

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0039
(916) 319-2039
FAX (916) 319-2139

DISTRICT OFFICE
9300 LAUREL CANYON BLVD., FIRST FLOOR
ARLETA, CA 91331
(818) 504-3911
FAX (818) 767-3907

E-MAIL
Assemblymember.Rivas@assembly.ca.gov



COMMITTEES
CHAIR: NATURAL RESOURCES
BUDGET
HEALTH
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REVENUE AND TAXATION
BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE NO. 3 ON
RESOURCES AND TRANSPORTATION
JOINT COMMITTEES
BUDGET
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

January 14, 2021

Tom Omishakin
Director
California Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 942873
Sacramento, CA 94273

RE: MPD-20-02R6

Dear Mr. Omishakin,

I write to you today to seek clarification on the Maintenance Policy Directive (MPD-20-02R6) issued by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

My office has received hundreds of calls from constituents who have been adversely impacted by encampments located on state property because of the interruption to regular maintenance services throughout these corridors. In numerous instances, constituents have reported fires near residential areas, and one incident even resulted in the Los Angeles Fire Department performing a water drop by helicopter on the property of a residence. The fire was started by unsheltered individuals in the area and was exacerbated by the overgrown dry brush on Caltrans property.

I appreciate the significant operational challenges that COVID-19 has placed on how to maintain our state infrastructure, while at the same time ensuring the health and safety of our homeless population. What is unclear under MPD-20-02R6 is whether this policy is unintentionally putting our residents' health and safety at risk by failing to conduct the necessary removal of debris and overgrowth that can potentially cause fires or other health and safety issues. Fast-moving fires have the potential to jeopardize the safety of those who are housed and unhoused. MPD-20-02R6 does not specify the safe distance from an encampment that could allow for ongoing Caltrans cleanup and as a result, several areas of my district have failed to receive upkeep.

I have attempted to ensure effective communication with Caltrans over the last several years including meeting with yourself, and recently meeting with District 7 Director Tony Tavares, and Caltrans External Affairs. Unfortunately, we continue to experience challenges in the district addressing issues communicated by my district office or myself.

Director Tom Omishakin

January 14, 2021

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I appreciate your willingness to work with my office on these issues and would appreciate your thoughts and timely response on the following questions:

1. What criteria is being applied to determine when and where trash and debris removal will take place?
2. What does Caltrans consider a safe distance from an encampment to conduct trash and debris removal?
3. I have previously sent the locations of highly impacted areas in need of immediate attention to Caltrans External Affairs that have gone unanswered. What is the time frame to respond to outstanding customer service requests?
4. What constitutes a “safety concern” as it relates to triggering a cleanup? Does safety include potential risks to nearby businesses and residences?

We appreciate your attention to this letter. I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (916) 319-2039.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Luz Rivas', written in a cursive style.

LUZ RIVAS

Assemblywoman, 39th District