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**From:** [Susan Cameron](#)  
**To:** [WebMail - CCD](#)  
**Subject:** Public comment on Purchase of State Route 72 (Whittier Blvd)  
**Date:** Saturday, January 21, 2023 12:59:36 PM

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Dear Mayor Vinatieri and members of the City Council,

Negotiations on the purchase of Whittier Blvd from the State of California have been appearing on the city council's closed session agendas for months. As a constituent of both entities involved in this negotiation, I would like to state my strong objection to these negotiations being held in secret, with little or no information given to the public about how our tax dollars may be spent and the future liabilities the city is negotiating to take on.

Whittier Blvd is still a state highway, and is used as a corridor for travel between the 605 freeway and Orange County. Cruising between Boyle Heights and Whittier is no longer a weekly event. Freeways have reduced its use for through-traffic. As a result, the automobile dealerships that used to form a large part of Whittier's sales tax base have left, but State Route 72 is still a state highway, and still used for a significant amount of travel through Whittier between destinations outside Whittier. Yet the city council has not explained to Whittier residents why Whittier should take on full responsibility to maintain this major piece of infrastructure forever, during an era when state law is imposing more and more obligations on local governments and placing more and more restrictions on local governments' ability to raise revenue.

Strong Towns and other organizations that perform such analyses have found that infrastructure maintenance is a liability that can bankrupt cities. State and federal funds are sometimes made available to build or improve infrastructure, but rarely to maintain what already exists, and it is this maintenance that is all too often not properly accounted for. [Strong Towns makes these recommendations](#) to make it possible to fund infrastructure maintenance:

**Stop adding more infrastructure.** When you have a leaking roof, you don't put an addition on your house. When your car engine is sputtering, you don't upgrade the speaker system. This is an easy and obvious policy to enact; the only thing preventing it is the momentum of the current approach.

**Stop bringing more acreage into the city limits.** Again, how can we make promises to new property owners when we can't keep the ones we have made to our current residents? And as Memphis has realized, how can we increase the tax burden on our own residents to support developers and others outside the city limits? We can't and we shouldn't.

**Shift focus from expansion to getting more out of existing investments.** Any community that wants to improve its fiscal health needs to obsessively focus on getting a higher return on its existing infrastructure investments. That is a complex balancing act of physical investment, financial analysis, and cultural dialogue. All

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three are critical, but this is where the work needs to occur, not the (comparatively easy, yet destructive) expansion model.

The residents of Whittier need to know that our elected representatives are [doing the math](#) to assure this is a fiscally sound transaction, and not one that will send the city closer to bankruptcy in years to come. Our neighboring city of La Habra Heights recently faced a crisis when they couldn't afford to maintain a major thoroughfare used to cross their city, which had formerly been the county's responsibility. Whittier residents deserve to understand the risks we could face a similar crisis.

Yet because real estate negotiations are an [exception to the Brown Act](#), the public has no information on what is being negotiated, and likely won't until it is a done deal and the City Council will likely vote unanimously to approve whatever it is you have been secretly negotiating for many months. We may get a chance to comment to LAFCO on the annexations that may be needed before the transaction can go through, but we are being left in the dark right now and unable to comment on what is anticipated to be one of the city's biggest new obligations taken on in our lifetimes.

I don't believe the Brown Act *prohibits* you from disclosing the substance of the negotiations and exactly what you are trying to achieve. It only *allows* you to conduct these discussions behind closed doors. Yet in this case, since all Whittier residents are constituents and taxpayers of both entities in this negotiation, I believe it should be made public and transparent. This is not a case of potentially being at a negotiating disadvantage because one side is a private entity with no obligation to the public. It should be open and transparent.

Please, I urge you, be transparent with Whittier residents about what you are negotiating and its costs and benefits while there is time for meaningful understanding, input, and community buy-in if the deal is sound. Please comment and report in the open public session of your next meeting about what is being done behind closed doors. It is the right thing to do.

Thank you,

Susan Cameron