

In an era of burgeoning population growth (the population in California is projected to reach upwards of 49 million people by the year 2030, an increase of 44 percent from 34 million in 2000)<sup>1</sup>, California sits at the cross-roads of a major transportation challenge. As the transportation system ages and acquisition and supply of materials and land space dwindles, there is a rising need to balance funding for critical transportation infrastructure with the future of California's economy, environment, and growth plan. In order to promote excellence in California transportation and thus address the demands of the future, as engineers and planners we have a professional obligation to promote and sustain the California quality-of-life. Since transportation has a direct influence on our daily lives, there is no better way to promote excellence in our quality-of-life than to promote excellence in transportation.

Thus with the publication of the California Transportation Plan (CTP) 2025, and in conjunction with Governor Schwarzenegger's Strategic Growth Plan and its provisions for a \$107 billion investment in transportation infrastructure<sup>2</sup>, the Caltrans Strategic Plan 2007-2012, and the directives of the California Transportation Commission (CTC), California is poised to address the challenges of tomorrow. Now the problem remains, *how* do we promote excellence in transportation (or excellence in our quality-of-life) through the implementation of the aforementioned strategic directives?

The answer lies in the collaboration and effective partnerships between federal, state, regional, and local agencies as well as between private industry and citizen groups.<sup>3</sup> In this essay, I present specific actions that are aligned with the state strategies, and although they are not all encompassing, represent steps that will ensure a *quality* transportation system for the future.

At the state level, I would advocate for the creation of a permanent inter-agency committee composed of liaisons from the departments of transportation, environmental, housing and development, and land-use in addition to representatives from the CTC and other key agencies. This collaboration of inter-agency liaisons would be responsible for developing *synergistic* policies, securing and administering funding from the federal and state levels to the regional levels (in conjunction with the legislature and CTC), and facilitating a state *smart-growth* plan in a matter that integrates transportation systems from region to region. I would force better accountability both *vertically* from region-to-state (Regional Transportation Planning Agencies and Metropolitan Planning Organizations to the CTC) and *horizontally* from department-to-department (Caltrans to the California Environmental Protection Agency) and county-to-county. This integration of state and local departments and geographic regions calls for effective communication and multi-functionality that would lead to increased efficiency and an overall better quality-of-life.

Furthermore, I would advocate for the authority to create a single smart-card style "tap-and-go" electronic payment means for all modes of California transportation (e.g. from light rail to train to bus such as Caltrain to BART to MUNI to LACMTA) with an enticing fare structure that allows for one-day or multi-day passes on multi-modal transportation in California.<sup>4</sup> This type of unified system connectivity between multi-modal assets would greatly add to the mobility and accessibility of the future California transportation system for users state-wide, once again increasing the quality-of-life.

Next, in conjunction with the *synergistic* style of planning, I would encourage local and regional authorities to adopt provisions for smart-growth that links land use and development with transportation and the protection of the environment.<sup>5</sup> I would encourage Transit Oriented Development (TOD) with changes for multi-functional zoning capable of handling denser

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<sup>1</sup> *State of California, Department of Finance, Population Projections for California and Its Counties 2000-2050, Sacramento, California, July 2007.*

<sup>2</sup> California Strategic Growth Plan Overview, Available at Caltrans: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> Caltrans Strategic Plan 2007-2012, page 12, Available at Caltrans: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/>

<sup>4</sup> The California Transportation Plan 2025 advocates for a similar electronic payment means on page 37, Available at Caltrans: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/>

<sup>5</sup> CTP 2025 provides strategies for this idea on page 57.

populations and sustainable communities.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, I would advocate for state funding incentives in the form of grants, development tax exemptions or breaks, or even lower finance interest rates in order to entice regional planning authorities to collaborate and program smart-growth communities as opposed to the urban and suburban style sprawl that is currently prevalent. Enabling the authority for regional planners to easily utilize public-private partnerships to levy additional funding for critical infrastructure projects would also go a long way towards elevating excellence in transportation in California.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, in order to expedite project delivery of critical projects, I would grant authority for more projects to be delivered with “design-build” style progression. Though still somewhat unproven for major large-scale projects, this style of project delivery has the potential to deliver at a faster, more efficient rate, on-time and on-budget if implemented effectively. Caltrans notes this specifically in reference to the Strategic Growth Plan, “*Specific reforms are necessary in order to effectively achieve the goals of the SGP: Provide authority to deliver projects more quickly and efficiently through the use of design-build contracting and design-sequencing.*”<sup>8</sup>

Finally, the mission of Caltrans—*Caltrans Improves Mobility Across California*—and what that mission entails signifies the future direction of engineers and planners throughout California who have accepted the transportation challenge of tomorrow. As Caltrans so astutely notes, “*Through strategic and effective partnerships, Caltrans can improve mobility even in the face of the state’s aggressive population growth. Inherent in this effort is the need to sustain a high quality of life.*”<sup>9</sup> The efforts of promoting transportation excellence inherently require the need to promote a high quality of life via collaboration between all levels of government and a variety of agencies and stake-holders. Similarly, the vision of the California Transportation Plan 2025<sup>10</sup> “...is one of a fully integrated, multimodal, sustainable transportation system that supports the three outcomes (3Es) that define quality of life — prosperous economy, quality environment, and social equity.”<sup>11</sup> Clearly, if the future of California’s transportation system is to be viable and successful, collaboration and integration must occur throughout California in order to deliver a quality and superb transportation system that supports the economy, the environment, and the ever-increasing growth in California.

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<sup>6</sup> I would utilize organizations such as the Center for Transit Oriented Development (<http://www.newurbanism.org>) to educate and inform the public on the benefits of TOD and Smart Growth initiatives.

<sup>7</sup> See CTP 2025 page A-31 and Caltrans Strategic Plan 2007-2012 for discussion on the need for funding alternatives.

<sup>8</sup> Caltrans Strategic Plan 2007-2012, page 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* page 20.

<sup>10</sup> The CTP 2025 Vision: *California has a safe, sustainable, world-class transportation system that provides for the mobility and accessibility of people, goods, services, and information through an integrated, multimodal network that is developed through collaboration and achieves a Prosperous Economy, a Quality Environment, and Social Equity.*

<sup>11</sup> CTP 2025 Update: GoCalifornia Mobility Action Plan Summary