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December 27th. 2018

To: RTC Commissioners and staff
From: Sierra Club
Re: Comments on the Unified Corridor Investment Study

Dear Commissioners and RTC staff,

Transportation is the greatest source of CO₂ emissions in the United States and in Santa Cruz County. Transportation choices also create some of the greatest environmental impacts for wildlife and natural habitats. Sierra Club Transportation Policy states that transportation strategies must:

“protect natural systems and open space, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and promote environmental and economic justice and access for all, including low-income communities and those most impacted by pollution.”

The Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), similarly, must consider environmental impacts in choosing which elements best accomplish its goals, consistent with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) scoping protocols.

In crafting preferred scenarios for the Unified Corridor Investment Study, the RTC should prioritize transit and active transportation by:

- eliminating auto-centric projects including the HOV Lane, auxiliary lanes, ramp metering for Highway 1, and Mission street intersection expansion, all of which are subject to failure due to induced travel effects
- retaining transit and a trail on the rail corridor
- designing all projects to enhance pedestrian and bicyclist safety and comfort
- aiming to reduce existing VMT, rather than generate new excursion or growth opportunities.

We note that higher property values should be considered an undesirable byproduct, not a goal, of transit improvements. Specifically, the Sierra Club supports efforts to “attract and enable new, high intensity development (UCS p.111)” only if these efforts focus on truly affordable housing, consistent with current local employment opportunities. In taking action on the UCS, the RTC should thus make a commitment to study and implement policies to counteract gentrification and displacement. We are inspired by the example of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in

forming the *Committee to House the Bay Area* to make policy on comprehensive regional solutions to the housing affordability crisis.

Furthermore, we ask that the RTC conduct a comprehensive analysis of alternatives that also satisfies programmatic environmental review requirements under CEQA. This analysis should include, but not be limited to:

- Ridership, total public transit mode share, cost/benefit, total cradle to grave energy costs, cost and energy efficiency per person mile, scalability, reliability, impact on associated active transportation modes such as walking and cycling, consistency with regional and state transportation goals, plans and policies, and total greenhouse gas emissions of bus rapid transit, rail transit, transit electrification, and any other viable public transportation options, before choosing preferred transit mode on the rail corridor;
- Protection of biological resources, including avoiding fragmentation and disturbance of local sensitive wildlife habitats and natural communities;
- Assessment and avoidance of impacts on, among other concerns:
 - Population/housing, including displacement of low-income communities, gentrification and potential for growth into agricultural lands;
 - Transport, emissions and storage of hazardous materials;
 - Cumulative impacts;
 - Ownership status of the rail corridor easements;
 - The public's ownership of the existing rail corridor must not be put at risk nor subject to expensive, lengthy property rights litigation.

In sum, the Sierra Club is enthusiastic to support a robust process that ensures that the Unified Corridor Investment Study is useful and successfully identifies strategies to carry Santa Cruz County into this new millenium, sustainably and effectively.

Thank you very much for your ongoing support for the environment.

Sincerely,

Gillian

Gillian Greensite, Chair

Sierra Club, Santa Cruz County Group

