



March 15, 2021

California Transportation Commission  
1120 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Comments RE: Draft Local Streets and Roads Funding Program Guidelines**

To whom this may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Local Streets and Roads Funding Program Guidelines (Draft Guidelines). Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability is a community-based organization working in over thirty communities across the San Joaquin and Eastern Coachella Valleys. We work predominantly with rural low-income communities and communities of color that are too frequently ignored or forgotten. Our work is rooted in co-powerment, which is defined as acknowledging, elevating, and respecting partner communities' expertise, knowledge, and experience. Our comments and recommendations are based on community priorities and the barriers they have faced in obtaining public investments.

We're well aware of the critical role transportation investments, and related policies have played in supporting and exacerbating Jim Crow-era discriminatory practices. For decades, governments spent an insurmountable amount of public dollars destroying black and brown communities while paving the way for white flight suburbs far away from urban centers. These practices are not simply history we read in textbooks but memories for many California residents. As such, this State's responsibility is to address and atone for our compliance, enforcement, and development of racially discriminatory policies and public investments. We hope the recommendations we provide below are taken into account for these Draft Guidelines as well as other relevant Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account programs.

**I. Require and Prioritize Community-Driven Projects in Disadvantaged Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Communities**

Section 3(8) of the Draft Guidelines identifies programmatic priorities and project examples that could be funded under the Local Streets and Roads Program. Generally, we appreciate the flexibility the Street and Highways Code allows this program. There are countless miles of



streets, and roads are found in such disrepair that it makes it dangerous and difficult to drive on, let alone bike, walk, or any other alternative mode of transportation. The relative flexibility of these dollars allows for the basic maintenance and improvements partner communities are seeking.

However, what's gravely lacking is the priority or intent in ensuring some equitable forms of investment or community-driven solutions. The 2050 California Transportation Plan, Executive Order No. 19-19—materialized into the Draft California Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure—, along with several other mediums have all recognized the stark difference BIPOC community members live relative to their white counterparts. These documents, along with others, have also listed implementable actions that require significant financial investments. Thus, we recommend the Draft Guidelines, to the extent possible, have required commitments to first prioritize community-driven projects in disadvantaged communities with the highest amounts of deferred maintenance.

We typically see local jurisdictions cutting the pie equally amongst all districts despite the decades of systemic divestment in BIPOC neighborhoods. Moreover, it is not uncommon to see the few projects that get financed be improvements that the community did not ask for and/or projects that benefit industrial businesses in their neighborhoods. For instance, a few years ago, the City of Fresno used their designated RMRA dollars to improve the road along North and Fig Avenues in West Fresno. This community ranks 97th on the pollution burden and 100 on population characteristics burden per CalEnviroScreen 3.0. Though there is a neighborhood along North Avenue leading to Fig Avenue, and they rightly needed their roads improved and then some because of all the heavy-duty traffic, there is a meat rendering facility right at Fig and North Avenues.

As with most infrastructure projects, community members were not involved in the selection of this improvement. If they had been, they would have also sought bike and pedestrian improvements in addition to general road improvements. Infrastructure such as sidewalks and bike lanes are severely needed here as it would provide safe routes to the nearby elementary and middle schools and the community center. Rural communities also face similar impediments; however, the resources are typically more scarce but more costly and feel less heard by their government staff and elected officials. For example, in the community of Delhi in Merced County, residents have been seeking drain and gutters, improved sidewalks, and road improvements. This is for pedestrian and public health safety because when it rains, the flood overflows the sewers creating a repulsive sludge that cars drive through and forcing people into the street.



## **II. Target Procurement and Contracts with BIPOC Businesses**

To combat our country and state's institutionalized discriminatory practices and patterns, we must also address the economic disparities and opportunities white and BIPOC businesses get. With the state funding, local jurisdictions obtain, there must be a requirement for equitable procurement and contracts targeting BIPOC businesses. Several other programs, such as the Strategic Growth Council's Transformative Climate Communities Program, have the language to encourage or reward jurisdictions that implement such policies.

## **III. Alignment of State Programs**

The elements noted in page 8 pertaining to technology, climate change and adaptation, complete streets considerations, and ZEV Infrastructure should be aligned and coordinated with State programs and efforts such as the Zero Emission Executive Order N-79-20 and CalSTA's CAPTI. Consistency with these programs ensures that jurisdictions will have streamlined guidelines when using combinations of RMRA and other state program funding.

## **IV. Accessible, Inclusive, and Transparent Public Processes**

Throughout the document, the Draft Guidelines emphasize transparency. This is acquired mainly by jurisdictions following status quo public processes through ways of public hearings. Though we are not saying this standard should be ignored, it should not be the only means of public engagement. Formal public hearings tend to be exclusive and inaccessible spaces and became ever more so this past year as remote participation excluded some of our most vulnerable populations out of public processes. Many residents are unaware of how to engage in these processes or even that they exist. Although we appreciate the agency's emphasis on transparency, it must also acknowledge the limitations of formal public hearings and require local jurisdictions to go beyond these meetings.

One way to initiate such a process is by partnering with trusted messengers. This can mean existing community-based organizations, informal groups, religious institutions, educators, or community members who are turned to by their neighbors. Additionally, meeting community members where they are, rather than expecting them to come to you, is critical. There are countless other recommendations we can annotate here. However, without a genuine long-term commitment by localities, this will continue to be an issue.



Lastly, we ask that you clarify the top paragraph on page 13 of the Draft Guidelines. This section adds language around project list changes noting that “in the event a city or county elects to make changes...formal notification of the Commission is not required”. We want to obtain clarity on whether or not jurisdictions must notify the public of such changes. We suggest a requirement to do so through at least a public hearing; however, if significant changes occur, those initially engaged must be re-engaged to ensure the changes’ approval.

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Thank you for taking the time to read and review our comments and recommendations. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact Grecia Elenes at [gelenes@leadershipcounsel.org](mailto:gelenes@leadershipcounsel.org) or (559)369-2790.

Sincerely,

Grecia Elenes

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