



December 1, 2011

Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa  
Chair of the Board of Directors  
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority  
200 North Spring Street, #303  
Los Angeles, CA 9012

Dear Mayor Villaraigosa:

With the United Nations Summit on Climate Change kicking off this week in Durban, South Africa, we are writing to urge you, as the Mayor of second largest city in the US, Chair of the MTA Board, and President of US Conference of Mayors, to exercise leadership in addressing our region's contribution to the climate crisis. We are writing as part of a national and international mobilization associated with the Grassroots Global Justice Network and La Via Campesina calling for *local and justice-based solutions* to climate change. LA can and should lead by example with policies that address our region's racial and economic disparities while substantially reducing our carbon footprint.

We are specifically concerned about two policies being pursued by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority that represent major steps backward for our region: 1) *941,000 bus service hours slashed in the last four years, including dozens of bus lines canceled, truncated, or losing mid-day, weekend, or night service;* and 2) *an irresponsible multi-billion dollar expansion of Interstate 710.* These policies will worsen our region's contribution to climate change and they will also harm the health and well-being of the people in our region, especially low income communities of color who depend on public transportation and neighbor the existing freeway. *We urge you and the other members of the MTA Board to reverse this trend by restoring and expanding bus service and stopping the proposed 710 expansion.*

### **The global climate crisis and LA's response**

As the devastating super-charged storms of 2011 and the global scientific consensus clearly demonstrate, there is simply no time to wait to take bold steps to address the climate crisis. The health and well-being of our own region and billions of people around the world are at stake. As Mayor of Los Angeles, you have stated publicly your desire to make Los Angeles a model green city for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Last year, you were among 138 mayors from cities around the globe to sign the Mexico City Pact in advance of the UN Climate Summit, committing to develop and implement local climate-change action plans that are *measurable, reportable and verifiable*. While some elements of your plan for reducing LA's carbon emissions are commendable, the above-mentioned policies fly in the face of the commitment you made on behalf of our region on a world stage.

### **Halt the Irresponsible Expansion of I-710**

Community members along the I-710 corridor and everybody in the region concerned about pollution and climate change will reject any Metro-Caltrans proposal that does not incorporate the following key community demands into the project:

- **Assessment of Who Pays:** The I-710 communities in our coalition are opposed to the continued subsidization of the freight industry through our health; accordingly, the project proponents need to reexamine the often overlooked assumption that the community and public funds should continue to pay for this multi-billion dollar project, which is designed primarily as a boon to the freight movement industry. Additionally, project proponents should explore and assess various equitable pricing mechanisms to manage I-710 corridor travel demand while keeping equity concerns central for choosing the best alternative.
- **Zero-Emissions Technology:** Any project that moves forward must include an enforceable commitment to use zero-emission technologies immediately upon completion.
- **Public/Alternative Transportation:** Any project must include aggressive strategies to improve public transportation along the I-710 corridor. The project proponents must engage with interested parties to prioritize implementation of an effective and comprehensive public transportation element in the design of this project. Additionally, any corridor enhancement to the I-710 must ensure adequate and safe bicycling and pedestrian infrastructure for the residents in this corridor.
- **Health Impact Assessment (HIA):** Metro-Caltrans need to incorporate all the HIA results into the EIR/EIS to maintain transparency. Public health advocates and the environmental community reject the agencies' resistance to including the full assessment of health impacts as part of the Draft and Final EIR/EIS for this project.
- **Mitigation Measures:** The final project must include adequate mitigation to protect the surrounding communities. Additionally the I-710 project should not adversely impact the LA River, and should be designed to augment and protect this vital community resource.

In addition to being significant sources of greenhouse gas emissions, freeways--particularly those that carry a high level of diesel truck traffic--pose a serious threat to public health. Recent studies have associated serious health outcomes with living close to freeways. These health risks include more premature and low birth weight babies, increased death from heart attacks and stroke, thicker arteries, and higher rates of lung cancer. Additionally, research has established that children living near freeway traffic have lowered lung function and higher rates of asthma. The Long Beach freeway (I-710) averages about 1,100 diesel trucks per hour with peaks as high as 2,600 heavy-duty diesel trucks per hour. There is a strong and urgent public health need to reduce existing dangerous conditions for the overburdened communities along the I-710 corridor. Metro cannot look the other way while Caltrans pushes through another freeway expansion project, which will be a significant health threat to the region's residents.

### **Expand MTA Bus Service, Lower Fares**

Expanding bus service and lowering transit fares are cost-efficient ways to attract Angelenos out of their single-passenger automobiles and benefit transit-dependent low income people of color, who are the majority of the system's current users. We appreciate your efforts earlier this year to stop bus service cuts; we need even stronger leadership now to reverse the MTA's recent trends.

- **LA's poor transportation system and carbon footprint from cars.** LA County has 7 million cars for 11 million people. Automobiles are the leading source of carbon emissions in Los Angeles. Los Angeles suffers among the worst from air pollution of any major metropolitan area in the US. Low income communities of color, who are more often using public transit and not automobiles, suffer disproportionately from the health impacts of air pollution, especially given that freeways are frequently routed through our neighborhoods.
- **LA missing opportunity created by economic crisis to increase transit ridership.** The economic crisis has been largely responsible for skyrocketing demand for use of mass transit nationally. Yet this has been a missed opportunity for LA Metro, as service cuts and transit fares increases have made mass transit a much less attractive option for those considering a mode shift from cars, and have been associated in recent years with a sharp decline in ridership.

- **Service reductions and transit fare increases devastate transit-dependent low-income communities of color.** The Federal Transit Administration’s review of MTA is examining possible discriminatory impacts on these communities of the agency’s policies. Higher fares--40% total over the last four years, plus canceled or truncated lines, longer wait times, and more transfers –impose a major burden on these communities and create barriers to participate in LA’s already slow economic recovery.
- **A plan for bus service expansion and fare reduction plan can be a cornerstone of LA’s transition to a just and robust low-emissions economy.** Bus expansion is much more cost-efficient than other forms of transit infrastructure investment. MTA faces no major financial crunch; funds are already available to purchase and run low or zero-emissions buses and lower fares today, not in 10 or 20 or 30 years. These policies will create thousands of green jobs and provide an economic stimulus for hundreds of thousands of people in LA.

Addiction to an auto- and freeway-based transportation system and the entrenched influence of corporate lobbyists are power obstacles standing in the way of real climate progress for our region. In that context, a coalition of environmental and economic justice and civil rights organizations can play a lead role – working with elected officials willing to take bold stands – to push forward real solutions. We look forward to working with you on this endeavor.

Sincerely,

*Darryl Molina-Sarmiento*

Communities for a Better Environment

*Isella Ramirez*

East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice

*Martha Dina Arguello*

Physicians for Social Responsibility – Los Angeles

*Sunyoung Yang*

Bus Riders Union