

1 [Freeway Removal]

2 **Resolution urging the City and County of San Francisco and the California**
3 **Department of Transportation to study and explore the ideas of the Central**
4 **Freeway removal.**

5

6 WHEREAS, on November 28, 2022, California Senator Scott Wiener (District 11)
7 sent a letter to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) requesting a study
8 on a removal of the Central freeway¹; and

9 WHEREAS, when United States President Dwight Eisenhower created the
10 Federal Aid Highway Act in 1956, he created a foundation for mass suburbanization and
11 an economy centered on the automobile,² and as the act facilitated highway
12 construction, these highways facilitated the economic development of predominantly
13 white communities while facilitating the physical and economic destruction and
14 underdevelopment of Black and low income communities³; and

15 WHEREAS, between 1993 and 2017, highway planners built more than 30,000
16 miles of freeway lanes in the country's 100 largest urban areas, according to
17 Transportation for America, a national advocacy group,⁴ and A *Los Angeles Times*
18 investigation found that out of 200,000 people who lost their homes in that time period,
19 nearly two-thirds of them resided in Black and Latino neighborhoods⁵; and

20 WHEREAS, planners of the interstate highway system routed many highways
21 directly and intentionally through Black and Brown communities, and

¹ "Forget the Central Subway—What's Happening With the Central Freeway?," *San Francisco Standard*, <https://sfstandard.com/housing-development/forget-the-central-subway-whats-happening-with-the-central-freeway/>.

² "How freeways bulldoze California communities of color," Calmatters, <https://calmatters.org/housing/2021/11/california-housing-crisis-podcast-freeways/>.

³ Deborah N. Archer, *Transportation Policy and the Underdevelopment of Black Communities*, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3797364#.

⁴ Rayla Bellis, *Transportation for America The Congestion Con: How More Lanes and More Money Equal More Traffic*, [Page 4], <https://t4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Congestion-Report-2020-FINAL.pdf>.

⁵ Liam Dillon and Ben Poston, "Freeways force out residents in communities of color — again," *Los Angeles Times* <https://www.latimes.com/projects/us-freeway-highway-expansion-black-latino-communities/>.

1 WHEREAS, Deborah Archer, professor at the New York University School of
2 Law, explains that “The highway development popped up at a time when the idea of
3 integration in housing was on the horizon. And so very intentionally, highways were
4 sometimes built right on the formal boundary lines that we saw used during racial
5 zoning. Sometimes community members asked the highway builders to create a barrier
6 between their community and encroaching Black communities”⁶; and

7 WHEREAS, Archer continues, “our system exists not to develop, but to
8 underdevelop Black people. To effect this underdevelopment, racism is embedded into
9 the core of power, the economy, culture, and society. The result is that Black people
10 have been intentionally sacrificed to feed America’s growth and expansion”,
11 demonstrating how the construction of highways benefited white communities, while
12 exploiting Black communities”⁷; and

13 WHEREAS, the late Congressman John Lewis described this discrimination
14 when he said “the legacy of Jim Crow transportation is still with us. Even today, some of
15 our transportation policies and practices destroy stable neighborhoods, isolate and
16 segregate our citizens in deteriorating neighborhoods, and fail to provide access to jobs
17 and economic growth centers”⁸; and

18 WHEREAS, in a 2016 Dear Colleague Letter, the then-secretaries of the United
19 States Departments of Housing and Urban Development (Julián Castro), Education
20 (John B. King, Jr), and Transportation (Anthony R. Foxx) acknowledged how the
21 intersection of transportation, housing, and education policies created and maintained
22 concentrated poverty and racial segregation which continues to impede economic
23 mobility and access to opportunity from marginalized communities”⁹; and

1 WHEREAS, Archer explains, “highways, roads, bridges, sidewalks, and public
2 transit have been planned, developed, and sustained to pull resources from Black
3 communities that are subsequently deployed and invested to the benefit of
4 predominantly white communities and their residents”, showing how freeways
5 specifically perpetuate the underdevelopment of Black communities”¹⁰; and

6 WHEREAS, the transportation sector is the single largest source of greenhouse
7 gas emissions in California, and according to the state’s most recent pre-pandemic
8 inventory, the transportation sector accounts for 41%, or 171 million metric tons, of the
9 state’s Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO₂e) emissions, and in San Francisco,
10 transportation accounts for 2.2 million metric tons CO₂e, or roughly 47% of emissions,
11 based on the most recent pre-pandemic inventory¹¹; and

12 WHEREAS, the highway system carries high volumes of traffic volumes, and
13 therefore high concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions, other particulate matter,
14 volatile organic compounds, brake dust, tire wear, and noise pollution¹²; and

15 WHEREAS, people who live near major highways have an increased likelihood
16 and severity of health problems associated with exposure to pollution from traffic,
17 including higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, impaired lung development in
18 children, preterm and low-birthweight infants, childhood leukemia, and premature
19 death¹³; and

⁶ “A Brief History Of How Racism Shaped Interstate Highways,” NPR, <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/07/984784455/a-brief-history-of-how-racism-shaped-interstate-highways>.

⁷ Archer, *Transportation Policy*, [Page 1].

⁸ Archer, *Transportation Policy*, [Page 8].

⁹ Archer, *Transportation Policy*, [Page 10].

¹⁰ Archer, *Transportation Policy*, [Page 1].

¹¹ Letter by Scott Wiener, “Caltrans Central Freeway Letter,” November 28, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qDBIKNdhZXyejOi3bbiqRBADm2l3kXgy/view>.

¹² Letter by Scott Wiener, “Caltrans Central Freeway Letter,” November 28, 2022, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qDBIKNdhZXyejOi3bbiqRBADm2l3kXgy/view>.

¹³ “Near Roadway Air Pollution and Health: Frequently Asked Questions,” United States Environmental Protection Agency, https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-11/documents/420f14044_0.pdf.

1 WHEREAS, youth, older adults, people with preexisting cardiopulmonary
2 disease, and people of low income in particular have higher risks for health impacts
3 from air pollution near roadways¹⁴; and

4 WHEREAS, finding alternatives to freeways is consistent with the City's climate
5 goals, as the 2021 San Francisco Climate Action Plan which laid out a climate action
6 framework across six sectors, including the transportation and land use sector, aimed at
7 least 80% of all San Francisco trips would be low-carbon trips, meaning trips by transit,
8 walking or biking by 2050¹⁵; and

9 WHEREAS, The areas surrounding the Central Freeway have "long been
10 blighted by the ugly, noisy freeway and its presence has caused the surrounding
11 neighborhoods to be marginalized and blighted. This imaginative proposal will help
12 revive this part of the City and create opportunities for much needed new housing", said
13 a critic at the University of California, Berkeley¹⁶; and

14 WHEREAS, in addition to eliminating or significantly mitigating these problems,
15 ripping out the three miles of the Central Freeway and 101's 200-foot right of way could,
16 all together, make space for some 13,000 new homes¹⁷; and

17 WHEREAS, the late San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee, SPUR, and the Spring 2014
18 graduate design studio at UC Berkeley explored and endorsed the proposal to take
19 down the spur of Interstate 280 from 16th Street northward and replace it with a
20 landscaped multiway boulevard¹⁸; and

¹⁴ "Near Roadway," United States Environmental Protection Agency.

¹⁵ *San Francisco's Climate Action Plan 2021*, [Page 16], https://sfenvironment.org/sites/default/files/events/cap_fulldocument_wappendix_web_220124.pdf.

¹⁶ Robert Steuteville, "Urban repair through freeway removal," CNU, <https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2021/04/22/urban-repair-through-freeway-removal#:~:text=A%20mile%2Dlong%20section%20of,to%20the%20I%2D80%20interchange>.

¹⁷ Roger Rudick, "SPUR Talk: Bury or Tear Down US-101 and the Central Freeway," StreetsBlog SF, <https://sf.streetsblog.org/2022/11/18/spur-talk-bury-or-tear-down-us-101-and-the-central-freeway/>.

¹⁸ John Norquist, *A Freeway-Free San Francisco*, [Page 18], https://www.cnu.org/sites/default/files/freeway-free-san-francisco_0.pdf.

1 WHEREAS, there have been many other examples of highways that have turned
2 to successful community spaces, while also preventing harmful impacts on marginalized
3 communities; for example, when the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco
4 damaged the elevated double-decker Embarcadero Freeway, officials turned the area
5 into the Embarcadero which has now become a beautiful water-facing, pedestrian-
6 friendly urban boulevard, and became one of the most popular attractions in the city¹⁹;
7 and

8 WHEREAS, traffic increases from the Embarcadero Freeway removal predicted
9 by Caltrans and others failed to materialize, and traffic actually improved without the
10 freeway because the network of local streets, which were underutilized because of the
11 nearby freeways, were able to manage a great deal of traffic capacity²⁰; and

12 WHEREAS, the property tax base for the city increased and thousands of units of
13 affordable housing were added, and since the freeway removal, John Norquist from the
14 Congress for the New Urbanism in “A Freeway-Free San Francisco” wrote “the
15 Embarcadero boulevard has prospered with added jobs, increased retail sales, and new
16 housing, including thousands of affordable units”²¹; and

17 WHEREAS, in 1999, voters approved a proposition to build Octavia Boulevard to
18 replace the concrete section of the Central Freeway west of Market Street that was
19 severely damaged 10 years earlier,²² and in 2003, the Central Freeway ramp north of
20 Mission Street was demolished, plans for the new Octavia Boulevard were approved,
21 and in 2004 construction on the new Octavia Boulevard began²³; and

¹⁹ Claire Wang, "Federal Highway Removal Program Raises Hopes in California," *The American Prospect*, <https://prospect.org/infrastructure/building-back-america/federal-highway-removal-program-raises-hopes-in-california/>.

²⁰ Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 5].

²¹ Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 10].

²² "Forget the Central,"

²³ "Timeline / A look back at Octavia St. and the Central Freeway," *San Francisco Chronicle*, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/news/article/Timeline-A-look-back-at-Octavia-St-and-the-2680322.php>.

1 WHEREAS, in 2004, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed Resolution
2 No. 304-04 urging the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) to study
3 relocating the freeway's on-and off-ramps and urging Caltrans to work with the city to
4 study alternatives to the freeway, and postpone retrofits in order to to lessen the
5 negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods²⁴; and

6 WHEREAS, the land beneath the section north of Market Street has been
7 redeveloped into housing and Octavia Boulevard while the remainder south of Market
8 Street was repaired,²⁵ and according to Norquist from the Congress for the New
9 Urbanism in "A Freeway-Free San Francisco", "The transformation of the Hayes Valley
10 around Octavia Boulevard has been remarkable. What was once considered a high-
11 crime, depressed area of San Francisco is now thriving"²⁶; and

12 WHEREAS, the SFCTA highlighted that full removal was actually the cheapest of
13 the alternatives analyzed, that removal would distribute traffic in such a way that it was
14 more dispersed, and equitable because not one neighborhood was absorbing the brunt
15 of automobility, that even though more intersections would be congested by removing
16 the freeway, the congestion was really acute only during rush hour while at most other
17 times of the day freeway removal would not cause traffic²⁷; and

²⁴ "Resolution urging the Governor to postpone future retrofits of the Central Freeway deck and to commit the State to participate in a study of alternative future configurations for the Central Freeway.," San Francisco Board of Supervisors, <https://www.sfbos.org/ftp/uploadedfiles/bdsupvrs/resolutions04/r0304-04.pdf>.

²⁵ Alex Mullaney, "Any Plan for the Central Freeway Must Be Community-Led, New Coalition Says," San Francisco Standard, <https://sfstandard.com/transportation/future-plans-central-freeway-community-coalition/>.

²⁶ Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 10].

²⁷ Jason Henderson, "Conservative Fight to Save Central Freeway," FoundSF, https://www.foundsf.org/index.php?title=Conservative_Fight_to_Save_Central_Freeway.

1 WHEREAS, in a follow-up study of the Octavia Boulevard freeway closure,
2 Caltrans concluded that a public information campaign alerting drivers of alternatives
3 was a success and that drivers learned new ways to navigate the city by car, and it was
4 evident the traffic increase did not ensue after a segment of urban freeway was
5 removed without a replacement boulevard²⁸; and

6 WHEREAS, in 1973, the San Francisco City Planning Commission and Board of
7 Supervisors adopted the Transit First Policy, “giving top priority to public transit
8 investments as the centerpiece of the city's transportation policy and adopting street
9 capacity and parking policies to discourage increases in automobile traffic. This policy
10 encourages multi-modalism, including the use of transit and other transportation
11 choices, including bicycling and walking, rather than the continued use of the single-
12 occupant vehicle”, as stated in the San Francisco Planning Department’s Transportation
13 Element of the General Plan²⁹; and

²⁸ Henderson, "Conservative Fight," FoundSF.

²⁹ "San Francisco General Plan," San Francisco Planning, <https://generalplan.sfplanning.org/>.

1 WHEREAS, Norquist from the Congress for the New Urbanism wrote that, “The
2 Bay Area is expected to grow by 1.7 million more residents by 2035, with San Francisco
3 proper projected to gain 160,000 new residents. (SPUR 2011). How will the city
4 accommodate these new jobs, residents, and commuters? Freeway removal could play
5 a key role. The idea of removing a road—particularly a big road that carries a lot of
6 cars—to meet transportation needs is perhaps counterintuitive. Yet cars are only one
7 component of what constitutes traffic. Transit, walking, and cycling, if properly planned
8 for, are viable ways to move through urban spaces—and these modes add to street
9 vitality. When San Francisco built the double-decked Embarcadero along its waterfront,
10 it claimed the space for cars and little else. When the Embarcadero was removed,
11 people returned to the area and today co-exist with the streetcar, buses, and cars”³⁰;
12 and

13 WHEREAS, the San Francisco Standard uncovered a 2005 provision in the San
14 Francisco General Plan’s Transportation Element that calls for a comprehensive study
15 the removal of the Central Freeway south of Market Street and an “analysis of the
16 impacts and benefits on surrounding neighborhood livability, local and regional
17 transportation, especially Muni and regional transit services, and economic impacts”³¹,
18 but the study was never done, which San Francisco County Transportation Authority
19 Executive Director, Tilly Chang was unaware of, and said the San Francisco Planning
20 Department needs to take the lead³²; and

³⁰ Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 16].

³¹ “San Francisco,” San Francisco Planning.

³² “Forget the Central,”

1 WHEREAS, the Planning Department is updating the transportation section of
2 the General Plan this year and what will happen to the section regarding the
3 comprehensive study of the Central Freeway and the impact of its removal is yet to be
4 seen³³; and

5 WHEREAS, the Planning Department's chief of staff, Dan Sider, said the
6 department still has not conducted any meaningful engagement on the freeway removal
7 study³⁴; and

8 WHEREAS, recently, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) established the new
9 Reconnecting Communities Pilot discretionary grant program, funded with \$1 billion for
10 the next 5 years for planning grants and capital construction grants, as well as technical
11 assistance, to restore community connectivity through the removal, retrofit, mitigation, or
12 replacement of eligible transportation infrastructure facilities³⁵; and

13 WHEREAS, the Central Freeway is eligible for these grants, as eligible facilities
14 include highways, roads, streets, parkways or other transportation facilities which create
15 barriers between communities, including barriers to mobility, access, or economic
16 development, due to high speeds, grade separations, or other design factors³⁶; and

17 WHEREAS, states, local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, and
18 nonprofit organizations can apply for a planning grant to study the feasibility and
19 impacts of removing, retrofitting, or mitigating an existing eligible facility or to conduct
20 planning activities necessary to design a project to remove, retrofit, or mitigate an
21 existing eligible facility³⁷; and now therefore be it

³³ Mullaney, "Any Plan," San Francisco Standard.

³⁴ Mullaney, "Any Plan," San Francisco Standard.

³⁵ "Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program – Planning Grants and Capital Construction Grant

³⁶ "Reconnecting Communities," United States Department of Transportation.

³⁷ "Reconnecting Communities," United States Department of Transportation.

1 WHEREAS, the City and County of San Francisco is eligible for a planning grant
2 from the Reconnecting Communities Pilot program to study and complete the following;
3 1) Current traffic patterns on the eligible facility proposed for removal, retrofit, or
4 mitigation and the surrounding street network; transportation network capacity;
5 alternative roadway designs or other uses for the right-of-way; impacts to the mobility of
6 freight and people; impacts to the safety of the traveling public; cost; anticipated
7 economic impacts and environmental impacts both human and natural, 2) Public
8 engagement activities to provide the public opportunities to provide input into a plan to
9 remove and convert an eligible facility, and 3) Other transportation planning activities
10 required in advance of a project to remove, retrofit, or mitigate an existing eligible facility
11 to restore community connectivity, as determined by the Department of
12 Transportation³⁸; and be it,

13 RESOLVED, the 2022-2023 San Francisco Youth Commission urges the City
14 and County of San Francisco to identify relevant historical documents, and grant
15 sources to develop freeway removal plans, such as the Reconnecting Communities
16 Pilot program, in order to support communities affected by freeways; and, be it

17 FURTHER RESOLVED, the 2022-2023 San Francisco Youth Commission urges
18 the City and County of San Francisco to complete the study on the freeway removal
19 from the San Francisco Planning Department General Plan's Transportation Element;
20 and, be it

³⁸ "Reconnecting Communities," United States Department of Transportation.

1 FURTHER RESOLVED, the 2022-2023 San Francisco Youth Commission urges
2 Caltrans to work with San Francisco to identify alternatives to the existing Central
3 Freeway spur, for which a study has already been explicitly called for.

4 FURTHER RESOLVED, the 2022-2023 San Francisco Youth Commission urges
5 the City and County of San Francisco to center the voices of black and low income
6 community members, seeing that more than 100 organizations—many of which are
7 community-serving nonprofits and cultural districts sent a letter to the Planning
8 Department and city officials asking to be in the center of any and all actions made in
9 regard to the 1.2-mile section of elevated freeway forming the boundary between SoMa
10 and the Mission³⁹; and, be it

³⁹ Mullaney, "Any Plan," San Francisco Standard.