

April 10, 2024

The Honorable Scott Wiener
California State Senate
1021 O St., Suite 8620
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support for SB 960 (Wiener) - Department of Transportation: Complete Streets and Transit Priority Policies

Dear Senator Wiener,

SPUR is proud to co-sponsor and support Senate Bill 960 alongside CalBike, Street for All and AARP. Senate Bill 960 is designed to make state-owned highways in California safer and more convenient for all users. If enacted, this bill would redouble the state's efforts on improving roadway design on state highways to achieve the following goals:

- Reduce deaths and serious injuries by making state-owned roadways safer by design;
- Give transit riders a more reliable and predictable trip with transit priority treatments;
- Create a virtuous cycle of growing ridership that, in turn, reduces climate pollution, increases equitable mobility, and improves transit's fiscal sustainability.

[Roadway design is one of the strongest predictors of how people drive and traffic violence.](#)

Roadway design is also one of the state's most powerful levers to help end the epidemic of traffic violence, given the state's near total role in funding, designing, building and maintaining state highways.

At this time of disturbingly high traffic fatalities and injuries, increasing congestion, transit operating deficits, ridership that is increasingly skewed towards people with low incomes and people of color, we strongly recommend that the state increase its leadership to make roads work for all users.

Traffic collisions have increased dramatically and alter the lives of victims and their families for a lifetime.

Americans are far [more likely to die in crashes](#) than those living in other wealthy countries, and California has one of the highest rates of deaths and serious injuries from vehicle collisions in the entire country. According to the Governor's Highway Safety Association, pedestrian deaths are

up 70% since 2010, and 10% since just 2019. That means that simply crossing the street is a risky activity in California. It doesn't have to be this way.

We have already mourned the lives of too many children, parents, and friends. These tragic numbers will continue to climb unless state legislators make safety for all people the top priority.

The costs of inaction are borne by the most vulnerable Californians.

The people who are most at risk are people who are walking, taking transit, or using non-motorized devices to travel. In 2021, [26% of all victims](#) of traffic fatalities were pedestrians, compared to 17% nationwide. People with low incomes, people of color, children, and seniors are overrepresented in traffic fatality and injuries. For example, in 2021, [20% of nationwide pedestrian fatalities were Black](#), even though just 12% of the population identifies as black.

[Safety issues are not isolated to urban areas](#) where there are more people traveling without a car. The 5 counties with the most fatalities are Los Angeles, San Diego, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Sacramento. However, on a per-capita basis, the 5 counties with the most fatalities are Siskiyou, Imperial, Trinity, Tehama, and Merced.

The people who would most benefit from transit priority improvements are people who ride buses now—people for whom buying, maintaining, or driving a car is not an option. Bus riders are more likely to be elderly people, young people, people of color, and low-income—a fact that has only become [more stark since the pandemic](#). Choosing not to make transit priority investments is choosing not to serve those who would benefit most from high-quality transit and those for whom more is at stake when transit fails — such as getting to school on time, getting to a doctor's appointment, or getting to an hourly job where clocking in late can mean docked pay.

The most cost-effective time to build safety and transit priority projects is during planned maintenance and resurfacing.

[Neither waiting for a new funding source nor patching together small amounts of Active Transportation Program grants from the highly volatile General Fund are viable strategies for building the safe and multimodal transportation system that we need.](#) Caltrans estimates that it would cost [\\$15 billion to build out the Active Transportation Plans](#) for each Caltrans district, and the state's overall pedestrian infrastructure needs could cost [as much as \\$60 billion](#). In an ideal world, there would be enough money for all of our transportation needs. But absent new funding, the most logical funding program to expand the state's safety and transit priority investments on the state highway system is the SHOPP program. This source is not only independent of the General Fund, it is also the largest source of transportation funding for state highways in the state, and the amount of funding available has grown significantly in large part due to an infusion of

federal funds. especially in light of disturbingly high traffic fatalities and injuries and the acute operating deficits that many transit agencies will soon face.

Further, the most cost-effective time to make safety and transit priority improvements are during regular maintenance. According to the [U.S. Federal Highway Administration](#), coupling these projects adds only a nominal expense, finding that combining a pedestrian safety project with a resurfacing project can reduce costs more than 50 percent compared to a stand-alone project.

Given the funding constraints, we believe it would be ideal to pursue opportunities to build the projects when it is most cost-effective to do so.


Transit priority investments build back transit ridership and reduce operating costs.

Transit vehicles that travel or interact with mixed traffic on roadways may need transit priority, at certain points along their route or during certain times of the day. Because buses are not prioritized on roadways, many people have had an experience where the bus was late, or they were stuck in traffic. Busses are then perceived as the less convenient choice for many people – and so ridership is not what it could be. In contrast, transit priority treatments speed up buses and make them more reliable, enabling ridership to grow. For example, ridership has [grown faster on routes where SFMTA has implemented transit priority treatments](#) as part of their pandemic recovery restructuring.

At the same time, transit priority helps agencies to reduce operating costs, which is increasingly important due to severe financial constraints. When buses can complete a given route in less time and on a more consistent schedule, transit operators can avoid service cuts or deliver more service hours or more frequency.

For all these reasons, **SPUR supports SB960** and is grateful for your leadership on this life or death issue for Californians.

Sincerely,



Laura Tolhoff
Transportation Policy Director