To: Chairwoman DuBois and Metro Directors

From: Denny Zane, Move LA

RE: Comments on 2014 Metro Short Range Transportation Plan

Date: May 18, 2014

It is because of Metro’s good work and voter approval of Measure R that Los Angeles County is in the midst of the largest public works program since the Great Depression, constructing what is surely the largest expansion of a transit system in the U.S. – one that is creating thousands of good jobs throughout LA County. We applaud the agency’s efforts to modernize LA County’s transit system — which you have laid out in the 2014-2024 Short Range Transportation Plan. It gives us much to celebrate.

In addition, we applaud Metro’s work with Congress to create a dramatically expanded TIFIA low-interest loan program. At Metro’s urging the funding for TIFIA was dramatically increased in the last federal transportation reauthorization and is now available for Metro and other transit agencies that can use a local revenue stream like Measure R to secure affordable financing for their construction programs. We hope that in the next reauthorization Metro will succeed in advancing the America Fast Forward program to create a new class of federal tax credit bonds that together with TIFIA loans would allow Metro to accelerate completion of several projects not yet in the time horizon of the SRTP plan — all of which you have laid out in the SRTP.

We must also applaud Metro’s continuing commitment to cleaning LA County’s air by being the first transportation agency in the world to operate only clean fuel buses.

In short, we are on a roll in LA County, thanks to Metro and to the voters who have shown their confidence in Metro. The build-out of our transit system continues to get media attention locally, nationally and globally — our self-help approach has caught the attention of jurisdictions around the nation that also suffer from air pollution and traffic problems. All of this bodes well for the success of another sales tax measure should Metro’s Board of Directors choose to put one on the ballot in 2016, which we urge you to anticipate.
Nevertheless, we have concerns with respect to the SRTP.

While the plan and its discussion are principally about transit and highway investments, as was emphasized in Measure R (as well as Propositions A and C in prior years), there is little discussion about some other valuable infrastructure investment opportunities. These include:

- Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure is referenced from time to time, including as part of a first-last mile strategy to facilitate access to transit, but the plan misses the opportunity to consider a more robust set of active transportation investments that could provide a healthier mobility option countywide.
- Expansion of transit service and other mobility improvements that could be implemented on the county’s extensive system of arterials, for example, in the context of a “Grand Boulevards” program that we will describe later.
- Enhancing and modernizing the Metrolink regional commuter rail system to enable more efficient service including possible express service for commuters on select lines.
- Efficiency, service and safety upgrades to the “legacy” rail transit system, especially the Blue Line and the Green Line

**Reasonably Expected Resources:** One response to these concerns could be that the SRTP is “fiscally constrained” and only considers priorities within the context of “financial resources that can be reasonably expected to be available” over the next decade; that what we are suggesting would require additional resources. The standard for what is “reasonably foreseeable” carries a great deal of political judgment. Is it reasonable to presume over the next decade that revenue from the federal government will continue as was adopted in MAP-21 without reduction? Like Metro, we are hopeful and believe so, but we could be wrong. Is it reasonable to base revenue projections for the highway program on a set of toll road programs that have yet to be approved? We think yes, though they have yet to be approved and are not certain in the way that Measure R is certain.

We believe there are additional revenues that Metro’s projections fail to include that can be reasonably expected and if included could allow the board to address part of our concerns. Metro should make reasonable assumptions about revenue likely to come to Metro from the State of California Cap & Trade program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The legislation that created this program is several years old and funds have already begun to accumulate in the state coffers. The expected statewide revenue may be as much as $5 Billion annually in the near term. As one fourth of the state’s population, LA County should expect and work to receive approximately $1.25 Billion annually to invest in reducing emissions. While Metro and transportation infrastructure will not receive all of these funds, since transportation sources account for almost 40% of such emissions, there should be a “reasonable expectation” that local clean transportation investments will be a target of a significant share of these expenditures. Every framework thus far proposed in Sacramento envisions a competitive process for allocating funds. Thus, it seems prudent for Metro to begin identifying priorities now in the context of the SRTP for how such funds might be expended in LA County, so we are ahead of the game when requests for proposals are released.
Move LA Memo to LA Metro Board of Directors
Comments on SRTP
May 18, 2014

Of course, it may also be “reasonable to expect” that voters might approve another sales tax measure within the decade but we are not suggesting you include such revenues in this deliberation.

What follows is our suggestions for expanded transportation infrastructure investment programs in the SRTP, investments we believe some share of could be candidates for use of “reasonably expected” state Cap & Trade revenues.

• **Enhancing Bicycle and Pedestrian Investments:** While we admire the First-Mile-Last-Mile Strategic Plan recently adopted by the board, and are pleased to see it discussed in the technical document, we would like to see a stronger commitment in the SRTP to bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects. There needs to a clearer acknowledgement of the potential of these investments to increase the transit commute shed and build ridership, their cost-effectiveness relative to other options (parking structures are expensive!), and the need to provide communities with more healthy and affordable transportation options. The interest in bike and pedestrian projects has dramatically increased since Measure R because of concerns about public health, obesity and air quality. Providing for bicyclists and pedestrians enhances a sense of community and makes local business districts more lively, interesting and appealing. Now is the time for these smaller scale investments as a way to improve quality of life in densely populated LA County. Such investments are a natural use of Cap & Trade revenues to reduce GHG emissions.

• **Creating a Network of “Grand Boulevards”:** Why is it that when the SRTP refers to highways it appears to always be referring to freeways? There are so many arterials in LA County, a number of which now have Metro Rapid bus service. These arterials provide an exceptional opportunity for cost-effective investments that enhance mobility and access and create new economic development opportunities.

For example, investments in a countywide system of “Grand Boulevards” could significantly enhance transit service on our arterials and that could include Bus Rapid Transit on some corridors. Base line program would include safer well-lit bus stops with real time information, signal synchronization, separated bike lanes, enhanced pedestrian infrastructure and amenities, and mobility hubs with smart mobility options including car- and bike-sharing and other car services involving zero-emission vehicles. Investing these new funding sources on specific boulevards could be linked to moderate increases in density and mixed-use infill development along these boulevards. The program should include the provision of mixed-income housing that would include high-propensity transit users as well as infrastructure improvements to enable these residents to walk or bike to nearby transit services. The development of publicly owned and managed parking to encourage development along underutilized streets and enable future removal of street parking for operation of BRT systems should be considered as well.

Opportunities for such a program will be enhanced through some of the tax increment financing tools now being considered by the State of California.

We have discussed “Grand Boulevards” with stakeholders throughout LA County and it has generated significant interest and enthusiasm because every subregion has more than one arterial that would be a candidate for such a program.
• **Metrolink:** We believe the Metrolink commuter rail system receives too little attention in the SRTP despite the fact that this system represents a significant transit growth opportunity because it connects so many communities, especially communities in the suburban ring, to communities in the urban core. Downtown LA is so quickly developing into a lively residential, commercial, employment and entertainment center. Enhanced Metrolink service into Union Station could improve access without causing traffic congestion or more air pollution. Moreover, linkages between the Metrorail transit system and the Metrolink commuter rail system would bolster the effectiveness of each.

• **Retrofit Investments to Improve Existing Metrorail service:** Similarly, there is no discussion of the need and opportunity to invest in upgrades to LA County’s “legacy” rail lines, especially the Blue and Green lines. The plan should examine whether additional stations can be provided, for example, at the Southwest College on the Green Line, or whether public safety improvements should be made at crossings and stations or whether public safety service could be enhanced.

We would also like to note that while all Metro’s performance measures are depicted graphically, there is little discussion about them: For example, we are interested in the analysis of how our expenditure of $88.2 billion, most of which will be spent on transit, results in modest GHG reductions over the no-build scenario. Given that the Southern California Association of Governments RTP/SCS sets a target of reducing per capita GHG emissions by 8% by 2025 it would be important to be assured that the SRTP puts us on course to meet that goal. What must we do to do better in this regard, especially given the opportunity for new funding from the Cap & Trade program?

Lastly, more than 2/3 of Metro’s funding sources are local and that percentage is likely to increase if the federal government constrains spending (as it seems likely to do) until a new revenue source for the Highway Trust Fund is secured. Because of this, a fuller discussion of the context in which Metro’s funding decisions are being made could help board members as well as the public understand their choices going forward. Federal transportation funding is at a critical juncture and strategies to secure local dollars are likely to become more important. It could be good to make this case in the SRTP and Technical Document.

Moreover, it could be important to consider the real funding need in LA County and how it compares to available revenues. What amount of funding is necessary in order to reduce GHG emissions and meet the 2025 targets, to clean the air, to reduce congestion, etc.? The SRTP would be a good place for this discussion. The public is increasingly interested in these “co-benefits” of transportation investments.

In conclusion we applaud Metro’s work program and the public confidence that the agency has earned. Not so long ago this would have been hard to believe, but LA County has become a model for other regions across the nation and around the globe, and the SRTP tells the story of how we did this. We are lucky to be in this position, again, thanks to voters and to the good work of the agency and its Board of Directors. But of course there’s always room for improvement.