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June 29, 2017

Director Ray Zhang
Caltrans, District 3
703 B Street
Marysville, CA 95901

RE: Caltrans Highway 174 Safety Project - Curve Realignment on State Route 174 in Nevada County

Dear Director Zhang,

As Chair of the Board of Supervisors, I am sending you this letter to relay our concerns over the Caltrans proposed safety curve realignment project on State Route (SR) 174 in Nevada County. Per Caltrans, the purpose of the Highway 174 Safety Project in Nevada County is to improve safety and operations for all users and reduce the number and severity of collisions within this segment of Highway 174. The project proposes to realign two curves, widen shoulders, add a left-turn lane and improve the Clear Recovery Zone along roughly two miles of highway. While Nevada County whole-heartedly supports public safety projects, in this case we have received numerous letters and complaints from constituents outlining their objections and concerns over the project, and frustration with Caltrans.

Major concerns for many local residents are the addition of an 8 foot paved shoulder on the road and the removal of trees and obstacles in the 20 foot Clear Recovery Zone, which would extend 12, or 20, feet beyond the paved shoulder and to the end of any slope within the zone. This would have a major impact on the natural beauty of the road and surrounding area. Residents who live along the right-of-way have also expressed concerns with the clearing and removal of over 100 trees and vegetation that act as natural buffers from the road. Some properties will have the road in their front yard. All of this will affect their property values and quality of life and will leave them feeling vulnerable. A local walking and bicycling trail that is maintained by a local nonprofit will also be jeopardized by the project. There is an abundance of public concern that by widening the road and lessening the severity of some of the turns, driver speeds and reckless driving will actually increase.

While Caltrans did hold meetings about this project in past years, it has only held one open house this year on May 7, 2017 to allow residents to see the proposed design and ask questions, prior to beginning to purchase roadside land. Many residents have asked Caltrans

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for a representative to come and explain the project in person so that they could better understand it, and to re-open discussion about the excessively wide design. Caltrans has yet to respond to their request. Local residents have formed a group to advocate against the project. , District 1 Supervisor Heidi Hall attended one of their meetings several weeks ago. They have shown up to our Board meetings requesting help and they have begun a letter-writing campaign. We acknowledge and express concerns about this project.

We respectfully request additional data about the project, so that we can better understand the justification for the project. From our understanding, Caltrans looked at 3 years of data and discovered that the fatal accident rate on SR 174 is 5.6 times higher than the statewide average in comparison to similar stretches of road, and the total accident rate is 2.7 times the statewide average. However, due to the significant changes and alterations that the project will bring to this rural community, additional analysis should be conducted to ensure the accident data used to justify this project is not an outlier over time due to a spurious cause.

Interestingly, it should also be noted that many residents across Nevada County have called for a safety project on SR 49, not SR 174, where there have been 3 head-on collisions in the past year alone. Residents believe that Caltrans safety funds would be better served on SR 49 instead.

Therefore, we are contacting you to request your assistance in having Caltrans re-assess this project and its scope of work to: a) ensure that the data used to justify this project is accurate; b) consider revisions to the project's design that decrease the Clear Recovery Zone in order to maintain the local rural beauty of the surrounding area and minimize the negative impact that it will have on residents; c) increase public outreach for input on the project and its design, and; d) consider a shift of focus to a safety project on SR 49.

Thank you for your attention to this matter in advance.

Sincerely,

Hank Weston,
Chair, Board of Supervisors