



TA Board of Directors
Meeting of July 10, 2025

Correspondence as of July 3, 2025

Subject

1. CA: Commentary: Why California won't give up the dream of high-speed rail
2. Letter of Support from SamTrans and TA re Assembly Bill 259 (Rubio) - Open meetings: local agencies: teleconferences as amended on April 21, 2025 – Support
3. Letter of Support from SamTrans and TA re SB 71 (Wiener) CEQA Streamlining for Clean Transportation Projects
4. Letter of Support from Samtrans and TA re: SB 63 (Wiener) Regional Transportation Funding

From: [Richard Hedges](#)
To: [Board \(@smcta.com\)](#); [cacsecretary \[@smcta.com\]](#)
Subject: CA: Commentary: Why California won't give up the dream of high-speed rail
Date: Thursday, June 26, 2025 6:26:46 PM

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FROM MASS TRANSIT

- 1.
2. RAIL
3. INFRASTRUCTURE

CA: Commentary: Why California won't give up the dream of high-speed rail

June 25, 2025

In a recent survey, 54% of Californians still believe high-speed rail is worthwhile — suggesting that they would rather take a three-hour train trip than spend six to eight hours driving from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

By Jeffrey Beeman

Source Los Angeles Times (TNS)

We have heard the stories and seen the headlines over and over:

“Trump Administration to Pull \$4 Billion in Funding for California High-Speed Rail,” “California’s high-speed rail project has ‘no viable path forward,’ new report says.”

In the face of constant negative prognostications and outright attacks by pundits and politicians of all stripes, how is it that California, like Sisyphus, keeps pushing such a giant boulder up an ever-growing mountain?

We have to admit that the history of our state’s high-speed rail has been disappointing, to say the least. The route has been planned, changed, argued over, compromised and hammered out over many years. Too many consultants were hired, too many lawsuits filed, too many hands

have dipped into a governmental pot that looks like a get-rich scheme. The money stops and starts, which causes efficiency losses of all kinds, and it's the ultimate political football, easy to kick by anyone with hatred of the "other side," which seems to be all of us now. The final Environmental Impact Report has been approved after Herculean effort, construction is well under way, and yet many hurdles remain. Despite the larger-than-life challenges, there are a few social issues that keep our state pounding away at this dream. Traffic is one of them. Californians clog their freeways up and down the state at nearly all hours. We subsidize highways to the tune of \$32 billion a year, only to sit on them stewing.

But we still love our cars, so would travelers give them up when going up and down the state? Apparently yes.

In a recent survey, 54% of Californians still believe high-speed rail is worthwhile — suggesting that they would rather take a three-hour train trip than spend six to eight hours driving from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Besides the time savings for residents, it would cost roughly twice as much in new highway construction to provide the equivalent trip volume provided by high-speed rail, making it a financial win as well. But aren't there more pressing problems for California to worry about — like housing, for instance? Like most states, California faces an affordable housing crisis. Perhaps unintuitively, trains can help here as well.

The decision to run the rail line through the Central Valley was deliberate. This is the area of the state with the least expensive land to develop, for housing and commerce. Just as the East Coast developed into a string of megacities linked by Amtrak, California is evolving into its own megalopolis. High-speed rail will not only connect these areas of housing and commerce but also will help produce them by reducing transportation issues. People will be able to commute by rail from affordable areas or live farther from urban centers without sacrificing access to urban amenities.

Another huge factor in the high-speed rail discussion is climate. Extreme weather events are growing worse, more frequent and more costly. More than 16,000 structures were destroyed in L.A.'s January wildfires, an astounding loss. The science of climate change is undeniably clear, and California is ground zero for the effects. Transportation causes around 30% of the greenhouse gas pollution in

the United States, and it's one of the sectors where we have many known technologies to replace our polluting ways. High-speed rail is one of them. The efficiency of converting stored energy into electric train motion is incredibly high. It's up to four times more efficient than driving cars and nine times more efficient than flying. And as we convert the grid to ever-cleaner sources of electricity, use of grid-sourced transportation like electric trains becomes cleaner as well.

The many reasons we need a modern rail system should keep us focused as we face obstacles. Remember that the Shinkansen in Japan, the Eurostar, the TGV in France and many other high-speed systems also went substantially over budget or were delayed during construction. Ultimately, they have been heavily used, and the results have been celebrated. The costs have been amortized over decades and proved to be totally worth the effort.

In the United States, we could get past much of the financial drama for high-speed rail if we considered creating a National Infrastructure Bank, which would rebuild our crumbling infrastructure and finance transportation projects like high-speed rail without adding to the national or state-based debt load. This common-sense financial mechanism built huge amounts of our national infrastructure in the past but currently faces headwinds because of self-destructive political polarization.

Climate, congestion, housing and commerce all help keep the dream alive, but perhaps there is something else brewing in California that just might make the dream real. We are the ultimate land of hope and solutions. This is still where dreamers dream and doers do, and we are stubborn about it. We see the political capture by entrenched, polluting profit seekers and it raises our ire. The success of high-speed rail in other countries raises our competitive hackles. The constant doom spread by media-driven conflict profiteers that use California high-speed rail to demonize things social in America makes us defiant.

Maybe all of these reasons have a multiplicative effect. Or maybe we simply refuse to believe that audacity, hope and pride in collective achievement is a thing of the past in the United States, and especially in California.

Jeffrey Beeman is a retired materials scientist and a member of Californians for Electric Rail.

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1250 SAN CARLOS AVENUE
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June 24, 2025

The Honorable Blanca Rubio
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 5250
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 259 (Rubio) - Open meetings: local agencies:
teleconferences as amended on April 21, 2025 – Support**

Dear Assembly Member Rubio:

On behalf of the San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans) and the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (SMCTA), I am pleased to inform you that both agencies are **supporting AB 259**.

AB 259 will preserve important teleconferencing procedures that have afforded public agency board members the flexibility to remotely attend meetings in which they might have been otherwise unable to participate due to illness, official travel, or medical emergency.

Recognizing the evolving landscape of public meetings and the demonstrated value of remote participation options when members of governing bodies are unable to attend a physical gathering, your office introduced, and the Legislature passed, Assembly Bill 2449 in 2022, which amended the Brown Act.

Beginning in 2023, our agencies began using the procedures established by AB 2449, successfully facilitating remote participation for officials that would have otherwise not been able to join due to illness, official travel, or medical emergency. Officials still publicly noticed their meeting location and opened the meeting to the public. The provisions of that bill, having been negotiated by civil society groups and local government stakeholders, contained numerous requirements, including the presence of an in-person quorum at the official meeting location.

While the provisions added by AB 2449 were modified slightly by technical amendments made by subsequent legislation, the January 1, 2026 sunset included in the original bill remains. To preserve the flexibility provided by your AB 2449, Assembly Bill 259 would extend this sunset date until 2030, thereby preserving the remote meeting procedures added by the earlier legislation. AB 259 would not make any additional changes to other elements of the remote meeting provisions.

The Honorable Blanca Rubio

June 24, 2025

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For these reasons, we strongly support AB 259. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact Government and Community Affairs Director Jessica Epstein at epsteinj@samtrans.com if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



April Chan
General Manager/CEO

Cc: San Mateo County Transit District Board of Directors
San Mateo County Transportation Authority Board of Directors
San Mateo County Transit District State Legislative Delegation
San Mateo County Transportation Authority Legislative Delegation

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June 24, 2025

The Honorable Isaac Bryan
Chair, Assembly Natural Resources Committee
1020 N Street, Room 164
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 71 (Wiener) CEQA Streamlining for Clean Transportation Projects

Dear Chair Bryan,

On behalf of the San Mateo County Transit District (SamTrans) and the San Mateo County Transportation Authority (SMCTA), I am pleased to inform you that both agencies are **supporting SB 71 (Wiener)**. SB 71 would make clarifying changes to, and modify slightly, the existing statutory exemptions to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for clean transportation projects, established by SB 288 (Wiener) [Chapter 200, Statutes of 2020], while also removing the law's January 1, 2030 sunset date.

In 2020, SB 288 (Wiener) was signed into law, establishing a set of statutory exemptions from CEQA in the Public Resources Code for certain clean transportation projects, with the goal of accelerating clean transportation projects that reduced greenhouse gas emissions by bringing online more public transit and active transportation projects sooner. SB 288 was followed by SB 922 (Wiener, 2022) which extended the sunset date, added additional exemptions to the law, and provided clarifying definitional and process amendments. These clean transportation projects include developing new bus rapid transit projects, expansion of bus or light-rail services, transit prioritization projects (as defined), projects that improve customer information and wayfinding for commuters, projects to construct or maintain infrastructure to charge, power, or refuel zero-emission buses, trains, and ferries, projects to reduce minimum parking requirements, and projects for pedestrian and bicycle facilities. In 2024, AB 2503 (Lee) further refined the Public Resources Code exemptions to include zero-emission passenger rail projects within an existing right of way.

Since the passage of SB 288 in 2020, over 90 projects statewide have moved forward more quickly and cost effectively, including transit priority projects, bicycle & pedestrian projects, bus rapid transit projects, traffic calming projects, zero-emission vehicle

charging infrastructure, ADA curb and sidewalk repairs, and transit maintenance facility modernization. SMCTA may use the exemptions established for two upcoming projects, the El Camino Real Complete Streets projects and Fashion Island Blvd/19th Ave Complete Streets Project in the City of San Mateo.

Along with conversion of our fleet to zero emission technology, SamTrans has many projects that may benefit from this bill. The agency fully implemented the changes from the last transit operational analysis and plan. SamTrans is in the process of implementing a bus stop study and changing shelters and amenities across the county.

As such, we believe the state should make many of these exemptions permanent, while giving others additional time to use the provisions of the bill. This would create long-term certainty for local agencies as they continue to advance projects that further clean transportation options and make public transit more equitable and accessible.

For these reasons, we strongly support SB 71. Thank you for your time and consideration. Please contact Government and Community Affairs Director Jessica Epstein at epsteinj@samtrans.com if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



April Chan
General Manager/CEO

Cc: San Mateo County Transit District Board of Directors
San Mateo County Transportation Authority Board of Directors
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1250 SAN CARLOS AVENUE
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(650) 508-6200

July 3, 2025

The Honorable Lori Wilson
Chair, Assembly Transportation Committee
1021 O Street, Room 1100
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SB 63 (Wiener) Regional Transportation Funding

Dear Assemblymember Wilson:

On behalf of the San Mateo County Transit District (SMCTD) and the San Mateo County Transportation Authority, we are writing to share our perspectives on SB 63, including the remaining issues that must be resolved, either through the legislation or agreements with outside partners, for San Mateo County to participate in the proposed regional measure.

San Mateo County is, and has been, a partner and active participant in developing a regional transportation funding measure. We have worked closely with Senators Wiener and Arreguín, other transit agencies, transportation authorities, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, as well as key stakeholders in our county.

Our leadership is actively considering joining this regional measure with the final decision to be made at the August 6, 2025, San Mateo County Transit District Board of Directors meeting. Our goal is to balance the funding needs with appropriate and reasonable conditions for disbursing those funds.

Below are the areas where it is critical that we reach agreement with the funded agencies:

BART and Muni:

- Reasonable service levels in San Mateo County
- Quality of life standards at San Mateo County BART stations: cleanliness, lighting, safety, and infrastructure (e.g. operational elevators, escalators, etc.)
- New surcharges that could disproportionately impact San Mateo County riders
- Unexpected contingencies (e.g. external funding windfalls coming to the agencies, insolvency, inability to provide service)
- Focused San Mateo County expenditure updates
- Local monitoring and oversight of side-letter agreements

Assemblymember Wilson

July 3, 2025

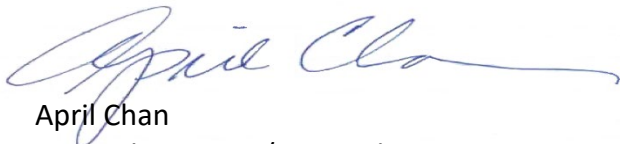
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Additional Board Priorities:

- Return-to-source funds for SMCTD public transit
- Transit Transformation: limited funding, local impact
- MTC oversight: only commissioners from participating counties
- MTC authority: 2026 Regional Measure only and sunsets with the regional measure
- Full funding for Caltrain
- No consolidation of Caltrain or SamTrans

We look forward to developing a clear and concrete process to ensure funding for vital public transit services across the Bay Area, while also ensuring that important transit service needs and related San Mateo County priorities are adequately addressed. If you have questions please contact Jessica Epstein, Government and Community Affairs Director, at epsteinj@samtrans.com.

Sincerely,



April Chan
General Manager/CEO and Executive Director



Jeff Gee
Chair, San Mateo County Transit District Board of Directors



Carlos Romero
Chair, San Mateo County Transportation Authority Board of Directors

Cc: San Mateo County Transit District Board of Directors
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