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Comment Received From: Prof David Blekhman
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**Comments from Cal State LA on Workforce Development
Investment for Hydrogen and EV Mobility**

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LOS ANGELES
COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING, COMPUTER SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Hydrogen Research and Fueling Facility

The Honorable Nancy Skinner
Commissioner, California Energy Commission
715 P Street, Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Sustainable Energy and Transportation Program at Cal State LA Comments on the 2026–2027 Investment Plan Update for the Clean Transportation Program Following the June 30, 2026 Advisory Committee Meeting; Docket No. 26-ALT-01

Dear Commissioner Skinner,

I appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments following the June 30, 2026 meeting of the Advisory Committee for the Clean Transportation Program Investment Plan. I am a professor and faculty lead for the Sustainable Energy and Transportation program in the Department of Technology, College of Engineering, Computer Science, and Technology at California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA). I also serve as the Technical Director for the Cal State LA Hydrogen Research and Refueling Facility (HRFF). In 2025, I was honored to receive the President’s Distinguished Professor Award in recognition of my scholarship and student education in hydrogen infrastructure and ZEV mobility.

I would like to update you and members of your staff on the special programs we offer at Cal State LA that directly address California’s workforce development needs in the areas targeted by the Investment Plan.

Hydrogen Infrastructure and Safety Workforce Training

I served as the Cal State LA Principal Investigator for the CEC’s IDEAL ZEV Workforce Pilot funding opportunity (GFO-21-602), which invested about \$6.8 million to support 13 community-based ZEV training projects across the state. Our project, “California ZEV Engineering Workforce Pilot by Cal State LA and Cerritos Community College,” was extremely successful in training Cal State LA engineering students in hydrogen technologies. It also supported the development of a hydrogen station internship training program, including two courses focused on onboarding and operations and maintenance for hydrogen stations.

Regretfully, this pilot investment has not yet been followed by growth and expansion support. Therefore, Cal State LA encourages continued investment in existing IDEAL centers of excellence in clean mobility workforce training.

In addition, the Cal State LA HRFF is focused on advancing hydrogen safety training. The program’s strong safety emphasis earned Cal State LA students a Gold Award in the 2025 Hydrogen Safety Challenge, as well as an Honorable Mention in 2026. Hydrogen safety is a broad and demanding engineering field. For this reason, workforce training in hydrogen safety should be supported by the CEC within the CSU and UC systems.

These programs are high-value programs. They may produce smaller numbers of trainees if judged only by outcome numbers that can also be increased through retraining of existing engineering workforce, but the return on this investment is significant. These graduates enter EPC firms, as well as other businesses, where they help create blue-collar and downstream jobs across the clean transportation and hydrogen sectors.

EcoCAR Competition Workforce Training

Cal State LA has been selected as one of 20 universities in North America to compete in the EcoCAR Innovation Challenge, a prestigious U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) program that prepares the next generation of engineers to lead the future of clean mobility. Cal State LA is the only university representing California in this four-year competition. The competition challenges students to design and build advanced mobility solutions using cutting-edge technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, and super computing. The program provides an unparalleled hands-on educational experience and has transformed the traditional classroom environment into a hub for automotive innovation. Participating teams will explore advanced propulsion system modifications, including the integration of electric motor systems and team-designed high-voltage batteries.

Managed by Argonne National Laboratory, the EcoCAR Innovation Challenge is the 15th installment of DOE's Advanced Vehicle Technology Competitions (AVTC) series. Cal State LA has participated in three previous efforts: EcoCAR2 (2011–2014), focused on a Chevy Malibu plug-in hybrid electric vehicle conversion; EcoCAR3 (2014–2018), focused on a Chevy Camaro plug-in hybrid police interceptor conversion; and the Battery Workforce Challenge (2023–2026), focused on a custom battery pack for a Ram ProMaster. For the 2026–2030 EcoCAR Innovation Challenge, the Cal State LA team will be working with a Stellantis Jeep Cherokee on deep, high-performance electrification as a fire response command vehicle.

With hundreds of engineering students going through this experience, we respectfully ask that the CEC recognize the value that programs such as EcoCAR bring to California. Targeted investment and support in these programs would help cultivate a highly skilled workforce while accelerating innovation in California's EV automotive industry and clean mobility sectors.

In conclusion, Cal State LA's programming at the HRFF and EcoCAR, including technical staff development, hydrogen safety expertise, and participation in world-class clean mobility workforce projects, demonstrates the need for focused and expanded support for workforce programs in the CSU and UC systems. Considering the state's clean transportation and workforce needs as well as other workforce training providers, the current allocation of \$2,000,000 annually should be significantly increased. Please contact me at blekhman@calstatela.edu or 323-343-4569 if more details are required.

Sincerely,



David Blekhman, Professor, Sustainable Energy and Transportation
Technical Director, Hydrogen Research and Refueling Facility