Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does this plan include tax increases?

No. The Traffic Relief and Road Improvement Act generates $7.8 billion in new transportation funding ($5.6 billion annual/$2.2 billion one-time revenues) by ensuring that existing fees and taxes paid by transportation system users are dedicated for transportation.

2. Does this plan divert funding currently dedicated to other programs?

The Traffic Relief and Road Improvement Act does not reduce revenues committed to any specific state or local program. The bill dedicates revenues from transportation taxes, which inappropriately support the state General Fund rather than transportation projects.

3. Will this bill require General Fund cuts?

The Legislature has increased General Fund spending by more than $36 billion over the past six years. None of this new spending supports roads. The General Fund impact of this plan is a small fraction of recent growth. The Governor and Legislative Democrats propose tax increases that place the transportation funding burden disproportionately on low-income and middle class families. Assembly Republicans welcome the opportunity to discuss General Fund spending priorities, but we will not support efforts by Democrats to fund transportation on the backs of the poor.

4. Why shouldn't transportation users pay higher taxes to fund roads?

Californians pay the second highest gas prices and the highest gas taxes (including cap-and-trade) in the nation. The average Californian pays more than $200 every year to register a vehicle. Next to housing, families pay more for transportation than any other household expenditure (including food and healthcare). Gas taxes are regressive because lower income Californians drive less fuel efficient vehicles, and commute longer distances due to the state's lack of affordable housing (According to the LAO, commute times increase 4.5 percent for every 10 percent increase in rent). At the same time, the Legislature is diverting transportation taxes for non-transportation purposes. California motorists already face some of the poorest roads and worst congestion in the nation. The Legislature should ensure that existing transportation tax revenues fund transportation before imposing regressive tax increases on hard-working families.

5. What does this bill do to reduce traffic congestion?

According to PPIC, nearly 60 percent of Californians view traffic congestion as a "big problem." According to The Road Information Program (TRIP), a national transportation research group, congestion-related delays cost California motorists $28 billion every year. In Los Angeles and the Bay Area, TRIP determined that the average motorist loses 80 hours due to congestion each year, costing $1,700 in lost time and wasted fuel. Traffic congestion ranks as the top concern for Los Angeles County residents—surpassing physical safety, making ends meet, and housing affordability. The Traffic Relief and Road Improvement Act provides nearly $2.5 billion to increase system capacity and reduce congestion. The bill ensures that last year's decision to slash $750 million from capacity projects can be immediately restored.

6. What is the "road diet," and why should it be repealed?

In 2013, the Legislature required that all new development must reduce automobile travel. This change to CEQA rewards projects that increase traffic, and blocks projects that reduce traffic. Stakeholders estimate this will "add approximately $1 billion in costs for each additional lane mile in California." The Administration describes this policy objective as a "road diet." Assembly

Republicans believe transportation funding should be used to reduce traffic, not create it. Policies designed to create gridlock should be repealed.

7. Does this bill restore funds diverted from transportation?

Yes. This bill eliminates the diversion of $1 billion annually from gas tax revenues to the General Fund (i.e. the "weight fee swap"). This diversion steals more than $400 million annually from local streets and roads. The bill also requires repayment of all outstanding transportation loans. It also ensures that revenues from the "hidden gas tax" (i.e. 11 cent gas price increase due to cap-and-trade) are appropriately funding transportation.

8. Does this plan provide stable and sustainable transportation funding?

Yes. Existing transportation funding is tied to the gas tax. The Governor has issued an Executive Order requiring a 50% reduction in petroleum consumption by 2030. The Air Resources Board proposes to place 4.2 million zero-emission vehicles on the road by 2030. Owners of zero-emission vehicles are predominantly wealthy, and pay no gas tax (According to an October 2015 University of California, Berkeley, study, the wealthiest 20 percent of households capture 90 percent of federal tax credits for electric vehicle purchases). If petroleum consumption declines, so will road funding. Gas tax increases will increasingly shift the funding burden to low-income motorists. The Traffic Relief and Road Improvement Act diversifies the transportation funding portfolio to provide stable and sustainable revenue. This bill creates the first new dedicated sources of transportation funding in 17 years.

9. Does this plan address all of the state's transportation needs?

Yes. The Traffic Relief and Road Improvement Act includes new funding for deferred maintenance, highway improvement, local streets and roads, transit, active transportation, DMV modernization and CHP. It also facilitates federal funding for trade corridor improvements.

10. Does this plan include reforms to improve efficiency and accountability for transportation spending?

Yes. California has the 4th highest overhead costs in the nation for transportation projects. In May 2014, the Legislative Analyst released a review of staff support costs at Caltrans. The report determined that Caltrans is overstaffed by 3,500 full-time employees, at a cost of more than $500 million per year. The Traffic Relief and Road Improvement Act achieves savings from Caltrans efficiencies, increases oversight over Caltrans spending, and creates a new Transportation Inspector General to audit projects and improve performance. All major transportation projects will be regularly audited. The plan increases flexibility for Caltrans to contract out, and restores a program allowing public-private partnerships.