

**From:** [Mike Swire](#)  
**To:** [cacsecretary \[ @smcta.com\]](mailto:cacsecretary [@smcta.com]); [Board \( @smcta.com\)](#)  
**Subject:** Chronicle op-ed against funding for highway widening projects  
**Date:** Friday, March 29, 2024 11:11:56 AM  
**Attachments:** [Chronicle - A Bay Area ballot measure that funds wider freeways No thanks.pdf](#)

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Dear SMCTA Board and Members of the CAC,

I thought you might be interested in [this article in today's Chronicle](#), written by several local transportation leaders. [Nick Josefowitz](#) is Vice Chair of the MTC. [Jeannie Ward Waller](#) is the former Caltrans whistleblower who was canned for speaking out against a widening. [Transform](#) is a local nonprofit that advocates for clean, affordable, and equitable transportation options.

Thanks,

Mike Swire  
SMCTA CAC Appointee  
C/CAG BPAC Appointee  
(writing as an individual)

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OPINION // OPEN FORUM

# A ballot measure that funds wider freeways? That's the last thing the Bay Area needs

By **Nick Josefowitz, Jeanie Ward-Waller, Jenn Guitart**

March 29, 2024





Highway widening is sold to the public as a way to reduce congestion. But new roads and wider highways make traffic worse by inviting more trucks and cars onto roads.

Jessica Christian/The Chronicle 2021

From cycles of drought and intense rain, to raging wildfires and rising sea levels, the Bay Area is already seeing the frightening effects of the climate crisis. Residents want policymakers to do all they can to avert further impacts. Yet despite lofty rhetoric from our politicians about their ambitious climate goals, highway widening projects that increase emissions and worsen congestion are still on the agenda for state and local governments.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Bay Area's regional transportation planning body, is pursuing legislation that could send a transportation funding measure to Bay Area voters as soon as November 2026, potentially raising over \$50 billion in new funding and creating thousands of good union jobs. Legislation to authorize the measure, Senate Bill 1031, introduced earlier this month by state Sens. Scott Wiener, D-San Francisco, and Aisha Wahab, D-Fremont, is currently being debated in the Legislature.

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Act Now

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Unfortunately, the MTC plan for the legislation is designed to pour billions from a future measure into highway widening — expensive projects that would bring more trucks and traffic onto our streets, gobble up funds critical to a healthy transportation system, and ensure decades of increased emissions.

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We need a fix-it-first approach to our streets, not wider highways. Our roadways and bridges are getting more dangerous and falling into disrepair. On average, someone dies from traffic violence every day in the Bay Area, with traffic fatalities almost 50% higher than a decade ago. Pavement conditions in jurisdictions in six of the nine Bay Area counties are “poor or at-risk,” and roads are not in good condition in any county. As part of Plan Bay Area, the region’s long-range strategic plan, MTC identified a \$73 billion need for improvements in the coming years just to make existing roads and bridges safe and functional.

Every dollar we spend on new highways is one dollar less for pothole and bridge repairs, safe streets and improving alternatives to driving alone. To widen one mile of freeway in an urbanized area can cost as much as \$85 million — about a fifth of AC Transit’s annual operating budget. That’s enough to build around 3,000 miles of protected bike lanes or 33,000 safer crosswalks. And highway building isn’t a one-time cost: Each lane added brings new maintenance and repair costs that eat up transportation dollars.

There’s also a cost to human health. Research shows that people who live or work near major roadways have higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, childhood leukemia, preterm birth, and premature death as well as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s and multiple sclerosis. And those impacts are borne unevenly, as low-income Black and brown people are more likely to live near highways. Diesel exhaust spewing from the major freeways crisscrossing West Oakland is associated with significantly higher rates of cancer, stroke and asthma hospitalizations according to a 2019 report by the Bay Area Air Quality Management District.

Highway widening is sold to the public as a way to reduce congestion. But new roads and wider highways make traffic worse by inviting more trucks and cars onto roads. The temporary traffic

relief from a new lane is quickly offset by additional drivers who would otherwise have taken transit or driven at off-peak hours. This phenomenon, known as “induced demand,” has played out throughout the United States, from Interstate 405 in Los Angeles to bottlenecks on Highway 101 and I-80 in the Bay Area.

Instead of wasteful spending on wider highways, the Bay Area urgently needs additional transit investments to keep trains and buses running and to make service more convenient. Despite stopgap support in the state budget last year, BART, Muni, AC Transit and other agencies face the prospect of devastating service cuts that could send public transit into a downward spiral from which it wouldn’t recover.

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Without additional funding by 2027, BART would only run one train an hour, and San Francisco Muni riders would see a 20% service cut across the board. The loss of public transit would cost the region's residents billions of dollars in increased transportation expenses, turning already clogged roads into truck parking lots and compounding the heavy burden of air pollution many communities face.

Wiener and Wahab authored SB1031 to impose clear guardrails on a future ballot measure by ensuring that new transportation



funding would first go to investing in transit service, avoiding service cuts and creating a safe, reliable and connected regional transit network. The bill recognizes how unconscionable it would be to run a regional transportation funding measure that did not prevent our transit agencies from falling off a fiscal cliff.

While this is a strong start, the scale of our climate crisis requires bolder action than two state senators can provide on their own, and they face strong pressure from highway building interests to ensure funding for continued highway expansion. Gov. Gavin Newsom and the Legislature need to ensure that not one dollar of this regional funding measure goes toward highway widening projects that worsen greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution and traffic congestion.

*Nick Josefowitz is a former Board Director of BART, Capitol Corridor and WETA and a longtime transportation advocate.*

*Jeanie Ward-Waller is Director of Transportation at Fearless Advocacy and former Deputy Director for Planning and Modal Programs at Caltrans. Jenn Guitart is Executive Director of Transform, a climate and equity advocacy organization based in Oakland.*

March 29, 2024

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By **Nick Josefowitz**

By **Jeanie Ward-Waller**

By **Jenn Guitart**

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## About Opinion

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