

January 23, 2020

Elaine L. Chao
U.S. Secretary of Transportation

US Department of Transportation

1200 New Jersey Ave, SE

West Building Room PL-401

Washington, DC 20590

RE: ROUTES Initiative (DOT-OST-2019-0167)

Dear Secretary Chao:

I am writing on behalf of the Rural Counties Task Force (RCTF) of California. The RCTF represents the 26-county rural transportation planning agencies across California. Transportation infrastructure throughout these 26 counties serves the fundamental needs of residents and commerce of rural California. Rural counties have relatively small populations limiting their ability to generate local revenue to support transportation projects and programs. Consequently, rural counties rely on State and Federal funding, 54% and 13% respectively, to deliver transportation projects and services. While the populations in these Counties are small, the number of lane miles of roadway are many. Rural counties have 14% of the total local road network in the state, 9% of the funding, and 6% of the population. Additionally, these rural roadways support the access to the recreation and tourism activities enjoyed by the ballooning populations of urban centers throughout California.

Road safety is of utmost concern for all 26 rural counties. Accidents are far more severe on rural roadways due to geographic, topographic, and severe weather conditions. Road maintenance is also a significant challenge for rural counties with an average pavement condition index rating of 58 and the least capacity to pay for maintenance efforts. Severe weather events, such as wildfires, flooding, and drought, continue to place a significant impact on the rural roadway system.

From a policy perspective, rural counties in California are facing new challenges to compete for funding. California has focused transportation investments on transit, active transportation, and multi-modal facilities aimed at reducing vehicle miles travelled and improving air quality. However, many rural communities still have traditional transportation needs such as increased roadway capacity, bridges, interchanges, and new roads. Traditional infrastructure serves these rural communities and is the foundation for economic sustainability and growth. Many of these investments in rural communities provide lifeline services and access for rural residents. While active transportation and transit are also appreciated and needed throughout rural California, funding for traditional transportation investments is critical for rural counties. Increased Federal support of rural counties throughout California would greatly improve these communities and promote economic opportunity for millions of rural Americans.

As always, the RCTF greatly appreciates the opportunity to coordinate with U.S. DOT on the development of ROUTE.

Sincerely,

Woodrow Deloria, Executive Director

**El Dorado County Transportation Commission**

Chair, Rural Counties Task Force