



February 27, 2019

The Honorable Scott Wiener
State Capitol, Room 5100
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator Wiener,

We are writing in support of your bill, SB 50, the MORE Homes Act.

As you know, we are already experiencing the effects of climate change via more intense wildfires, drought, sea level rise and the worst air quality in the country. While it is true that California has been a world leader on pushing for solutions, we still have a long way to go to get off fossil fuels, but we must do so as quickly as possible. We recognize that our way of life will be very different for future generations if we fail to act.

At the same time as we figure out how to get off fossil fuels and adapt to the effects of climate change, California is grappling with high demand and skyrocketing housing costs in many parts of the state that are also the biggest job centers. According to state housing officials, California needs 180,000 new housing units per year to meet current demand, and we are building fewer than 80,000 annually on average.¹

How and where we build more housing has vast consequences on our environment, public health, and quality of life. The more we push people away from job centers and public transportation options, the harder it will be to reduce global warming pollution. Right now the number of “supercommuters” traveling hours to and from work each day is on the rise. More than 500,000 workers in the state have one-way commutes of more than 90 minutes, according to census data.² Private passenger vehicles currently account for a full 28 percent—the largest single chunk—of California’s greenhouse gas emissions.³ This is not sustainable.

¹ Angela Hart, [“How California’s housing crisis happened.”](#) August 21, 2017, Sacramento Bee.

² Ryan Lillis, [“Think your commute is bad? These Central Valley residents have it worse than almost anyone in U.S.”](#) September 24, 2018, Sacramento Bee.

³ Alyssa Walker, [“When Electric Isn’t Good Enough.”](#) October 24, 2018, Curbed.

Even as we march towards 100% clean electricity and push car manufacturers to electrify our fleets, experts agree that we must also reduce the number of miles we travel by car to reach our climate goals. The California Air Resources Board noted in its 2018 report, California's Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act:

*California will not achieve the necessary greenhouse gas emissions reductions to meet mandates for 2030 and beyond without significant changes to how communities and transportation systems are planned, funded, and built. Specifically, CARB's 2030 Scoping Plan Update identifies reduction in growth of single-occupancy vehicle travel as necessary to achieve the statewide target of 40 percent below 1990 level emissions by 2030. Even more will be needed to achieve Governor Brown's new carbon neutrality goal by 2045.*⁴

Increasing the availability of housing near transit and reducing commute times for workers could have incredible environmental and public health benefits. A 2017 study by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, estimated that "infill" housing built in neighborhoods already near transit could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by nearly 1.8 million metric tons per year by 2030 over the alternatives, the equivalent of taking 378,000 cars off the road.⁵

Creating opportunities for more people to live in walkable and transit-oriented neighborhoods has other quality of life benefits as well. Living near job centers means shorter commutes and more free time. A 2005 study by researchers from California State University, Long Beach and UCLA found a direct link between the amount of miles commuters drive and obesity.⁶ Increasing the availability of housing near transit helps bolster the success of public transit, benefiting riders and non-riders alike by keeping more cars off the roads. Those leaving near more public transportation options have greater ability to avoid taking on more auto loan debt than they can afford, which is unfortunately all too common today.⁷ Allowing greater density in existing neighborhoods

⁴ California Air Resources Board, "[2018 Progress Report: California's Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act](#)," November 2018

⁵ Nathaniel Decker, Carol Galante, Karen Chapple & Amy Martin, Terner Center for Housing Innovation, UC Berkeley; Ethan N. Elkind & Marilee Hanson, Center for Law, Energy and the Environment (CLEE), UC Berkeley School of Law, "[Right Type, Right Place, Assessing the Environmental and Economic Impacts of Infill Residential Development through 2030](#)," March 2017.

⁶ Javier Lopez-Zetina, Howard Lee, and Robert Friisa, "[The link between obesity and the built environment. Evidence from an ecological analysis of obesity and vehicle miles of travel in California.](#)" Health & Place, Volume 12, Issue 4, December 2006.

⁷ U.S.PIRG Education Fund and Frontier Group, "[Driving Into Debt: The hidden costs of risky auto loans to consumers and our communities](#)," February 2019.

also reduces the pressure to sprawl, meaning less land must be paved over for new roads, homes, and other infrastructure. And fewer Californians are pushed out to the urban-wild interface, where they are at greater risk of wildfires.

Not every Californian chooses to live in a city. The statewide benefits of transit-oriented neighborhoods are so great, however, that state policy should incentivize, not prohibit, modest increases in density near existing transit hubs and job centers.

For all the reasons above, we express our support for SB 50.

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