



Environment and Climate Commission

INFORMATION CALENDAR

[Meeting Date (Month Day, yyyy)]

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Environment and Climate Commission (ECC)
Submitted by: Ben Gould, Chairperson, ECC
Subject: Letter regarding Transportation Division Staffing Issues

To the Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council,

We are writing to express concern about the vacancy rate in the Transportation Division within the Public Works department and echo the priorities of the Transportation and Infrastructure Commission in their recent letter.

As the Environment and Climate Commission, our responsibility is to “advise the City Council on matters relating to emerging issues, policies, projects, programs, planning efforts, activities, and funding of environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience” (BMC 3.82.040). Transportation has been consistently identified as the single largest source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in Berkeley since our very first climate action plan, in 2009¹. That plan recommended strategies to “accelerate implementation of the City’s Bicycle and Pedestrian plans,” “manage parking to effectively minimize driving demand,” and “encourage and support alternatives to driving.” We believe the same recommendations hold true today: the completion of the Vision Zero Action Plan, the Berkeley Bicycle Plan, and the Pedestrian Plan are critical measures needed to reduce GHG emissions in Berkeley and meet our climate action targets.

However, the current 45% vacancy rate within the Transportation Division threatens these goals and jeopardizes our ability to meet the climate emergency with the urgency it demands. As noted in the City Auditor’s recent report, *Staff Shortages: City Services Constrained by Staff Retention Challenges and Delayed Hiring*, Berkeley’s staff vacancies reduce city services, delay major transportation projects, and increase mandatory overtime². The report indicates that current staff vacancy rates are higher

¹ City of Berkeley, “Climate Action Plan”. <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/Berkeley-Climate-Action-Plan.pdf>

² Berkeley City Auditor, “Staff Shortages: City Services Constrained by Staff Retention Challenges and Delayed Hiring” <https://berkeleyca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Staff%20Shortages%20-->

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than that of most other Bay Area cities, and that low employee satisfaction levels, unmanageable workloads, poor communication from City leadership, and ineffective hiring procedures results in employee turnover and prolonged vacancies. City of Berkeley employees reported lower job satisfaction than federal government employees (55% to 73%). As a result of a high vacancy rate, City employees remaining in City Hall face greater responsibility with insufficient compensation. Only 44% of City employees reported that their workload was “manageable.”

These vacancies prevent the implementation of climate-critical plans like Vision Zero. The following plans, which have a significant impact on our city’s ability to reduce single occupancy automobile usage and therefore respond to climate change, have been adversely impacted due to staffing issues:

- Bicycle Plan
- Transit First Policy Implementation Plan
- Vision Zero Action Plan Implementation
- Pedestrian Plan
- E-bikes for City Staff initiative
- Telegraph Ave Multimodal Corridor Project
- Ohlone Greenway Safety Improvements Project

Berkeley is not on track to meet its climate action goals, and with these staffing challenges it is in danger of falling even further behind. Berkeley’s original climate goals for 2020, set in 2009, included a target of reducing citywide emissions by 33%. This target was not met: Berkeley reduced city wide emissions by 26% by 2020. Transportation stubbornly remains the highest source of emissions. As regional transit networks are likely to continue to struggle due to changing ridership patterns post-pandemic, Berkeley cannot rely on transit to reduce automobile usage and meet our climate goals – we must implement bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, and this requires adequate staffing to deliver projects.

The city must follow the recommendations of the City Auditor and the Transportation and Infrastructure Commission to address this staffing crisis, stemming the loss of expertise and institutional knowledge and rebuilding our capacity to deliver and implement transportation improvements. ECC urges the City Council to:

[%20City%20Services%20Constrained%20by%20Staff%20Retention%20Challenges%20and%20Delayed%20Hiring_0.pdf](#)

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- Support the professional staff in the Transportation Division as they work to carry out Council-approved policies, by considering staff capacity when introducing new legislation, and limiting or prioritizing new legislation during periods of short staffing.
- Support the City Manager in improving the hiring process and ensuring a fully staffed HR department to accelerate the recruitment of new Transportation Division staff.
- Support the City Manager in improving retention among existing Transportation Division staff by improving performance evaluation processes, promotional opportunities, and compensation where needed.
- Support the City Manager in recruiting strong transportation leadership knowledge within the City Manager's office and creating a work environment that both supports and encourages staff leadership and innovation and promotes internal employees to fill the current Transportation Division leadership vacuum.

The stakes for this work could not be higher - the derailment of Vision Zero, the failure to complete the Hopkins Corridor and Placemaking Study, and impediments to other critical projects shines a bright light on Berkeley. Our adopted plans are commendable, but our inability to act accordingly only furthers traffic violence and continued reliance on polluting fossil fuels. Addressing the climate crisis demands that Berkeley fully staff its Transportation Division to effectively tackle our greatest source of greenhouse gas emissions head-on. We urge you to rectify this staffing shortfall with haste.

Sincerely,

Environment and Climate Commission