

1 [Study of Freeway Removal]
2 **Resolution urging the City and County of San Francisco to further urge and**
3 **collaborate with the California Department of Transportation to study and explore**
4 **the removals of the Central Freeway and the Interstate 280 Freeway with**
5 **consideration of its impact on marginalized communities.**
6

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

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

16 WHEREAS, Between 1993 and 2017, highway planners built more than 30,000
17 miles of freeway lanes in the country's 100 largest urban areas, according to
18 Transportation for America, a national advocacy group,⁴ and a *Los Angeles Times*

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," *Calmmatters*, <https://calmmatters.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>.

1 investigation found that out of 200,000 people who lost their homes in that time period,
2 nearly two-thirds of them resided in Black and Latino neighborhoods⁵; and

3 WHEREAS, Planners of the interstate highway system routed many highways
4 directly and intentionally through Black and Brown communities, and

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

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

17 WHEREAS, The late Congressman John Lewis described this discrimination
18 when he said “the legacy of Jim Crow transportation is still with us. Even today, some of
19 our transportation policies and practices destroy stable neighborhoods, isolate, and

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/>.

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].

1 segregate our citizens in deteriorating neighborhoods, and fail to provide access to jobs
2 and economic growth centers”⁸; and

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

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

14 WHEREAS, The transportation sector is the single largest source of greenhouse
15 gas emissions in California, and according to the state’s most recent pre-pandemic
16 inventory, the transportation sector accounts for 41%, or 171 million metric tons, of the
17 state’s Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO₂e) emissions, and in San Francisco,
18 transportation accounts for 2.2 million metric tons CO₂e, or roughly 47% of emissions¹¹;
19 and

20 WHEREAS, The highway system carries high volumes of traffic volumes, and
21 therefore high concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions, other particulate matter,
22 volatile organic compounds, brake dust, tire wear, and noise pollution¹²; and

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/1qDBIKNdhZXyejOi3bbiqRBADm2I3kXgy/view>.

¹² Letter by Scott Wiener, “Caltrans Central Freeway Letter,” November 28, 2022,
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qDBIKNdhZXyejOi3bbiqRBADm2I3kXgy/view>.

1 WHEREAS, People who live near major highways have an increased likelihood
2 and severity of health problems associated with exposure to pollution from traffic,
3 including higher rates of asthma, cardiovascular disease, impaired lung development in
4 children, preterm and low-birthweight infants, childhood leukemia, and premature
5 death¹³; and

6 WHEREAS, Youth, older adults, people with preexisting cardiopulmonary
7 disease, and people of low income in particular have higher risks for health impacts
8 from air pollution near roadways¹⁴; and

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

14 WHEREAS, According to SF StreetsBlog, "The highest instances of pedestrian
15 fatalities are reported to center around freeway ramps that spill the highest volumes of
16 motor traffic onto wide, one-way arterial roads in the city's eastern neighborhoods. In
17 SoMa, a growing residential population is walking in some of the city's harshest
18 conditions"¹⁶; and

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.

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 "City's Pedestrian Crash Toll Dwarfs Preventative Safety Costs," Streets Blog SF, <https://sf.streetsblog.org/2011/04/12/citys-pedestrian-crash-toll-dwarfs-preventative-safety-costs/>

1 WHEREAS, The areas surrounding the Central Freeway have “long been
2 blighted by the ugly, noisy freeway and its presence has caused the surrounding
3 neighborhoods to be marginalized and blighted. This imaginative proposal will help
4 revive this part of the City and create opportunities for much needed new housing”, said
5 a student at the University of California, Berkeley¹⁷; and

6 WHEREAS, In addition to eliminating or significantly mitigating these problems,
7 ripping out the three miles of the Central Freeway and 101’s 200-foot right of way could,
8 all together, make space for some 13,000 new homes¹⁸; and

9 WHEREAS, The late San Francisco Mayor Ed Lee, SPUR, and the Spring 2014
10 graduate design studio at UC Berkeley explored and endorsed the proposal to take
11 down the spur of Interstate 280 from 16th Street northward and replace it with a
12 landscaped multiway boulevard, noting that this section of freeway was underutilized
13 and its removal could simplify the Caltrain Downtown Extension and California High
14 Speed Rail projects and allow for new housing to be built¹⁹; and

15 WHEREAS, There have been many other examples of highways that have
16 turned to successful community spaces, while also preventing harmful impacts on
17 marginalized communities; for example, when the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in San
18 Francisco damaged the elevated double-decker Embarcadero Freeway, officials turned
19 the area into the Embarcadero which has now become a beautiful water-facing,
20 pedestrian-friendly urban boulevard, and became one of the most popular attractions in
21 the city²⁰; and

¹⁷ 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%201%2D80%20interchange>.

¹⁸ 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/>.

¹⁹ John Norquist, *A Freeway-Free San Francisco*, [Page 18], https://www.cnu.org/sites/default/files/freeway-free-san-francisco_0.pdf.

²⁰ 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/>.

1 WHEREAS, Traffic increases from the Embarcadero Freeway removal predicted
 2 by Caltrans and others failed to materialize, and traffic actually improved without the
 3 freeway because the network of local streets, which were underutilized because of the
 4 nearby freeways, were able to manage a great deal of traffic capacity²¹; and

5 WHEREAS, The property tax base for the city increased and thousands of units
 6 of affordable housing were added, and since the freeway removal, John Norquist from
 7 the Congress for the New Urbanism in *A Freeway-Free San Francisco* wrote “the
 8 Embarcadero boulevard has prospered with added jobs, increased retail sales, and new
 9 housing, including thousands of affordable units”²²; and

10 WHEREAS, In 1999, voters approved a proposition to build Octavia Boulevard to
 11 replace the concrete section of the Central Freeway west of Market Street that was
 12 severely damaged 10 years earlier,²³ and in 2003, the Central Freeway ramp north of
 13 Mission Street was demolished, plans for the new Octavia Boulevard were approved,
 14 and in 2004 construction on the new Octavia Boulevard began²⁴; and

15 WHEREAS, In 2004, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors passed Resolution
 16 No. 304-04 urging the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) to study
 17 relocating the freeway’s on-and off-ramps and urging Caltrans to work with the city to
 18 study alternatives to the freeway, and postpone retrofits in order to to lessen the
 19 negative impacts on the surrounding neighborhoods²⁵; and

²¹ Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 5].

²² Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 10].

²³ "Forget the Central,"

²⁴ "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>.

²⁵ "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>.

1 WHEREAS, The land beneath the section north of Market Street has been
2 redeveloped into housing and Octavia Boulevard while the remainder south of Market
3 Street was repaired,²⁶ and according to Norquist from the Congress for the New
4 Urbanism in *A Freeway-Free San Francisco*, “The transformation of the Hayes Valley
5 around Octavia Boulevard has been remarkable. What was once considered a high-
6 crime, depressed area of San Francisco is now thriving”²⁷; and

7 WHEREAS, according to the Project for Public Spaces, after the transformation
8 of Octavia Boulevard, there was a 75% increase in transit trips, a large increase in
9 housing production, a 23% increase in employment, an increase in home values, and a
10 new development of a park²⁸; and

11 WHEREAS, In a follow-up study of the Octavia Boulevard freeway closure,
12 Caltrans concluded that a public information campaign alerting drivers of alternatives
13 was a success and that drivers learned new ways to navigate the city by car, and it was
14 evident that a traffic increase did not ensue after a segment of urban freeway was
15 removed²⁹; and

²⁶ 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/>.

²⁷ Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 10].

²⁸ “Octavia Boulevard: Creating a Vibrant Neighborhood from a Former Freeway,” Project for Public Spaces, <https://www.pps.org/article/octavia-boulevard-creating-a-vibrant-neighborhood-from-a-former-freeway#:~:text=The%20city%20accomplished%20this%20by,light%20fixtures%20and%20brick%20color.>

²⁹ Henderson, “Conservative Fight,” FoundSF.

1 WHEREAS, In 1973, the San Francisco City Planning Commission and Board of
2 Supervisors adopted the Transit First Policy, “giving top priority to public transit
3 investments as the centerpiece of the city's transportation policy and adopting street
4 capacity and parking policies to discourage increases in automobile traffic. This policy
5 encourages multi-modalism, including the use of transit and other transportation
6 choices, including bicycling and walking, rather than the continued use of the single-
7 occupant vehicle”, as stated in the San Francisco Planning Department’s Transportation
8 Element of the General Plan³⁰; and

9 WHEREAS, Norquist from the Congress for the New Urbanism wrote that,
10 “Transit, walking, and cycling, if properly planned for, are viable ways to move through
11 urban spaces—and these modes add to street vitality. When San Francisco built the
12 double-decked Embarcadero along its waterfront, it claimed the space for cars and little
13 else. When the Embarcadero was removed, people returned to the area and today co-
14 exist with the streetcar, buses, and cars”³¹; and

15 WHEREAS, A provision in the 2005 San Francisco General Plan’s
16 Transportation Element called for a comprehensive study the removal of the Central
17 Freeway south of Market Street and an “analysis of the impacts and benefits on
18 surrounding neighborhood livability, local and regional transportation, especially Muni
19 and regional transit services, and economic impacts”³², but the study was never done³³;
20 and

³⁰ "San Francisco General Plan," San Francisco Planning, <https://generalplan.sfplanning.org/>.

³¹ Norquist, *A Freeway-Free*, [Page 16].

³² "San Francisco," San Francisco Planning.

³³ "Forget the Central,"

1 WHEREAS, The Planning Department was said to be updating the transportation
2 section of the General Plan in 2022 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 seen³⁴; 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 study³⁵; and

8 WHEREAS The 2022 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 including freeways³⁶ which the
13 Central Freeway would qualify for; and

14 WHEREAS, States, local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, and
15 nonprofit organizations can apply for a planning grant to study the feasibility and
16 impacts of removing, retrofitting, or mitigating an existing eligible facility or to conduct
17 planning activities necessary to design a project to remove, retrofit, or mitigate an
18 existing eligible facility³⁷; and

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

³⁵ Mullaney, "Any Plan," San Francisco Standard.

³⁶ "Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program – Planning Grants and Capital Construction Grants

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 facility proposed for removal, retrofit, or mitigation and
4 the surrounding street network; transportation network capacity; alternative roadway
5 designs or other uses for the right-of-way; impacts to the mobility of freight and people;
6 impacts to the safety of the traveling public; cost; anticipated economic impacts and
7 environmental impacts both human and natural, 2) Public engagement activities to
8 provide the public opportunities to provide input into a plan to remove and convert an
9 eligible facility, and 3) Other transportation planning activities required in advance of a
10 project to remove, retrofit, or mitigate an existing facility to restore community
11 connectivity, as determined by the Department of Transportation³⁸; and be it,

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

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

20 FURTHER RESOLVED, The 2022-2023 San Francisco Youth Commission urges
21 Caltrans to work with San Francisco to identify alternatives to the existing Central
22 Freeway spur, for which a study has already been explicitly called for, and as well as
23 the Interstate 280 Freeway; and, be it

³⁸ "Reconnecting Communities," United States Department of Transportation.
Commissioner(s) Nguyen; Miller, Barker Plummer
YOUTH COMMISSION

1 FURTHER RESOLVED, The 2022-2023 San Francisco Youth Commission urges
2 the City and County of San Francisco to center the voices of marginalized groups,
3 seeing that more than 100 organizations—many of which are community-serving
4 nonprofits and cultural districts sent a letter to the Planning Department and city officials
5 asking to be in the center of any and all actions made in regard to the 1.2-mile section
6 of elevated freeway forming the boundary between SoMa and the Mission³⁹.

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