and directed staff to develop a multi-year plan for consideration in future years’ budgets. First and last mile improvements around station areas hold great potential for improving the health and safety of residents by shaping the physical environments around transit stops. The development of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in and around these areas has the potential to improve public health as well as improve the transit system by ensuring that users are able to safely access transit stations.

Given the number of new stations that will be built over the next ten years, we recommend that a percentage of funding from all future Metro transit projects be allocated for the development of first and last mile projects, especially if utilizing Federal Transit Authority funds. In 2011, the Federal Transit Administration established a formal policy on the eligibility of pedestrian and bicycle improvements with FTA funding. The policy states that all “pedestrian improvements located within one-half mile and all bicycle improvements located within three miles of a public transportation stop or station shall have a de facto physical and functional relationship to public transportation and may be eligible for FTA funding.”

First and last mile funding is also needed for existing transit stations that currently lack adequate pedestrian and bicycle access. We recommend setting aside funding to help cities plan and implement improvements at existing stations with poor pedestrian and bicycle safety and/or connectivity. This could be modeled on the Metro-funded Eastside Light Rail Access Project,
which included thirty million dollars of Measure R funds to implement bicycle and pedestrian improvements at four transit stations along the Gold Line. For existing stations, we recommend using an evidence-based approach utilizing injury data and the percentage of low income residents within the transit station area to prioritize stations for this funding assistance.

We provide these recommendations in the interest of improving public health, recognizing that many factors need to be considered in providing transportation to support our growing region. We appreciate Metro staff’s leadership and hard work in developing the Short Range Transportation Plan and look forward to continuing to work with you to make our county healthier for all residents. If you have questions please feel free to contact me at (213) 351-7825.

Sincerely,

Paul Simon, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer

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12009 National Household Travel Survey