Governor’s Transportation Vision Includes Boosts for Walking, Biking, & Transit

Today, Governor Brown released his 2017-18 State Budget proposal, which includes $4 billion in new annual investment for transportation to repair roads and help Californians travel more efficiently and sustainably. While the majority of the new revenue will be directed towards maintaining state highways and local roads, this proposal does provide meaningful increases to a variety of other road, transit, and active transportation programs that will help put California on a path toward meeting state climate and equity goals. The new revenue will be raised from a combination of gas and diesel taxes, vehicle license fees, and state climate investments from the possible extension of the Cap-and-Trade Program.

The Active Transportation Program (ATP)—the state’s dedicated source of funding for walking, bicycling, and Safe Routes to School projects—is slated to receive an additional $100 million per year from Cap-and-Trade proceeds in the proposal, with at least half to be invested in projects in communities where they are most needed. “As one of the first state programs to weave social equity into its very fabric, the ATP has already invested millions in communities that are too often left behind,” said Tony Dang, Executive Director of California Walks. “The ATP’s investments have brought the needs of our most vulnerable Californians to the forefront and enable them to walk or bike for their everyday needs safely and conveniently.”

Though the proposal does not meet the unrelenting demand for these investments at the local level—totalling over $1 billion in requests annually—it would nearly double the ATP.

“We applaud the Governor for proposing to significantly increase the state’s commitment to the Active Transportation Program and ensuring that walking and biking project funds are prioritized to disadvantaged communities,” said Jeanie Ward-Waller, Policy Director for the California Bicycle Coalition. “We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature on crafting the details of this funding proposal to ensure investments in state and local roads also include improvements for people walking and bicycling to create “complete streets” and provide safe alternatives to traveling by car.”

“We are pleased to see the Governor champion such a big investment in the Active Transportation Program in this year’s budget. This money will benefit children across the state who walk and bike to school every day, and encourage many more to do so by creating safer crossings, improved sidewalks and Safe Routes to School education programs,” shared Bill Sadler, California Senior Policy Manager, Safe Routes to School National Partnership

“The American Heart Association/American Stroke Association welcomes the Governor’s plan to increase funding for the Active Transportation Program,” said Eric Batch, Vice President of Advocacy. “As one of the nation’s oldest public health organizations, we know that physical activity is an important tool in preventing heart disease and stroke. We will continue to work with the Governor’s office to adequately fund Active Transportation, Safe Routes to School, and the creation of complete streets.”

The proposal would also invest an additional $400 million of Cap-and-Trade funds in new transit projects to expand our rail and bus networks statewide. “We support and appreciate the Governor’s desire to invest in new transit projects and service; however, we need to see a proportional investment in improving existing service for people who already rely on the bus for their daily travel,” commented Joshua Stark, State Policy Director, TransForm.
Finally, Governor Brown proposes new programs to empower regions to achieve ambitious state climate goals: regional sustainability planning grants to major metropolitan regions in the state and the new Corridor Mobility Improvement Program to improve congestion on major commute routes, which with appropriate direction could be a boon for public transit improvements and walk and bikeway projects along those corridors.

“Given the ambitious nature of our climate and equity goals, we are pleased to see the Governor provide the regions with much-needed resources to tackle improving access and mobility while ultimately addressing climate change through these innovative programs.” said Chanell Fletcher, Associate Director for ClimatePlan. “We remain committed to working with the Governor and Legislature to ensure that the regions -- and local communities -- have the necessary tools to create sustainable, healthy, and equitable communities.”

Despite the strides in the Governor’s Budget to increase investment in walking and bicycling, new transit, sustainable planning and corridor improvements, the vast majority of new transportation revenue still short-sightedly enables auto travel. The Governor’s proposal includes an additional $800M for new projects in the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) -- this is on top of $750M to restore funding for projects that were cut in 2016. Additional funding to programs like the STIP should include clear accountability measures to ensure it is spent on projects that reduce driving and promote social equity, or it will ultimately hinder the state from meeting its climate change reduction targets.

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California Bicycle Coalition, California Walks, the Safe Routes to School National Partnership, TransForm, American Heart Association, and ClimatePlan are non-profit organizations committed to advancing walking, bicycling, and affordable transit for all Californians.