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NEWS RELEASE

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ENVIRONMENTAL GROUP ASKS COURT TO STOP COUNTY FROM ILLEGALLY SPENDING STATE TRANSIT FUNDS FOR ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

San Francisco, California — Our Children's Earth filed a petition this week asking the Superior Court of California to stop the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments from illegally spending transportation funds specifically set-aside for public transportation.

“The California public has a Constitutional right to have access to public transportation,” said Tiffany Schauer, Executive Director of Our Children's Earth. “The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments has historically and systematically circumvented the law and denied public transit funding to those that need it most. This action seeks to enforce State law that directs state transit funding to transit and not roads.”

The petition, filed Monday in Santa Barbara County Superior Court, asks the court to order Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) to set aside a decision made last month authorizing the County to spend about \$3.5 million of State Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds for roads and streets rather than for public transportation services.

OCE is joined in the litigation by Jesus Estrada, a member of Santa Maria's Mixtec community, and David Pierce of Lompoc. The suit seeks an order stopping the illegal diversion of transit funds to roads and consideration of transit services to meet the needs of thousands of strawberry workers who have few other transportation choices.

The TDA was enacted to ensure that all the people of the state, including the elderly, the handicapped, the youth, and the citizens of limited means, freely have access to public transportation. It is funded from state tax revenue and the proceeds of are intended to be “fully expended to meet the transit needs that exist in California.” Under TDA, no funds can be used except for public transportation services, specialized transportation services, or facilities provided for the exclusive use of pedestrians and bicycles unless statutory procedures are followed and findings are made as required by TDA.

Several cities and Santa Barbara County have historically used TDA funds for streets and roads purposes in spite of long-standing community unmet transit needs that are otherwise reasonable to meet. These jurisdictions and their public works departments have historically usurped TDA funds and used them for routine expenses including staff salaries and other non-specific purposes.

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