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# California State Senate

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TRANSPORTATION & HOUSING



August 21, 2019

David Kim  
Secretary, California State Transportation Agency  
Office of the Secretary  
915 Capitol Mall  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Flawed Caltrans Fiscal Analysis for SB 127

Dear Secretary Kim:

I write to express my significant concern and disappointment about how the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has handled Senate Bill 127 this year. Specifically, I object to Caltrans's recently issued cost estimate for SB 127 - a severely inflated cost estimate that, frankly, undermines the agency's credibility.

SB 127 requires Caltrans to consider and integrate complete streets features into SHOPP projects where appropriate, particularly on state highways that function as multimodal local streets and roads - e.g., 19th Avenue and Park Presidio in San Francisco, Santa Monica Boulevard in Los Angeles, and Highway 1 in Pacifica. According to Caltrans, the agency wants to move in this direction and has internal policies to do so. Unfortunately, despite those internal policies, Caltrans has made remarkably little progress in complete streets integration. As a result, too many state roads that serve as city surface streets are not safe for pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders. It is critically important that Caltrans consider and integrate complete streets features in its road projects where appropriate. Given the agency's lack of progress, legislation is necessary to accomplish this goal.

The fiscal analysis that Caltrans provided to my office on August 12 estimates that SB 127's requirements will cost an eye-popping \$1.1 billion annually. When we first saw this number, we assumed it was a typographical error, particularly since only a few weeks ago, Caltrans told the Assembly Transportation Committee that it was unable to estimate the cost of the bill. Unfortunately, the cost estimate was not a typo, and Caltrans actually intended to include this appallingly exaggerated cost estimate. Indeed,

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Caltrans's dramatic memo goes so far as to assert that California will lose its federal highway funds if this bill passes. Caltrans has no basis to make that absurd statement.

The Caltrans cost estimate for SB 127 was calculated based on a faulty assumption that complete streets features cost \$4.5 million per centerlane mile to implement. In fact, complete streets features are often the least expensive part of a project, particularly when a street is already being ripped up for resurfacing and needs to be re-striped regardless. In canvassing transportation agencies around the state, we have received cost estimates of anywhere between \$20,000 and \$600,000 per centerlane mile depending on the complexity of the project. In other words, even the high end of the range is dramatically lower than the Caltrans assumption. For example, the City of Sacramento has done a series of significant and comprehensive complete streets overhauls that have cost roughly \$400,000 per centerlane mile. That is one-tenth of Caltrans's base assumption for a significant and complicated project.

Complete streets elements are ancillary to much more intensive street rehabilitation work. The most common and cost-effective complete streets features — high-visibility crosswalks, adequate sidewalk lighting, and separated bicycle lanes — are far less capital and construction-intensive than asphalt repaving, bridge rehabilitation, and culvert repair. Further, the most cost-effective time to integrate these safety features into stretches of pavement that already have pedestrian and bicycle traffic is during routine maintenance work done through the State Highway Operation and Protection Program.

In addition to its extreme inaccuracy, the Caltrans analysis displays an outdated approach to transportation. As Caltrans itself acknowledges, complete streets elements are important. In our urbanized areas, it is important to allow for safe walking, biking, and transit use. Yet, to achieve that goal, streets must be designed appropriately. All we are asking — and all SB 127 requires — is that when Caltrans is already engaging in road work, it collaborate with the local community to determine what complete streets elements are warranted.

I am disappointed that the staff in our Department of Transportation would take such a defeatist and outdated approach to retrofitting California's automobile-centric urban road network. Caltrans states that it wants to move in the direction of complete streets. Yet, instead of working with us to accomplish that goal, the agency is sabotaging the goal with a grossly inflated cost estimate.

I look forward to working closely with you and the agency moving forward, and I hope that we can find common ground to ensure a fast transition to a safe and sustainable transportation system for all Californians.

Sincerely,



Scott Wiener

**Senator, 11<sup>th</sup> District**