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## Press Release

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### **Assemblymember Cristina Garcia Introduces Assembly Bill 1778 to Prohibit California from Funding or Permitting Freeway Expansion in Environmental Justice Communities**

(Sacramento) – Today, Assemblymember Cristina Garcia (D-Bell Gardens) introduced Assembly Bill (AB) 1778, which would prohibit the State of California from funding or permitting transportation projects of freeway expansions/widening in Environmental Justice Communities adversely affected by vehicle emissions and/or in areas with a higher rate of population below the poverty line. Specifically, the bill would block the state from funding or issuing permits to freeway projects that would increase traffic in low-income communities and displace vulnerable communities from their homes. AB 1778 would make it so that neither state money, personnel hours, nor permits are allocated to such construction projects.

More than 200,000 people have lost their homes nationwide to federal road projects over the last three decades, according to a Los Angeles Times<sup>[1]</sup> analysis of federal transportation data. The actual total is higher because many states fail to report how many homes are taken annually. In large projects in California and 4 other states the families that lost their homes were disproportionately residents in Black and Latino neighborhoods.

Unlike decades ago, those who are displaced today are compensated for the value of their home if they are homeowners and renters are compensated for moving expenses and the difference in rent for 42 months<sup>[2]</sup>. However, expecting any amount of money to make up for the displacement of families especially during California's housing crisis is unacceptable. Specifically the displacement of vulnerable communities in the middle of a housing crisis when housing near freeways is often the most affordable to own or rent is backwards to our state housing goals and targets already vulnerable communities by adding to their housing insecurity.

“If we are truly going to govern with equity lenses we must stop the seizure of family homes in poor brown and Black communities and acknowledge that the freeway system since the 1950's has been used as a tool to further disenfranchise low income communities and communities of color like mine,” stated Assemblymember Garcia.

Evidence also indicates that expanding freeways isn't easing congestion problems. Experts have found that widening freeways can actually increase traffic, because it leads to urban sprawl and encourages more vehicle trips. This simply leads to more pollution and further exacerbates the community's health problems.

AB 1778 will end the allocation of state funds to the widening of Interstate 710 from the port of Long Beach to the railyards in my district. Brown and Black communities along the I-710 corridor are already plagued with bad air quality, congested city streets, and expanding the freeway will increase vehicle emission effectively choking us to death and will displace many low income Latinos.

A better way to help ease congestion is to fund public transportation projects like the West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor (WSAB) project which is a 19-mile corridor which will service Environmental Justice communities along Interstate-710 trucking corridor. WSAB is the solution that fixes air quality, health, and reduces freeway congestion by getting commuters out of their cars, thus speeding up goods movement from the Port of Long Beach to the railyard in Commerce.

“It is imperative that the resources, money and time, consumed by the discussion of freeway widening are reallocated to completing public transportation projects. This creates jobs and helps make communities healthier while keeping people in their homes. It is outrageous and feels criminal to use state resources to choke and displace communities like mine when the data and research clearly show that this practice is just another example of the systemic racism in our policies and practices. Emission increases from freeway expansion raises the risk of health hazards for underserved communities along the corridor. I can no longer allow state dollars to fund expansion projects that kill of us faster,” stated Assemblymember Cristina Garcia.

“Expanding highways for six decades has only made traffic worse thanks to induced demand, all while polluting our air and locking us into more car reliance.” said Michael Schneider, Founder of Los Angeles-based Streets For All. "Assemblymember Garcia’s bill will force Metro and Caltrans to invest in projects that will actually fight climate change and reduce traffic, including bus rapid transit, rail, and active transportation."

“The introduction of AB 1778 is the starting point of a conversation that has been ignored for decades. I encourage all affected stakeholders and advocates to work with me to solve this problem and actually but action behind our commitment to equity once and for all, we can’t wait any longer, my neighbors’ and my life are worth the fight,” concluded Garcia.

**The 58th Assembly District includes the cities of Montebello, Pico Rivera, Commerce, Bell Gardens, Downey, Norwalk, Bellflower, Cerritos, and Artesia.**

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<sup>[1]</sup> <https://www.latimes.com/projects/us-freeway-highway-expansion-black-latino-communities/>

<sup>[1]</sup> [tenadisp.pdf \(hud.gov\)](#)