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PROJECT KOLIKA



February 24, 2025

Senator Dave Cortese
Senate Transportation Committee
State Capitol, Room 405
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Senate Bill 10 (Padilla): Otay Mesa East Toll Facility Act: Toll Revenues: Environmental Mitigation

Dear Senator Cortese,

As members of the Transboundary Pollution Coalition for Advocacy and Healing, we write to you in support of SB 10, which would expressly authorize funds from the new toll road (State Route 11) to be used for water treatment, environmental mitigation, and restoration of the Tijuana River Valley.

The Transboundary Pollution Coalition for Advocacy and Healing is a growing coalition of nearly 50 nonprofit and community-based organizations representing residents, workers, businesses, and recreators throughout San Diego County. We are dedicated to addressing the severe environmental and public health crisis caused by transboundary pollution in the Tijuana River Watershed located in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

For years, communities across South San Diego County and North Baja have endured harmful effects of transboundary pollution from Mexico. Ongoing cross-border flows of contaminated water have significantly damaged the economy and environment of the region. Most critically, billions of gallons of raw sewage and industrial waste have created an untenable and serious public health threat to local residents. The dangerous water quality has been linked to thousands of illnesses in the region, with emerging research from San Diego State University and the University of California San Diego also revealing alarming levels of toxic gasses in air samples from the open sewer that the Tijuana River has become.

A major factor contributing to this crisis is the rapid expansion of manufacturing across the border in Mexico. In response to the increasing demand for cross-border trade, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) has begun construction of the Otay Mesa East Port of Entry (OME POE), a four-lane toll road along State Route 11, developed in partnership with Caltrans and other federal and state agencies in both the U.S. and Mexico. While this project aims to facilitate trade, it also risks exacerbating the environmental burden on communities already suffering the consequences of increased industrial activity.

The construction of an additional highway will likely lead to greater expansion and intensification of border activities, further overburdening already vulnerable communities. Without mitigation measures, this increase in transportation and manufacturing will continue to degrade air and water quality, putting the health and well-being of residents at even greater risk.

SB 10 provides a critical solution by allowing a portion of toll revenues from the new border crossing to fund essential water treatment, environmental restoration, and wastewater infrastructure improvements.

These funds would directly support long-overdue mitigation efforts in the Tijuana River Valley, ensuring that frontline communities receive the necessary resources to combat pollution, improve public health, and restore ecological balance.

By securing a dedicated revenue stream to address the worsening environmental crisis caused by cross-border trade and industrial expansion, SB 10 represents a crucial step toward environmental justice and sustainable border development.

For these reasons, SB 10 (Padilla) aligns with the Transboundary Pollution Coalition for Advocacy and Healing's goal to advance policies that protect communities in this cross-border region from environmental harm, and we are proud to support this important legislation. We urge your "aye" vote when it is heard in your committee.

Respectfully,

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