

COMMISSION ON CALIFORNIA STATE GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION AND ECONOMY

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August 3, 1981

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Honorable Edmund G. Brown Jr.
Governor of California

Honorable David A. Roberti
President pro Tempore of the Senate
and to Members of the Senate

Honorable Willie L. Brown, Jr.
Speaker of the Assembly
and to Members of the Assembly

Dear Governor and Members of the Legislature:

This letter is being written to express this Commission's deep concern about the status of the proposed Century Freeway. This concern is based upon the projected cost (\$2.8 billion), the unconscionable delays, and the chaotic economic and social effect on the communities, as well as the hundreds of thousands of citizens living within the freeway corridor.

At a public hearing held by the Commission on June 23, 1981, Adriana Gianturco, the State's Director of Transportation, informed the Commission that the Century Freeway project had its birth in 1958 when the State Legislature adopted into law the California Freeway and Expressway System and designated for freeway development the corridor between the Los Angeles International Airport and Interstate 605 in Norwalk. The Highway Commission adopted the western segment on July 24, 1968. The proposed route was added to the Interstate Highway System by the U.S. Department of Transportation in 1968.

In the 23 years since the initial action by the Legislature, the State has expended more than \$250 million for right-of-way acquisition, housing, staffing and engineering costs. To date, not one square yard of freeway concrete has been poured.

The lack of accomplishments on the project, due, in part, to legal action taken by various groups and the on-again/off-again policies of five National Administrations (five Presidents, six Secretaries of Transportation and ten Federal Highway Administrators) involving a myriad of differing transportation, economic, fiscal, housing and environmental impact issues, has resulted

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in the most degrading and chaotic condition describable for those living in the area. At the Commission's June 23 public hearing, Assemblyman Bruce Young, Chairman of the Assembly Transportation Committee, stated:

"The Century Freeway has turned into a 20th Century horror movie for thousands of people in the county: rats, wild dogs, and even human predators haunt this judicial wasteland. The victims of this massive governmental and judicial neglect are not only the former residents of this urban no-man's-land, but all nearby homeowners who have watched their friend's home skyrocket in value while their own home values tumbled. What government has done, it must remedy. There is no moral, legal or ethical alternative but to make the Century corridor whole again."

A 17.3-mile, 600-foot wide swath of land has been cut through the communities, hundreds of buildings have been boarded up or razed, and nearly 5,000 parcels of land and structures have been acquired with a consequent loss of hundreds of millions of dollars of potential property tax and business revenues to the affected communities and the State.

At the Commission's public hearing, the Mayors of at least eight communities related their total frustration with this stalled project. Some presented alternatives, while others remained consistent in their demand that the project be completed as originally envisioned. All concurred, however, that because of the legal action, resulting in the Consent Decree, and the very high construction inflation rate, that Federal and State funds necessary for the project might not be forthcoming.

Even if the increased user fees provided the necessary funding, this Commission is of the opinion that the project as presently envisioned would not be attainable. Under the terms of the court settlement reached on October 11, 1979, the project would include eight lanes of general traffic, 21 local freeway interchanges, a transitway in the median for busses, vans and car pools or rails; and at least 10 transit stations with park-and-ride lots at each station. The Consent Decree also required the provision of 4,200 replacement housing units and the establishment of various organizations and processes to represent the rights of corridor residents and corridor communities to stimulate minority business enterprise and employment on the project.

Clearly, some alternative to the project as originally envisioned must be chosen.

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Several alternatives have been suggested by different authorities. These alternatives include increased Interstate funding, increased State funding; increasing the user tax solely in Los Angeles County; lengthening the construction schedule to use existing funds as they are generated; and rescoping the project to reduce its overall cost.

It is the opinion of this Commission--a Commission mandated by the Legislature to promote economy in State operations--that the project must be rescoped to balance with the State and Federal Governments' reduced funding capacities. Steps must be taken immediately to alleviate the crime, loss of tax revenue and other adverse economic and social effects on the corridor communities and their residents.

On July 2, 1981, Federal Highway Administrator Ray Barnhart and other Federal, State and local officials viewed the project. At that time, Mr. Barnhart announced that the Federal Government would support a scaled-down \$1 billion version of the long-delayed freeway. The Barnhart proposal included a six-lane freeway, instead of eight lanes, with a possibility of adding two lanes for busses and other high-occupancy vehicles. Instead of the 4,200 units of replacement housing called for in the Consent Decree, the new Federal plan apparently would assure construction of between 1,500 and 2,250 units. Mr. Barnhart also indicated that if his proposal is accepted that he would urge the Federal Environmental Protection Agency to lift the sanction which presently would prevent construction of the freeway.

As pragmatic individuals, the members of this Commission strongly recommend that this new Federal proposal serve as the basis for negotiations to get this long-delayed project completed. Such negotiations with the Federal Government and the courts should commence immediately and lead to agreement on what Mr. Barnhart calls a "fair, cost-effective alternative" which would end a "20 year nightmare" along the proposed freeway route.

As responsible public officials, your urgent positive action on this recommendation is essential.

Sincerely,



NATHAN SHAPELL, Chairman

James F. Mulvaney, Vice Chairman

Senator Alfred E. Alquist

Maurice Rene Chez

Dixon R. Harwin

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