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# 60+ Organizations Call for Caltrans Accountability to Governor Newsom's Climate Vision



[CLIMATE100.NEXTGENPOLICY.ORG/CALTRANS-CLIMATE-ACCOUNTABILITY-LETTER/](https://CLIMATE100.NEXTGENPOLICY.ORG/CALTRANS-CLIMATE-ACCOUNTABILITY-LETTER/)

October 17, 2023  
The Honorable Gavin Newsom  
Governor, State of California  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Holding Caltrans Accountable to Your Climate Vision**

Dear Governor Newsom,

We are writing to you as dedicated climate, transportation, and environmental justice advocates deeply concerned about ongoing developments within the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), which fundamentally put the department at odds with the achievement of the State's climate goals and your enduring climate legacy. We commend your leadership as a staunch climate champion and understand your administration's commitment to fostering sustainable practices and policies. However, we find it imperative to bring to your attention recent actions taken by Caltrans leadership that appear to be incompatible with your vision for equitable climate leadership.

The California Air Resources Board has issued an urgent warning: if California does not significantly reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in the near future, the state will not be on track to meet its legally binding 2030 and 2045 greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction targets. Despite this stark forecast, our state continues to pour billions of taxpayer dollars into highway and interchange expansions that increase our reliance on driving, draining household budgets and making traffic worse. These expansions also facilitate sprawl development, which in turn undermines the emissions and affordability benefits of our state's efforts to promote dense land use and build more infill housing. Meanwhile, Californians are suffering from a sustained uptick in traffic fatalities and life-altering injuries; and every day, disadvantaged communities are subject to the deep environmental injustices of air pollution and displacement from urban freeways that have long scarred their neighborhoods.

**Recent developments at Caltrans threaten to tarnish California's reputation as a leader in the fight against climate change.** Specifically, our concerns revolve around Caltrans'

ongoing disregard for your own climate agenda for the transportation sector, the Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI). Caltrans' implementation of CAPTI has been marked by continued expansions of highways and interchanges, persistent neglect of its own guidance for reducing VMT and GHGs, and repeated efforts to water down its Complete Streets policy – all of which demonstrates an insufficient dedication to building the sustainable, multimodal transportation network that Californians deserve. Together, these actions position Caltrans as an agency that is actively working against the equitable climate vision that you have worked so tirelessly to champion.

Furthermore, we are deeply worried by Caltrans Deputy Director Jeanie Ward-Waller's recent public assertions that Caltrans District 3 is misusing roadway maintenance funds for highway expansion projects. These assertions reinforce our existing concerns surrounding Caltrans's lack of transparency, agency culture, and our state's failure to make progress on key climate and equity metrics in the transportation sector. If Deputy Director Ward-Waller's concerns are found to hold merit, they would likely represent a serious violation of state law and a betrayal of your efforts to fulfill urgent climate and equity mandates.

The fact that Deputy Director Ward-Waller claims that she was reassigned from her role as a result of challenging Caltrans's alleged misuse of funds elevates our concern.

With the issuance of Executive Order N.19.19 and subsequent adoption of CAPTI, you set forth an admirable vision for a modern sustainable transportation system that could serve as an example nationwide. But accomplishing such an ambitious vision will require proactive, enthusiastic implementation. Currently, Caltrans is failing to champion this vision.

We implore you, Governor Newsom, to rigorously evaluate and address the systemic issues within Caltrans to ensure alignment with the State's ambitious climate goals. The current discord between state policy intent and Caltrans' implementation not only undermines California's climate commitments but also casts a shadow over your esteemed reputation and legacy as a progressive climate leader.

**To this end, we request that you initiate a comprehensive external audit of Caltrans' alleged misuse of State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP) funds for roadway capacity expansion projects.**

**Further, we request that you appoint an independent third party to investigate the extent to which the practices alleged by Deputy Director Ward-Waller are being employed throughout Caltrans and its districts to circumvent state environmental law and SHOPP rules.**

**We ask that you order a moratorium on highway and interchange expansions until these investigations are concluded.**

By addressing these pressing concerns and steering Caltrans toward a path of environmental responsibility and policy coherence, we believe that you will be taking a crucial step in solidifying your legacy as a true climate champion and furthering California's leadership in combating climate change.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. We are looking forward to your swift and decisive actions in addressing our concerns and restoring faith in California's commitment to a sustainable and equitable transportation future. For any questions or further information, please contact Dave Weiskopf, Senior Policy Advisor at NextGen California, at [david.weiskopf@nextgenpolicy.org](mailto:david.weiskopf@nextgenpolicy.org), or Jamie Pew, Climate Policy Advisor at NextGen California, at [james.pew@nextgenpolicy.org](mailto:james.pew@nextgenpolicy.org).

Sincerely,

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