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California governors decry red tape Environmental review process stalls stimulus action

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OP-ED:

California and the nation are in the midst of a severe economic crisis. Without urgent action, the crisis may deteriorate beyond our control. A successful federal stimulus package will be one which includes infrastructure funding for sectors like transportation that can make the difference in our recovery. And while we must act in an aggressive manner, we simply cannot waste our finite financial resources. We must harness all the state, local and private resources available to address the scale of the challenge.

To be successful, federal stimulus dollars must result in immediate job creation. But they must also create strategic benefits for the future of our country and economy. As an example in the transportation sector, most "shovel ready" expenditures today are for repair and maintenance, but not "breakthrough" new infrastructure projects like clean, modern-goods movement systems. Why? Because these larger, more strategic projects face long environmental review-process delays. Yet many of these projects of national significance are actually solutions to address the public- health, safety and environmental needs of our communities.

California is the gateway for almost half of our nation's imports and exports, which support our regional and national economies. Modernization of our transportation systems addresses air quality and congestion issues in the region while stimulating both national and local job creation. It also positions us as long term competitors in the global economy.

As former California governors who faced emergencies during our administrations, we know that the smart use of emergency powers to enable

rapid response can make the difference in ending a crisis. Our advice to President Obama and Congress is to recognize the urgency by granting and encouraging the use of streamlined public procedures for our nation's governors to use as your field commanders. Governors must be enabled to work with their state and local leaders to combine these federal streamlining measures with their own state emergency powers to get federal stimulus dollars where they will have the best chance for both timely job creation and strategic, long-term economic benefits.

And because the nation's infrastructure needs so far exceed federal funds available, it is critically important that the stimulus package not only permit, but encourage private partnership and investment in these federal, state and local efforts.

Potholes are a symptom of the crisis, but clean, modern infrastructure systems create sustainable economic and environmental solutions for our nation's future while addressing our communities' urgent public health and safety needs. As our new president has told us, "We need new models to address our critical challenges."

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