

SANTA MONICA

Safe Streets Alliance

*Safe, livable, and sustainable streets are welcoming to everyone
and strengthen our community.*



Excessive Cuts to Transportation Department Will Threaten Economic Recovery

The streets we travel on make up over 20% of our city, and are one of our biggest assets. *Our streets move people, goods, and services and are essential infrastructure for our economic and social recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.* It is crucial how we manage and use this public asset, at the core of economic resilience, social equity, health and environmental sustainability. The critical function of managing our streets is confirmed by [Governor Newsom's Executive Order N-33-20](#) that **classified transportation infrastructure and services as essential government functions.**

Transportation work assures public safety and economic activity -- operating signals and roads on which we all depend. Mobility staff provide essential fiber optic network infrastructure, signal timing with regular adjustments, and Opticom first-responder systems. Proactive maintenance of these systems ensures faster response to emergencies and saves lives.

These essential life saving functions are under threat with extreme plans to cut over half of the City Transportation and Mobility Division compared to 20-40% across other departments. While we can only imagine the stress and burden of decisions weighing on City Council, this level of cuts would severely impact basic public safety and operational functions, greatly hindering our city's ability to rebound fiscally from the COVID-19 crisis.

Movement of goods, services, and customers in a safe, fluid way is critical to any economic recovery. In the near-term, accommodating the movement of people and goods will need to be extremely dynamic to adapt to "the realities" of the post COVID-19 emergency. Efforts to rebound and support our local economy (businesses, employers, restaurants, retail shops, schools, etc.) depend on maintaining and adjusting critical transportation infrastructure and services in real time, not on a delay of days or weeks due to insufficient staff.

Santa Monica's Transportation Department *pays for itself* in revenue generation (grants, programs, plan check and permit fees).

Drastically cutting our city's vital Transportation and Mobility staff would severely impact its capacity to be nimble in identifying new and expanded revenue streams. Not having the needed staff would prevent Santa Monica from taking advantage of emerging opportunities for grant and stimulus funds that will certainly be coming for infrastructure post *shelter in place* orders. Cities that are prepared and well-positioned to receive these funds will, without doubt, perform better in economic recovery. Being ready means having shovel ready projects with continued investment in multi-modal street projects.

Independent of any forthcoming stimulus funds or grants, why not use our city's transportation infrastructure to help bring in new forms of revenue? For example, what about requiring the biggest e-commerce, delivery services and rideshare companies to pay their fair share? They currently make no fiscal contribution to defray the cost to us of their impact on roadways, curbsides, sidewalks, or other infrastructure that they use to do business as they simultaneously divert revenue from our local brick-and-mortar businesses and increase GHG (Greenhouse Gas) emissions and traffic congestion. These conveniences often result in erratic driving behavior and dangerous maneuvering that adversely impact safety in our community. However, instituting fair fees requires responsible management by sufficient transportation staff.

As we emerge from this COVID-19 crisis, experts project increased traffic congestion due to single car trips and more people walking, biking and scooting. This will likely be exacerbated by reduced public transportation capacity while physical distancing remains necessary. Reduced transit capacity will not only negatively impact our essential workers but also those who can't afford the option of a single car trip.

With sufficient resources, transportation staff can pull from a toolbox of approved mitigations and strategies to accommodate these dynamic changes in road use and temper negative safety impacts as we rebound from *shelter in place* orders. Without sufficient transportation resources, the impending increase in congestion will choke off our economic recovery and surely result in a spike in traffic-caused serious injuries and fatalities.

How we manage our streets - or ignore them - will move us either toward environmental justice, economic recovery and climate resiliency or away from those vital community and city goals.

While the City suffers catastrophic shortfalls, we should not use a sledgehammer where a scalpel is needed to balance new budgets. We urge the Council to be strategic and lean on staff expertise for thoughtful “restructuring” that reduces costs and bureaucracy while retaining essential capacity that would facilitate a secure path to economic recovery and resilience.

Cris Gutierrez and Cynthia Rose
Co-Chairs, Santa Monica Safe Streets Alliance