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July 30, 1997

Susan S. Simpson
California Department of Transportation
Office Chief, Environmental Planning-North
111 Grand Avenue
Oakland, CA 94623-0660

Dear Chief Simpson:

The San Rafael Chamber strongly supports construction of the southbound HOV lane as proposed in the Draft EIS/EIR.

Completion of this section of HOV lane will:

- remove the largest bottleneck for traffic,
- improve commute times and speeds,
- improve the safety and operation of the highway and
- create a viable mass transit option for employees.

Many of our members have told us that two of the largest issues impacting their ability to hire qualified workers are transportation gridlock and the lack of affordable workforce housing. Those of us whose offices are in downtown San Rafael, never know when our employees who live north of the city will arrive in the morning because of frequent traffic tie-ups. Employees are discouraged from joining carpools or using buses, because of the bottleneck created by the HOV lane gap.

In order to encourage more employees to use buses and carpools, it is imperative that the HOV lane gap be closed. The City of San Rafael is encouraging "infill" development in the downtown area, which means that more workers will have to squeeze through the congestion between Terra Linda and the downtown exit. The advantages of this "infill" development will be greatly enhanced by providing more transportation choices for our workers.

We urge you to move ahead with construction of the southbound HOV lane now, because it is currently funded. Commuters have experienced years of frustration while highway options were being evaluated. It is imperative to move ahead now, while the funding is available, to complete this important traffic improvement.

The Chamber is also pleased with CALTRANS' plan to create a landscaping buffer between Highway 101 and Francisco Boulevard West. It will be a welcome improvement to upgrade that section of freeway.

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We would also like to encourage CALTRANS to continue their investigation of a reversible HOV lane as an alternative to the Ultimate project. However, we would like CALTRANS to investigate the possibility of having the reversible lane constructed in a way that would allow exits in downtown San Rafael. If the reversible lane could be constructed for only an additional \$20-\$25 million, then it might be possible to have this lane in operation by 2010, especially if Marin County voters approve a transportation tax.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Elissa Giambastiani".

Elissa Giambastiani
President and CEO