

Date: May 11, 2021

To: Mayor and Members of the City Council

From: Thomas B. Modica, City Manager 

Subject: **City Partnership with the California Department of Transportation**

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At its November 17, 2020 meeting, the City Council directed City Manager and all appropriate departments to seek approval, access and reimbursement from Caltrans and all other appropriate agencies so that the City can perform needed maintenance and cleanup of State transportation rights-of-way in the most efficient, cost effective, and expeditious way possible. This memorandum provides a response to this request.

The City of Long Beach (City) has been working closely with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to encourage collaborative efforts to clean State rights-of-way, freeway onramps, and other State property that crosses jurisdictional lines throughout Long Beach. Like many agencies across the country, Caltrans experienced significant impacts to their resources due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which contributed significantly to the decrease in cleanup activity, starting in 2019 and continuing through today. This decrease in resources has exacerbated public health and safety concerns as the trash, debris, and homeless encampments have grown exponentially since the beginning of the pandemic.

### **Caltrans Interim Guidance and Prioritization**

In March 2020, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued interim guidance on how to address sheltered and unsheltered homelessness during this time of crisis. This interim guidance released by the CDC was intended to support the response to COVID-19 by local and State health departments, homelessness service systems, housing authorities, emergency planners, healthcare facilities, and homeless outreach services. This guidance was developed from the premise that the risk of spread and transmission of COVID-19 is decreased when sleeping outside compared to a congregate setting, because sleeping outside allows for increased physical distancing. However, this guidance does not mitigate the risk of other environmental factors and/or public health and safety concerns that exist from living outside. Shortly after the CDC guidance was released, Caltrans developed their own interim guidance using the CDC guidelines, intended to assist Caltrans employees, California Highway Patrol (CHP) officers, and local partners to prioritize and address encampments on Caltrans-owned property through a focused lens on safety.

Multiple agencies, including the City, had to adjust cleanup and outreach efforts to follow the Caltrans recommendations, which has resulted in fewer encampment cleanups over this period. While Caltrans does not provide social services and engagement directly to people experiencing homelessness, they do look to collaborate with local partners to help connect people to critical services and housing solutions, coordinate cleaning of trash and debris from encampment sites, respond to emergencies at encampments to inspect for potential damage to Caltrans infrastructure, and restore and maintain their property where possible. Caltrans

developed a tiered approach to prioritize the level of attention given to growing encampments located on their property. Priority levels range from Tier 1 (highest priority), when encampments pose imminent threats to safety or infrastructure and must be immediately resolved, to Tier 4 (lowest priority), where staff work with local partners to distribute trash bags and sharps containers to encampment occupants and schedule trash collection. For Tiers 1 and 2, Caltrans must work with local partners and experts on homelessness to develop a relocation strategy and plan for securing the encampment site once it is cleared. To reach the point where an encampment is removed, Caltrans requires that the encampment be found to have significant public health and safety impacts to people experiencing homelessness. The City has requested removal of several encampments based on potential traffic hazards, criminal activity, fire activity, or general safety and cleanliness concerns. Caltrans is required to meet their State policy standards before an encampment can be addressed. Long Beach has also advocated that Caltrans, at the State level, revisit this policy, as the circumstances regarding the COVID-19 pandemic has changed, the vaccine is now available to all, and Long Beach has actively offered vaccine to our population experiencing homelessness and the risk of transmission at communal shelters is significantly lower than in the past.

### **City Partnership with Caltrans District 7 Region**

The City has been working in partnership with local, regional, and State partners to address homeless-related issues over the last several years. In 2018, Los Angeles County Supervisorial District IV funded a program to create an interjurisdictional approach to addressing homelessness in areas of overlapping jurisdictions, specifically in Long Beach. The Interjurisdictional Collaborative (IJC) is made up of the Long Beach Interdepartmental Team, Los Angeles County Public Works, Union Pacific Railroad, Compton Sheriff's Department, Supervisor Hahn's Homeless Services team, Southern California Edison, Port of Long Beach, private property owners and, of course, Caltrans. As mentioned earlier, during the COVID-19 emergency response, challenges arose in how to appropriately address the growing encampments across jurisdictions. Though teams on the ground were still meeting within the IJC, they found themselves at a standstill due to the conflicting guidance and mandates that were quickly changing within the COVID-19 emergency efforts. To address these challenges, the City Manager and his leadership team began to meet monthly with the Caltrans District 7 Director and his staff to prioritize the need for ongoing maintenance, cleanups, and outreach along State property located in Long Beach.

The following list of ongoing actions were agreed upon in the initial meeting between the City Manager and the Caltrans District 7 Director:

- A cleanup and outreach priority list will be updated regularly by the IJC.
- Dates will be set monthly for 1 to 3 of the listed priority locations to be addressed in a coordinated approach by the IJC.
- Regular updates will be given to the Long Beach leadership team from Caltrans regarding cleanups and scheduling.
- Clean up efforts and/or planning will be done monthly by the collaborative team.
- The City provided a map to the Caltrans team of the small areas within Caltrans jurisdiction that the City can address immediately.

- Caltrans shared their interim guidelines with the City team and discussed for clarity and understanding.
- City Manager and Caltrans District 7 Director will continue to meet regularly to build a partnership going forward.
- Both jurisdictions continue to work with State and federal legislative offices to develop policy and increase resources.
- Long Beach is in the process of establishing a Letter of Consent/Memorandum of Understanding with Caltrans to allow Long Beach Outreach teams from the Health Department Homeless Services Division to provide outreach and support to people experiencing homelessness on Caltrans property. Outreach services include disseminating health education materials, providing and assisting clients with community referrals, resources, and linkages to services, connection to shelters/housing, relocation assistance, COVID-19 screening and testing, and assessing encampments for safety. Access to Caltrans property will also expand work for the Department of Public Works (Clean Team) who will support with cleanup efforts.

City management has also had discussions with Caltrans about the financial impact to the City if the City has to engage in work that Caltrans is not appropriately resourced to do. During this interim period to help resolve community complaints, the City has stepped in and done work usually performed by Caltrans, using City crews and at City cost. Each cleanup costs several thousand dollars, for labor, vehicles, and trash disposal fees. Per the City Council direction, initial discussions were conducted about the City performing the work and billing Caltrans; however, it was clear that Caltrans does not have the financial resources to pay the City and that City work would likely go unreimbursed. Instead, City staff have taken a more collaborative approach, facilitated with the new influx of potential federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, to supplement Caltrans work through those funds. The City is also making it a top legislative priority to request additional funding for Caltrans, similar to how Long Beach is using ARPA funds, so they can be a better resource. Additional research continues on other programs Caltrans has to address homelessness, such as programs in Northern California and Fresno to keep medians clear of encampments. Caltrans, while continuing to be under-resourced, has responded positively to the City's efforts to assist and coordinate, and we have noticed a distinct improvement in activity in the Long Beach area and cleanup activity.

In the initial discussion, priority areas where people experiencing homelessness were generating trash/debris were identified as "hot spot" locations that required immediate attention. Some of the hot spots are listed below, but please note that this list is not exhaustive. Some of these locations have been addressed, while others are still a work in progress:

- I-405 at Lakewood Boulevard south exit
- Walnut Avenue at I-405
- Cherry Avenue at I-405
- I-405 South at Woodruff Avenue on/off ramps south of freeway along soundwall
- Lakewood Boulevard north of Willow Street – behind Holiday Inn
- Willow Street east of Lakewood Boulevard – under I-405
- 710 transition to 91 West at 67<sup>th</sup> Street and Coachella Avenue

- I-405 South between California Avenue and Orange Avenue
- 1500 West Wardlow Road

### **State Delegation Efforts**

To improve interjurisdictional coordination, the City has also engaged legislative delegation offices at the County and State level. Representatives from the offices of County Supervisor Janice Hahn, State Senator Lena Gonzalez, and State Assemblymember Patrick O'Donnell have participated in numerous meetings between the City and Caltrans. This approach with the City's delegation has helped to address challenges regarding coordinated cleanups on State property and elevating hot spot locations.

The City has also registered support for Senate Bill (SB) 635, authored by Senator Gonzalez, which would require Caltrans to collaborate with the Office of the Inspector General and relevant health, State, and local agencies to conduct a study recommending ways to improve coordination of cleanups on State rights-of-way. The review proposed by SB 635 would help to advance the City's priorities to better coordinate between Caltrans and our regional partners, as well as address other barriers to roadside cleanups.

### **Next Steps**

City leadership and the IJC recognize the urgency to continue to connect people to permanent housing solutions, while simultaneously addressing cleanliness issues across the City. The priority is to move as efficiently as possible to engage people into services and housing options while also addressing the public health and safety concerns that arise from living in encampments in areas not meant for habitation. This continues to be an all hands-on-deck effort while finding common ground and understanding about what is needed to push toward a common goal. The IJC will continue to work together to identify outreach and cleanup priority locations while following all protocols as appropriate. The City will also finalize the Letter of Consent/MOU to solidify the ongoing partnership with Caltrans to keep moving this work forward and prioritizing locations for cleanup throughout the City. At an upcoming City Council meeting, staff will be seeking authorization to execute the Letter of Consent/MOU that is being developed with Caltrans.

### **Fiscal Impact**

On March 16, 2021, the City adopted the Long Beach Recovery Act (LBRA) to advance economic recovery and public health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Included in the LBRA is \$5 million to support increased staffing and resources to coordinate with Caltrans and regional partners to conduct cleanups at City, County, and State property in Long Beach. These funds are needed to cover the additional costs necessary to maintain Long Beach as clean as possible and to continue our partnership with Caltrans and other agencies. The increased workload associated with dealing with an increased number of people experiencing homelessness and the additional trash generated as a result of the pandemic is substantial and requires funding support beyond typical levels. Staff are preparing a follow-up memorandum that outlines the plan for the \$5 million to support the City's enhanced Clean City Initiative over the next few years, and will include enhanced support for our Commercial

Corridor Improvement Program. Funds will be allocated to support various services including, but not limited to, litter abatement, illegal dumping servicing, graffiti abatement, weekend cleanups, and pressure washing targeted rights-of-way areas. Our deep cleaning events will also be doubled and allow staff to schedule two major deep cleaning events a week instead of just one. Additional details on the enhanced services funded by federal funds will be provided in a separate memorandum.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to contact Deputy City Manager Teresa Chandler at (562) 570-5116 or [Teresa.Chandler@longbeach.gov](mailto:Teresa.Chandler@longbeach.gov).

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