



March 31, 2017

The Honorable Kamala D. Harris  
U.S. Senator  
112 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: Proposed Cuts to Transportation Funding**

Dear Senator Harris:

The Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) is deeply concerned about transportation funding cuts proposed by the President in his draft budget proposal for FY 2018: the New Starts/ Small Starts program, the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grant programs, and Amtrak long-distance routes. The reduction or elimination of these funding programs would have a dramatic impact on transportation options in Monterey County. **TAMC respectfully requests your support in maintaining these funding programs in the FY 2018 appropriations bills.**

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5309 Capital Investment Grant is known as the New Starts, Small Starts, and Core Capacity program. According to the President's draft budget, no new Full Funding Grant Agreements would be approved. This includes the Small Starts program, which TAMC has long hoped would help to fund the Monterey Branch Line Light Rail project, and the "Very Small Starts", or Warrants, program, which Monterey-Salinas Transit (MST) has hoped would help fund its Highway 1 bus on shoulder/bus on branch line project.

Operating a low-cost busway along the Monterey Branch Line corridor is a cost-effective service that would improve regional transit in the Monterey Peninsula and provide a faster commute alternative to the congested Highway 1 freeway. Service along this busway is expected to provide evidence of ridership demand along the corridor that will help make the case for funding for future light rail service. The project would facilitate the regional movement of residents and visitors to Monterey County, which has significant commute-hour congestion on Highway 1 on the Peninsula as well as significant traffic on weekends and holidays, especially during the summer. A parallel transit option would greatly help to alleviate traffic congestion on Highway 1, which is seen by the hospitality industry as a huge barrier to economic growth.

The President's budget proposes to eliminate the highly competitive TIGER grant program. TAMC applied for TIGER funding several times to no avail, and has considered submitting a new application for the Pajaro/Watsonville multimodal train station project, if the grant program were still available. The overwhelming response to the previous TIGER grant years shows the great need

for this grant program, with over 7,300 applications submitted since 2009, resulting in a total of 421 award finalists.

TAMC is also very concerned about the proposed elimination of funding to support Amtrak's long-distance routes, which includes the Coast Starlight. The Coast Starlight is currently the only train service on the Central Coast of California. This scenic route travels one round trip per day between Los Angeles and Seattle, stopping in Salinas. When combined with the proposed elimination of the Essential Air Service program, which provides subsidies to the Monterey Regional Airport, the elimination of the Coast Starlight would be a severe reduction of intercity travel options for Monterey County, leaving us only with bus service or driving.

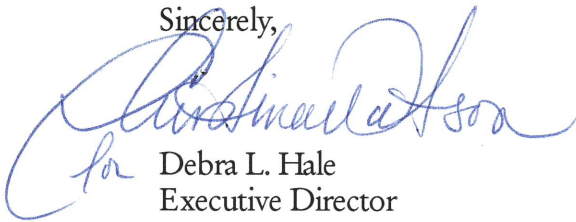
On the other hand, the budget proposal indicates the Administration's overarching objective of reducing regulatory burdens, which could free up administrative resources spent on regulatory procedure; federal regulatory streamlining has long been a priority for TAMC.

We ask for your support for maintaining:

- Full funding for the Capital Investment Grant program in the FY 2018 Transportation Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill, at levels approved in the bipartisan FAST Act, and support the projects already in the pipeline that have undergone an extensive and rigorous review to get there;
- Increased funding for the TIGER grant program; and
- Ongoing operations support for Amtrak intercity train services nationwide.

Thank you for your consideration and support for Monterey County transportation priorities.

Sincerely,



for Debra L. Hale  
Executive Director