



June 30, 2016

Brenda Veenendaal, Senior Regional Planner & Public Information Officer  
 Fresno Council of Governments  
 2035 Tulare Street, Suite 210  
 Fresno, CA 93721

**RE: Comments on Fresno Council of Governments 2016 Public Participation Plan and 2018 Regional Transportation Plan Public Participation Plan**

Dear Ms. Veenendaal,

We are writing to provide comments on the Fresno Council of Governments' (Fresno COG) 2016 Public Participation Plan and 2106 Regional Transportation Plan Public Participation Plan (Plan). We thank you for the opportunity to submit comments to help guide Fresno COG's efforts to make the transportation planning process equitable and inclusive of all residents of Fresno County. We hope to work in partnership to create a comprehensive and equitable public process that is inclusive of diverse voices and communities.

We are pleased to see strategies and objectives in the draft Plan that clearly lay out the importance of community engagement. We believe the strategies and objectives in the draft provide a clear roadmap to how Fresno COG will meet its objectives. We offer the following recommendations in an effort to strengthen the current draft to ensure that public outreach efforts are inclusive of all Fresno County residents.

**I. Fresno COG 2016 Public Participation Plan Commitments**

We applaud Fresno COG's commitments laid out in the draft plan. We firmly believe that early engagement, accessibility, responsiveness and transparency will lead to strong policies and programs that will advance and meaningfully meet the needs of all communities. While

Fresno COG references early and ongoing communication with diverse audiences throughout the five proposed commitments, we recommend that Fresno COG include an explicit sixth commitment to partner with diverse community based organizations to ensure broad based engagement in all transportation related activities and upcoming 2018 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (2018 RTP/SCS).

## **II. Establish the Environmental Justice Committee as a stand-alone committee**

While we appreciate Fresno COGs efforts to provide multiple opportunities for engagement through multiple committees, we respectfully request that the Environmental Justice Committee be established as a stand-alone committee that reports directly to the Policy Board instead of as a subcommittee to the Transportation Technical Committee. Low-income communities of color are disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution and have traditionally lacked access to basic services such as adequate and reliable public transit and pedestrian and biking infrastructure to support active travel. Fresno County residents in environmental justice communities will not shift their mode of travel unless we provide real transportation choices that get resident to where they need to go and disparate impacts are addressed. This can only be achieved through a committee dedicated to assessing and providing recommendations on proposed Fresno COG policies and programs that will further the needs of environmental justice communities.

## **III. Additional Public Participation Strategies**

### **A. Develop partnership with local schools**

To increase community resident participation, we suggest Fresno COG coordinate closely with local schools to host workshops and public hearings. Schools serve as key resource centers for many communities and in particular, low income communities of color. Close partnerships with teachers, principals and superintendents have led to strong public participation in efforts aimed at improving services and conditions in local communities. These facilities are also readily accessible to the community; they are often within walking or biking distance and accessible through public transportation. Often residents have a well-established working relationship with schools making it a familiar space, and it is more affordable.

### **B. Engage bilingual staff**

We believe it is important for Fresno COG staff to be in direct communication with community residents. It is crucial for non-English speaking residents to be able to communicate directly to COG staff over the phone to provide input or raise concerns without having to rely on a third party. Residents from disadvantaged rural communities who lack access to public transportation are often not able to attend public workshops in certain areas of the County. We recommend Fresno COG establish a clear process through which residents can contact staff directly in their native language.

### **C. Performance measures**

We commend Fresno COG for acknowledging the need to consistently evaluate performance. To build on this, we suggest Fresno COG incorporate performance measures in the Plan that

will be used to assess public outreach efforts. This will allow the public to understand how Fresno COG will measure its efforts and to provide meaningful feedback based on their experiences.

**D. Use of social media**

As part of the social media outreach strategy proposed in the Plan, we recommend Fresno COG include schools as a main location to post and distribute bilingual flyers/notices inviting residents to public workshops or hearings. This is especially important in the disadvantaged unincorporated communities that do not have access to broadband or internet services. The schools act as the principal resource for residents to access public information.

**IV. Development of 2018 RTP/SCS**

We look forward to working closely with Fresno COG to develop the 2018 RTP/SCS. While we are in strong support of the various strategies identified in the draft Plan, we recommend that Fresno COG identify a clear process through which scoring criteria will be determined to rank and prioritize transportation projects; land use scenarios will be modeled; policies and programs will be developed; and finally, development of performance evaluation criteria. We further recommend that at each stage of this process Fresno COG provide ample opportunity for public review and input.

Finally, we applaud Fresno COG for its efforts to ensure broad based community engagement by providing grants to local community based organizations. We are in strong support of continuation of this program as we saw its success in the development of the 2014 RTP/SCS.

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We thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with Fresno COG to ensure barriers to public participation are removed and ensure that input from low income communities is reflected in Fresno COG policies and programs. Please feel free to contact me with any question at (559) 369 2790.

Sincerely,

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Community Advocacy Director  
Leadership Counsel for Justice and  
Accountability

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