

RESOLUTION NO. ____

A RESOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALO ALTO

OFFERING COMMENTS ON SB 532 (WIENER) *The Safe, Clean, and Reliable Bay Area Public Transportation Emergency Act*

WHEREAS, any official position of the City of Palo Alto, with respect to legislation, rules, regulations or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state, or federal government body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution; and

WHEREAS, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused a steep decline in public transit ridership and revenue. The federal government provided \$4.4 billion of emergency relief funds to Bay Area transit operators, which allowed agencies to continue to deliver transit services over the past three years. However, the operators are expected to exhaust those federal relief funds in the coming years; and

WHEREAS, in response to this fiscal crisis facing the agencies, the Newsom Administration and State Legislature provided \$5.1 billion of transit capital and operating funding – including \$1.1 billion of new funding – in this year’s state budget to give transit agencies across the state more time to recover ridership and make adjustments to adapt to post-pandemic travel patterns. The entire \$5.1 billion was made flexible to be used to cover operating shortfalls, and all together, allows transit to avoid any fiscal cliffs until 2027; and

WHEREAS, Senate Bill 532 (Wiener), introduced as a “gut and amend” bill on June 22, 2023, would raise tolls on the seven state-owned Bay Area bridges by \$1.50 effective January 1, 2024 for even more support for transit operators; and

WHEREAS, bridge tolls are already high and set to be raised again in 2025 for Regional Measure 3. The tolls are overwhelmingly paid for by non-San Francisco residents, but the funds would inequitably go to largely fund Muni and BART operations into San Francisco which may not serve the toll payers’ commute corridors; and

WHEREAS, in a post-pandemic world, commuters who drive a car or pick-up truck across our bridges and paying tolls are statistically lower income and are disproportionately people of color. Post-pandemic, we have a bifurcated society in the Bay Area of those with the luxury to work remotely and those that cannot. Many of these bridge-crossing drivers cannot work from home nor reasonably take transit, and the cost of providing transit to them would be prohibitively expensive.

WHEREAS, SB 532 is a gut and amend bill that would bypass the voters to levy a bridge toll increase on the commuters who can least afford it. It could undermine the region’s ability to raise transit revenue at the ballot going forward; and

WHEREAS, The state budget relief package bought the region valuable time to maintain service while transit agencies find ways to operate more efficiently, collect fares from existing riders, and provide a more attractive service to build ridership and revenue; and

WHEREAS, The Bay Area should wait to see how transit agencies use the state budget relief funding to improve their services to respond to rider concerns and then the region can reevaluate new revenue options next year.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that by the adoption of this Resolution, the City of Palo Alto hereby offers these comments as part of its 2023 State Legislative Advocacy Program to SB 532 (Wiener) that seeks to raise tolls on the seven state-owned Bay Area bridges to fund transit operations and encourages the Legislature to explore other ways to financially support the transit agencies. There are clear benefits and drawbacks to this legislation and more effort should be focused on equity for low-income workers if the legislation continues to move forward.

PASSED AND ADOPTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALO ALTO this [DATE] by the following vote:

AYES:	X	COUNCILMEMBERS:
NOES:	X	COUNCILMEMBERS:
ABSENT:	X	COUNCILMEMBERS:
ABSTAIN:	X	COUNCILMEMBERS:

APPROVED: