

Chair DeSaulnier, Honorable Committee Members

Good afternoon

My name is Amanda Eaken, I am Deputy Director of NRDC's Urban Solutions Program.

Last week [the White House released a new](#) National Climate Assessment affirming that climate change has “moved firmly into the present,” [and we're already feeling its effects, especially here in California. With transportation responsible for 40% of California's carbon pollution,](#) now is a perfect time to discuss the implementation of California's Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Law. I want to thank the committee staff for convening this hearing, and thank all of you for your leadership to advance this program.

I was given a simple task today: tell you what's worked, what hasn't and what's needed going forward, so let's get right to it.

**First – what has worked?**

- 1) The real breakthrough of SB 375 is that we made the connection for the first time, in statute between land use decisions, transportation investments and greenhouse gas emissions. [It also lends itself well to integration of SB 535's focus on putting California's climate strategies to work in disadvantaged communities.](#)
- 2) The fact that [18 metropolitan planning organizations](#) now have a specific, measurable GOAL to achieve has in my experience transformed the regional transportation planning process because the regions are now looking for strategies to reduce their

greenhouse gas emissions. And key to this success is local flexibility to innovative locally appropriate solutions.

- You've heard other speakers re-inforce this, but I'll give a few examples [to illustrate that this is happening all over the state](#):
- In Kern County, they are planning a 10 fold increase in funding for safe biking and walking, and there has been a significant new focus on transportation choices.
- In San Diego, nearly a billion dollars that was previously slated for a widening of interstate 5 was re-allocated to smart growth incentive programs.
- And one of the most innovative examples we've seen so far—the Bay Area pioneered a program called Project Performance Assessment in their [Sustainable Community Strategy](#). Here's the basic idea—
  - i. Analyze ALL of your money for how well it aligns with your goals.
  - ii. They set 10 clear goals—reduce household transportation costs for low income families, improve public health, strengthen the regional economy, and they analyzed 1000 transportation projects for how well they align with these goals.
  - iii. And it turns out, some changes were needed and some changes were made.
- This program has also enhanced our understanding of the co-benefits of better land use planning and transportation investments, [for example air quality and efficient urban water use](#).

- **What we** see is regions helping citizens and stakeholders to make sense of the process
- Which growth scenarios improve public health? What are the impacts on farmland and the agricultural economy? How do certain investments move us towards, or away from the goal of creating equitable communities?
- The degree of stakeholder engagement and partnership has truly exceeded my expectations.
- There is of course room for improvement, but it's very clear that every region is experimenting with scenarios to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, and that alone, is progress.

### 3) So, what do we need to do going forward?

- I'm going to lay out three top priorities I hope we can focus on to ensure this program achieves its potential.
- **First** we need to make sure sufficient resources exist to implement these sustainable communities strategies.
  - i. NRDC joins our Transportation Coalition for Livable Communities partners in supporting significant cap and trade proceeds for 375 implementation, and we believe such investments must be structured to incentivize a race to the top competition at the regions so that the most cost-effective projects come forward and are funded.
  - ii. But I also have to say, while there is an appropriate emphasis on identifying *new* resources to support sustainable transportation choices, from my experience, it appears to me that not ALL of the

regions are spending all of their existing dollars as efficiently as possible.

1. We would like to see all regions undertake an analysis similar to the Bay Area's Project Performance Assessment so that we can all understand how well existing funding is aligned with sustainability goals
  2. There has been a lot of talk about sales tax projects and the constraint posed by sales tax measures. But I think both the fiscal crisis faced by local governments as well as the climate crisis demand that we re-open some of these measures to understand whether these lists of projects are still serving our communities.
- **Second**, as the legislature looks beyond 2020, [NRDC urges you to work](#), in partnership with the Air Resources Board and the regions, to analyze whether, in light of recent climate news, and in light of all of the modeling improvements and best practices from regions around the state, 375 can in fact deliver greater greenhouse gas reductions.
    - i. Its perfect timing, because the Air Resources board is due, to update the targets this year under the law.
    - ii. If you think about it—the world has changed SIGNIFICANTLY since we set the first GHG targets in 2010.

- iii. We all know the phones in our pockets have transformed our lives, and some are postulating that they may be able to similarly transform transportation.
- iv. It's my hunch that the convergence of new technology, new transportation choices, millennial transportation preferences and the emergence of the sharing economy could mean that we have a new set of strategies to help us reduce vehicle miles traveled, that we could not have imagined four years ago, and I'm very interested to see how we could update the targets in light of all of this new information. [We need to consider all of these factors as we look to set new GHG reduction targets beyond 2020.](#)
- v. We also need to continue to build the capacity at ARB to review these plans, understand the complex interaction between land use and transportation, including induced demand, so that we can have even greater confidence that as ARB is approving these plans, that they will deliver the intended GHG reductions.
- **Third, and finally** – Some of the most important work ahead is to continue to align state programs and policies to support the successful implementation of SB 375 moving forward. The legislature saw and seized such an opportunity last year, when it enacted legislation to eliminate level of service from CEQA. The legislature recognized that level of service—a measure of delay to automobiles-- was no longer the

appropriate planning metric to use in our goals to create sustainable communities with transportation choices.

- i. There has been some excellent work of late to examine whether our state department of transportation priorities are aligned with our climate goals, and the recommendations of the SSTI report deserve our immediate attention.
  - ii. I would also note that the California Transportation Commission – which oversees nearly \$10 billion a year in revenues could benefit from greater expertise in the areas of sustainable transportation, affordable housing and social equity. A bill to do so last year – AB 1290 – was vetoed by the governor, but would have moved in the right direction.
- [We're proud that California continues](#) to lead the nation in pioneering a new approach to smarter land use and transportation planning to address climate change, we are grateful for your environmental leadership and look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead to ensure California continues to set the standard for the rest of the country.
  - Thank you.