TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER  DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DATE: JULY 21, 2008  CMR: 316:08

SUBJECT: POLICY AND SERVICES COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL IN SUPPORT OF CITY’S POSITION ON SOUTHBOUND HIGHWAY 101 RAMP METERING PROJECT

RECOMMENDATION
The Policy and Services Committee and staff recommend that the Council:

1. Continue support for the existing Council position on ramp metering as detailed in the May 29, 1996 letter from Mayor Wheeler to Caltrans, and
2. Recommend that Santa Clara County implement a Memorandum of Understanding with Caltrans for this issue similar to the one in place for San Mateo County, which would specify the responsibilities of Caltrans and the local agencies in the oversight and monitoring of the operations of the ramp metering program, and
3. Direct staff to convey the City’s position to VTA and Caltrans and report back to the City Council.

BACKGROUND
On June 30, 2008 staff presented a review of eleven regional transportation issues to the Policy and Services Committee, including the Southbound Highway 101 Ramp Metering project (CMR:267:08). The full report from the Policy and Services Committee will be brought forward to the City Council after the summer break. However, in order to provide timely input to the Valley Transportation Agency (VTA) and Caltrans on the ramp metering project, staff is bringing the Committee recommendation forward for Council approval at this time. Staff will also bring forward a report to Council on the VTA Governance issue prior to the Council break.

VTA is the lead agency for the activation of ramp metering on the southbound ramps on Highway 101 from Embarcadero Road in Palo Alto to De La Cruz Blvd. in San Jose. The ramps to be metered in Palo Alto include the Oregon and Embarcadero southbound on-ramps. The project schedule calls for completion of the ramp metering plans in the fall of 2008, initiation of ramp metering by the end of the year and project evaluation in early 2009.

Staff has identified a number of issues related to ramp metering and its impact on Palo Alto. These include the project’s impact on traffic on surface streets and the need for establishment of
a formal process between VTA/Caltrans and the local agencies for monitoring and resolving any problems that arise in the future. (See Attachment A, CMR 267:08 with Ramp Metering attachments only).

The City Council last considered the issue of ramp metering in April 1996. The Council endorsed the position that the ramp metering lights should not be turned on until such time as there is a formal agreement between Caltrans and the local agencies detailing the operational aspects of the project and the responsibilities and process for addressing operational concerns in the event ramp metering had impacts on local streets. A copy of the letter from Mayor Wheeler to Caltrans is included in Attachment A. Caltrans and the City/County Association of Governments (C/CAG) created such a Memorandum of Understanding for the implementation of ramp metering in San Mateo County (Attachment B). The MOU designates the C/CAG Board of Directors as the policy body for policy decisions related to the implementation of ramp metering. The MOU further establishes a Technical Committee comprised of representatives from Caltrans, C/CAG and all the public agencies in the county. The Technical Committee is charged with monitoring and overseeing the program, providing guidance and making all technical decisions with regard to operational strategies and parameters of ramp metering. VTA staff has indicated that this is not contemplated by VTA and that, at present, no VTA Board action is anticipated before the ramp metering is turned on.

COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS
On June 3rd, the Policy and Services Committee voted 3-0 (Barton absent) to forward staff’s recommendation to support the existing (1996) Council position on ramp metering, but added a recommendation that Santa Clara County implement a Memorandum of Understanding with the local agencies on this issue similar to the one in place in San Mateo County. The action minutes from the P&S Committee meeting are provided as Attachment C. Upon Council action, staff will draft an updated letter to Caltrans and VTA for the Mayor’s signature, reflecting Council direction.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS
This recommendation is consistent with existing Council policy and Comprehensive Plan transportation policies.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW
VTA is the lead agency for this project and will need to complete the appropriate environmental analysis prior to implementation of the ramp metering.

ATTACHMENTS
A: CMR 267:08, with Ramp Metering exhibits only
B: Memorandum of Understanding between C/CAG and Caltrans
C: Action Minutes from the Policy and Services Committee meeting of June 3, 2008