

# Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

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From: MITCH WEISS, Executive Director

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Subject: Innovations in Transportation – Implementing Highways to Boulevards Projects

## **Summary:**

Erik Frisch, Deputy Commissioner of Neighborhood and Business Development at the City of Rochester, New York, will provide a presentation on the Interstate 490 Inner Loop East Transformation project. This presentation will be followed by a presentation by Tony Dang, Deputy Director for Sustainability at the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), on how Caltrans envisions its future Highways to Boulevards work.

## **Background:**

The mid-Twentieth Century saw a major expansion of transportation infrastructure in the United States, aided by an influx of federal funding that prioritized highway construction and suburban development. New highways, frequently constructed through predominately Black and brown neighborhoods, were designed to meet the needs of primarily white, suburban commuters. Low-income communities and communities of color continue to experience legacies of past transportation decisions that physically divide communities, contribute to racial segregation, and disproportionately expose residents to negative environmental and health impacts.

Today, certain urban highways have reached the end of their lifespans, which has provided an opportunity for some jurisdictions to reconsider their utility. According to the Congress for the New Urbanism, the Highways to Boulevards movement “seeks to replace aging highways that damage communities with assets like city streets, housing, and green space.”

Over the past decade, the federal government has asserted the value of these types of projects through the creation of multiple competitive funding programs that offer solutions to highways that divide communities. Most recently, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 included \$1 billion over five years for a Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program. This funding will support both planning and capital construction grants to remove, retrofit, or mitigate existing transportation facilities that create barriers to mobility, access, or economic development.

In August 2021, the Commission solicited potential Highways to Boulevards Conversion project concepts from Regional Transportation Planning Agencies through its 2022 State Transportation Improvement Program guidelines. In December 2021, the Commission received a list of regionally identified highway and intercity rail needs as well as 17 possible Highways to Boulevards conversion projects that is available on the Commission website at: <https://catc.ca.gov/-/media/ctc-media/documents/programs/stip/2022-stip/hwy-intercity-rail-needs-hwys-to-blvds-convers-revised-020222-a11y.pdf>. Additionally, the Commission's 2022 State Transportation Improvement Program guidelines require Caltrans to include a discussion of a possible Highways to Boulevard Pilot Program for the 2024 program cycle.

In January 2022, Governor Newsom proposed in the Fiscal Year 2022-23 state budget to allocate \$150 million to Caltrans for a Highways to Boulevards Pilot Program. This new pilot program would be developed with guidance from the California State Transportation Agency and in consultation with the following three state agencies: the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Strategic Growth Council, and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. The program would provide competitive planning and implementation grants to local entities for the conversion or transformation of underutilized highways to benefit residents of underserved communities. The draft trailer bill language outlines the proposed program: <https://esd.dof.ca.gov/trailer-bill/public/trailerBill/pdf/545>. If included in the final state budget, this funding would support the advancement of the Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure Strategy 7.3 "Explore a 'Highways to Boulevards' Conversion Pilot Program." More information on Strategy 7.3 is available here: <https://calsta.ca.gov/-/media/calsta-media/documents/capti-july-2021-a11y.pdf>.

The presentation of this agenda item will feature an example of a successfully completed Highways to Boulevards project. Erik Frisch, Deputy Commissioner of Neighborhood and Business Development at the City of Rochester, New York, will provide a presentation on the Interstate 490 Inner Loop East Transformation project. The project, which was completed in 2017, eliminated a 2/3-mile segment of the Inner Loop Expressway between Downtown Rochester and its southeast neighborhoods, replacing it with a pedestrian and bicycle friendly complete street. The new streetscape increases traffic safety, reconnects neighborhoods with the city center, and increases the potential for economic activity. In addition, removing the highway created roughly six acres of developable land, which is expected to increase local tax revenues, create jobs, generate private investment, and reduce highway maintenance costs. A federal Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grant helped fund the construction.