



CONSENT CALENDAR
July 28, 2020

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
 From: Councilmember Rigel Robinson and Councilmember Ben Bartlett
 Subject: Support for SB 288: Sustainable Transportation COVID-19 Recovery Act

RECOMMENDATION

Send a letter to Senator Scott Wiener, Senator Nancy Skinner, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks in support of Senate Bill 288, which would exempt specified transportation projects from environmental review under CEQA, including bus rapid transit projects, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and zero-emission charging stations.

BACKGROUND

The California Environmental Quality Act requires agencies to assess the significant environmental impacts of proposed discretionary projects before approval. Current law exempts certain categories of projects from CEQA requirements, including increases to service on existing rail or highway rights-of-way.

SB 288, introduced by Senator Scott Wiener, would extend the following existing exemptions until 2030: 1) bicycle transportation plans for an urbanized area for restriping of streets and highways, 2) bicycle parking and storage, 3) signal timing to improve street and highway intersection operations, and 4) related signage for bicycles, pedestrians, and vehicles under certain conditions. Additionally, this bill would further exempt projects relating to updated and new transit stations, bus rapid transit lines, safer streets for biking and walking, zero-emission vehicle charging facilities, and repairs for bridge and transit storage facilities.

The environmental benefits of public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructure are already well-documented. The City of Berkeley Climate Action Plan states that to meet our greenhouse gas reduction goals, “transportation modes such as public transit, walking and bicycling must become the primary means of fulfilling our mobility needs, and remaining motor vehicle use must be far less carbon-intensive.”¹ Recommended actions to achieve this goal include:

- Increasing the safety, reliability, and frequency of public transit.
- Accelerating implementation of the City’s Bicycle and Pedestrian Plans and continuing efforts to make walking and cycling safe, healthy, and enjoyable alternatives to driving.

¹ https://www.cityofberkeley.info/uploadedFiles/Planning_and_Development/Level_3_-_Energy_and_Sustainable_Development/Berkeley%20Climate%20Action%20Plan.pdf

- Creating incentives for low-carbon vehicles such as electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids.

Several other countries, such as Canada and Germany, do not require full environmental impact reviews for sustainable transportation projects since they are presumed to have a positive impact on the environment.² Delays in such projects due to CEQA reviews and lawsuits can add years to project timelines, driving up costs and obstructing the rapid infrastructure investments we need to effectively combat climate change.

Accelerating sustainable transportation projects is especially important now, as unemployment skyrockets and transportation agencies and cities across California struggle with strained budgets due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the bill text, “investments in building public transit, complete streets, and bicycle lanes are proven job generators and can help California avoid an extreme and prolonged recession by growing and protecting jobs. Studies have shown that complete streets projects create an average of 10 jobs per one million dollars. Investments in public transportation result in an average of 13 jobs per one million dollars spent and have a 5 to 1 economic return.”³

SB 288 would put the City of Berkeley on the right track towards economic recovery and meeting our GHG reduction goals. The Council should support the passage of this legislation, and send the attached letter of support to Senator Scott Wiener, Senator Nancy Skinner, and Assemblymember Buffy Wicks.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The transportation sector comprises 60 percent of Berkeley’s greenhouse gas emissions. Ensuring the acceleration of sustainable infrastructure investments, which promote walking, biking, and taking public transit, is aligned with the goals put forth in the City’s Climate Action Plan.⁴

CONTACT PERSON

Councilmember Rigel Robinson, (510) 981-7170

Attachments:

1: Letter of support

² <https://sf.streetsblog.org/2020/06/16/bill-would-streamline-transit-bike-and-ped-projects/>

³ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200SB288

⁴ <https://www.cityofberkeley.info/climate/>

2: Bill text

https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201920200SB288

July 28, 2020

The Honorable Scott Wiener
California State Senate
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: City of Berkeley's Support for Senate Bill 288

Dear Senator Wiener,

The Berkeley City Council would like to convey our full support for SB 288, regarding CEQA exemptions for sustainable transportation projects such as updated and new transit stations, bus rapid transit lines, pedestrian and bicycle projects, zero-emission vehicle charging facilities, and repairs for bridge and transit storage facilities.

As California sets out on a long road of economic recovery from the impacts of COVID-19, renewed investment in public transit, pedestrian, and bicycle infrastructure will create much-needed jobs. As the state slowly begins the process of re-opening safely, we must also ensure that polluting vehicle traffic does not bounce back to pre-COVID levels, which would prevent California from reaching its stated goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.

Environmental reviews for public transportation projects that are inherently pro-environment are often lengthy, expensive, and can cause years of delay. Especially at a time when public transit agencies and cities are suffering from reduced ridership and severe budget cuts, these additional costs and delays can render projects infeasible altogether.

California should be fast-tracking such projects, not delaying them. The Berkeley City Council supports SB 288 and thanks you for taking the lead on this important issue.

Sincerely,

The Berkeley City Council

CC: Senator Nancy Skinner
Assemblymember Buffy Wicks