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September 20, 2012

Hon. Michael Antonovich
Chairman
Los Angeles Metro Board
1 Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Chairman Antonovich and Metro Board Members,

As you know, last month Metro released the final five options it will consider throughout the environmental review process for the "710 North Gap Closure Project." After considering the strong community concerns expressed over the impact of a tunnel, and in light of the dramatically escalating and uncertain costs that would be incurred in its construction, I urge Metro to remove this option from consideration at the next appropriate stage in the review process.

Many years ago, when Metro first proposed that a tunnel may provide a solution to the decades long fight over the 710 freeway, I supported a technical study to determine whether a tunnel was feasible so that the community could explore the full range of options. Metro represented at that time that because of the advancement of tunneling technology, it may be possible to construct a tunnel at little more than the cost of building a freeway at-grade or for about one and a half billion dollars. Metro also believed that a strong community consensus would emerge to support such a concept, if it made the case to the public. Neither claim would prove to be correct.

Several years later, we know that although a tunnel is technologically feasible, it is cost prohibitive. Metro has refused to release an accurate figure on the cost of a tunnel, but it is safe to say that its original estimate is off by many billions of dollars. In any event, this is money we do not have and are not likely to obtain, and it would be a disservice to the community to invest substantial sums towards a project that may never be completed while forgoing more immediate traffic improvements that could do much to mitigate traffic and pollution now.

It is also plain that the community consensus, far from supporting a tunnel, is strongly opposed to it. One of the reasons the technical study of the tunnel was designed to be route neutral, was so that the most logical route would be examined -- not the route that may have made sense when the proposal was at-grade, and not through only poor communities -- but in the corridor that made the most sense from a transportation, mitigation and neighborhood impact point of view. The result was salutary and informative; in each of the five zones in which the tunnel could be

constructed, no community embraced the proposal. This was not a simple matter of each neighborhood simply wanting the tunnel elsewhere, but rather a recognition by each community that the price was too high, both fiscally and in terms of its impact on the quality of life, and not only for their own community, but for any community.

These concerns, which echoed throughout the public hearings on the matter, include Metro's intent to use tunnel boring machine (TBM) technology to construct the tunnel. The large and bulky TMB, which can be hundreds of feet long and tens of feet wide, will clog space in residential neighborhoods for years to come as the tunnel construction process can be quite lengthy. Moreover, once the TMB is underneath homes, the daily boring through rock and soil could cause severely disruptive vibrations. The quality of life in the communities surrounding the tunnel path will further be reduced as tens of noisy and polluting trucks will have to be used to remove the tons of rock and soil discharged from the machine.

While constructing the tunnel will create a series of problems for the surrounding communities, the negative effects associated with pursuing a tunnel option are not constrained to the construction phase of the project. Once the tunnel is complete, trucks and other vehicles using the tunnel will discharge harmful emissions for the 4.5 mile length of the tunnel. These emissions, such as hazardous air pollutants, carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide, will have to be captured and removed from the tunnel through portals and ventilation stacks at select points along the tunnel. The emissions will then be pumped into surrounding neighborhoods, reducing local air quality and exposing nearby residents to pollutants that could cause a wide range of health problems. These health problems include, but are not limited to, asthma and certain types of cancer.

Additionally, tens of thousands of trucks will start using the tunnel on a daily basis when the tunnel is complete. These vehicles will begin passing through communities – Glendale and La Canada to the west and Arcadia and Monrovia to the east – that abut the 210. This will expose these communities to noisy vehicles that will interrupt peaceful neighborhoods, heavy trucks that will wear down the freeway and require that more taxpayer dollars be spent to maintain the freeway, and harmful emissions.

Unfortunately, these problems will only grow worse over time as studies now indicate that for each percentage increase in road capacity there is a corresponding increase in vehicle traffic. The tunnel will not reduce traffic congestion in the region; instead it appears that a tunnel will only expose surrounding communities to more disturbances and harmful pollutants.

Finally, the community has rightly expressed profound concerns over the cost of the project.

While the project was originally estimated to cost approximately \$1.5 billion, a 2011 study estimated it would cost \$2.8 billion and now the Measure R extension expenditure plan believes it will cost \$5.6 billion. How costly will it be in another year? Or two? Or ten?

Metro expects to fund half of the project through private financing and another \$1.8 through federal funding and the rest through Measure R funds. But Metro has not provided any information to taxpayers indicating that those estimates of expected private funding sources are sound. I am deeply concerned that taxpayers could be left picking up the full tab, if the highly

speculative financing does not come through. These risks are magnified when you consider the likelihood that Metro's estimates are deeply inadequate. A 2003 study of global infrastructure projects determined that cost overruns occurred on nearly 90 percent of mega projects, such as a 710 tunnel, and that the average cost overrun for such tunnel projects was 34 percent.

The environmental review process Metro is engaged in has been excessively focused on the tunnel option. I have expressed my concern over Metro's apparent rush to judgment on a tunnel option many times, but without success. This has only confirmed what many in the community suspected, that Metro was once again starting with the conclusion it wished to reach and working backwards.

I urge Metro to give full and serious consideration as to how funds for a tunnel project could be better spent. I suspect that for less than the actual cost of a tunnel, Metro would have the funds necessary to undertake all of the remaining options under consideration -- combined. These options, transportation system management, bus rapid transit and light-rail would help move people in an environmentally friendly manner without disrupting our long-established neighborhoods.

We can and we must pursue better options than constructing a tunnel for meeting our future transportation needs. I look forward to continuing our work on this vital issue, and appreciate your consideration of my thoughts on the way forward.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress

Handwritten signature or scribble.