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September 22, 2011

Chairman Mark Green and Steering Committee Members
Alameda County Transportation Commission
1333 Broadway, Suite 300
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Chairman Green and Steering Committee Members:

We at the Alameda County Office of Education, appreciate the staff time and interest given to the development of an Eco Student Bus Pass Program for Alameda County students. The report, by aggregating information about other similar programs across the country, provides us with a great resource to draw from. We are encouraged by findings that demonstrate increased transit use by youth in all of the long-standing free bus pass programs; particularly, that Tempe's free youth bus pass program doubled enrollment between 2005 and 2011, and that Portland was successful in increasing transit ridership to school from 44% before the program in 2000 to 80% today.

The report calls out a number of potential challenges that we believe are resolvable. We are excited and ready to work with the ACTC, transit operators, parents, students and members of the educational community (and the community at large) to answer those questions and develop and deliver a program that meets common goals: To create a new generation of transit users; reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality; and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities, extracurricular activities and jobs.

The ACOE will develop an educational program for students that we believe will be essential to the overall success of the bus pass program. The program will focus on three areas: The threat of Climate Change to our health, environment and wellbeing; the value of transit use as a powerful way to reduce GHG emissions; and the importance of creating a culture of respect for transit and its riders. We believe it will help address some of the concerns identified about the perception other transit riders may have with more youth riding transit.

Just as the Countywide Transportation Plan, at its core, is a plan about quality of life, the Eco Student Bus Pass Program is about improving lives today and in the future. We look forward to an opportunity in the near future to meet with Chairman Green and Art Dao to provide additional information that complements the current report and discuss program considerations in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Unique Holland
Director, Communications & Public Affairs
Alameda County Office of Education