LANDWATCH
MONTEREY COUNTY

October 26, 2026

Ms. Tanisha Taylor
Executive Director
California Transportation Commission
1120 N Street, MS 52
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Letter of Support for the 2026 Senate Bill 1 Solutions for Congested Corridors Program and Local Partnership Program – Scenic State Route (SR) 68 Corridor Improvement Project Phase 1

Dear Ms. Taylor:

On behalf of LandWatch Monterey County, I write in strong support of the Transportation Agency for Monterey County (TAMC) and Caltrans' 2026 Senate Bill (SB) 1 Solutions for Congested Corridors Program (SCCP) and Local Partnership Program (LPP) applications for the Scenic State Route (SR) 68 Corridor Improvement Project Phase 1 (Project). The Project will replace the signals at San Benancio Road, Corral de Tierra Road, and Laureles Grade Road with roundabouts, build two wildlife crossings, construct a 0.77-mile Class I multiuse trail in Toro Park, and restore Salinas–Monterey transit service with two zero-emission buses. LandWatch has supported roundabouts on this corridor since TAMC's Scenic Highway Plan, when the TAMC Board voted 16–1 in August 2017 to adopt the roundabout concept as the preferred alternative.[1] Phase 1 leverages $22 million in local Measure X sales tax revenue that Monterey County voters committed to this corridor.[2]

SR 68 is the principal link between the Salinas Valley and the Monterey Peninsula, carrying 25,000 to 30,000 vehicles per day.[1] TAMC reports westbound morning queues extending up to 2.8 miles and delays of roughly 20 minutes, borne disproportionately by Salinas Valley workers commuting to Peninsula hospitality and service jobs. Peak-hour westbound demand at the Portola Drive ramp is approximately 1,250 vehicles per hour.[3]

Adaptive signals have been tested on SR 68, and the field data show their limits. In 2025 TAMC funded a pilot of artificial-intelligence adaptive traffic signal control (ATSC) at all nine SR 68 signals, and Caltrans placed the system in operation on May 4, 2026.[4] LandWatch regarded the pilot as a fair test. The results presented to the TAMC Board on August 26, 2026, are instructive. At San Benancio Road, westbound median AM peak-hour throughput rose from 1,110 vehicles per hour before adaptive control to 1,143 during the spring operating period, an increase of 3 percent, and fell to 1,089 during the summer period.[3] Both figures remain well below the roughly 1,250 vehicles per hour that seek to use the corridor. That outcome is predictable: an adaptive controller reallocates green time among competing movements, but it cannot create intersection capacity. FHWA itself describes the technology's value as maximizing "the capacity of existing systems."[5] When demand exceeds that capacity, time given to the mainline is taken from the side streets, and that is what the pilot recorded. AM side-street delay increased at seven of the eight intersections reported, including 23 percent at San Benancio Road, 33 percent at Laureles Grade, 52 percent at York Road, and 55 percent at Corral de Tierra Road; only Pasadera Drive/Boots Road improved. Twenty of the 25 public complaints Caltrans received in 2026 concerned side-street and left-turn operations.[3] Traffic modeling evaluating traditional signal, adaptive signal, and roundabout at the San Benancio westbound approach tells the same story: AM queues of about 80 vehicles before the pilot, about 30 with adaptive control, and about 8 with a roundabout, with roundabout throughput exceeding 1,400 vehicles per hour, the only alternative modeled to serve peak demand.[3]

The benefit-cost analysis measures roundabouts against adaptive signals, not against doing nothing. Caltrans' benefit-cost analysis for Phase 1 uses the adaptive system as its baseline, so every benefit it reports is in addition to what AI signal control already delivers.[6] Over the 30-year analysis period (2032–2061), peak-hour person-hours of travel fall from 22.4 million under adaptive control to 15.2 million with roundabouts, a 32 percent reduction and 7.2 million hours returned to commuters, valued at $70.0 million in present value. Projected crashes at the three intersections fall from 757 under adaptive control to 293 with roundabouts, a 61 percent reduction, including a drop in injury crashes from 466 to 181. By comparison, adaptive control reduces crashes only about 5 percent from the no-build condition (798 crashes). Discounted at 4 percent, total benefits of $117.8 million exceed costs of $100.3 million, a benefit-cost ratio of 1.17.[6] These estimates are conservative: the analysis assigns no value to fatal-crash prevention, holds annual travel-time savings flat with no allowance for traffic growth, and applies a crash

modification factor specific to multilane roundabouts rather than the larger reductions documented for roundabouts generally.

The national safety record for roundabouts is consistent and strong. FHWA designates roundabouts a Proven Safety Countermeasure and reports that converting a signalized intersection to a roundabout reduces fatal and injury crashes by 78 percent.[7] The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) reports that U.S. conversions from signals or stop signs reduced injury crashes 72 to 80 percent and all crashes 35 to 47 percent. Most relevant to SR 68, a study of 19 higher-speed rural intersections with approach speeds of 40 mph or more found all crashes fell 62 percent and injury crashes 85 percent.[8] Roundabouts achieve this by eliminating the high-speed right-angle and left-turn collisions that cause the most serious injuries. The benefit is greatest for older drivers, for whom intersection crashes account for 43 percent of fatal crash involvements among drivers 80 and older, compared with 24 percent for drivers 16 to 59.[8] We recognize that IIHS also finds smaller safety gains at two-lane roundabouts than at single-lane designs, and that drivers and pedestrians at multilane roundabouts face lane-choice and yielding challenges.[8] The benefit-cost analysis already accounts for the first point through its multilane crash factor; we urge Caltrans to address the second through clear lane guidance, splitter islands, and well-marked crossings in final design.

Roundabouts also deliver operational, environmental, and lifecycle benefits that signals cannot. IIHS documents delay reductions at converted intersections ranging from 13 to 89 percent, carbon dioxide and fuel consumption reductions of 23 to 34 percent, and a service life of about 25 years versus about 10 for a typical signal, with generally lower maintenance costs.[8] The Phase 1 analysis estimates more than 5,500 tons of carbon dioxide avoided over the analysis period.[6] A roundabout continues to function during power outages and requires no detection hardware, software, or vendor support to keep traffic moving.

Phase 1 is not an either-or choice between roundabouts and adaptive signals. Adaptive control will continue to manage the six remaining signalized intersections until future phases can be funded, while Phase 1 targets three intersections where the pilot recorded the largest side-street penalties. The Project's two wildlife crossings advance the wildlife-connectivity goal set in TAMC's Scenic Highway Plan;[1] the analysis assumes a 90 percent reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions at those locations, worth $2.9 million in present value.[6] The Toro Park trail and zero-emission buses give residents of the corridor and Salinas Valley commuters alternatives to driving that do not exist today.

For these reasons, LandWatch Monterey County strongly supports TAMC and Caltrans' 2026 SB 1 SCCP and LPP applications for the Scenic SR 68 Corridor Improvement Project Phase 1. We respectfully urge the California Transportation Commission to fund this important investment in safety, mobility, and environmental stewardship.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Michael DeLapa
Executive Director

Cc: Todd Muck, Executive Director, Transportation Agency for Monterey County

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Sources

1. LandWatch Monterey County, "State Route 68 Scenic Highway Plan" (TAMC Board action of Aug. 23, 2017; corridor volumes).
https://landwatch.org/issues-actions/monterey-county/highway-68-corridor/state-route-68-scenic-highway-plan/

2. TAMC, Board Highlights, Aug. 26, 2026.
https://www.tamcmonterey.org/files/da999f3f4/TAMC-Board+Highlights-August+26%2C+2026.pdf

3. TAMC, "Scenic State Route 68 Corridor Improvement Project Update," Board presentation, Aug. 26, 2026 (adaptive signal pilot results, traffic modeling, PeMS demand).
https://www.tamcmonterey.org/files/3cd498974/Scenic+State+Route+68+Corridor+Improvement+Project_Presentation.pdf

4. "Adaptive AI signals are coming to Highway 68," Monterey County Weekly (clarified July 18, 2025); Caltrans District 5 announcement of May 4, 2026 activation as reported at
https://letsdatascience.com/news/caltrans-deploys-ai-traffic-control-on-highway-68-dd77ffea.
https://www.montereycountynow.com/news/local_news/adaptive-ai-signals-are-coming-to-highway-68-and-roundabouts-may-be-out-for-good/article_4ebbe420-751e-4df8-9f02-4e943ff2299f.html

5. FHWA, Every Day Counts, "Adaptive Signal Control Technology."
https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/innovation/everydaycounts/edc-1/asct.cfm

6. Caltrans/TAMC, SR 68 Phase 1 Benefit-Cost Analysis (Performance Analysis; Safety Benefits; Peak Hour Travel Time Savings; Emission Savings tables), 2026.

7. FHWA, Proven Safety Countermeasures: Roundabouts, FHWA-SA-21-042 (citing AASHTO Highway Safety Manual, 2010).
https://www.sjtpo.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/fhwa-pscm-roundabouts.pdf

8. Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, "Roundabouts" research area (citing Retting et al. 2001; Eisenman et al. 2004; Rodegerdts et al. 2007, 2010; Isebrands & Hallmark 2012; Hu et al. 2014; Wang & Cicchino 2022).
https://www.iihs.org/research-areas/roundabouts