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October 15, 2013

Councilmember Jose Huizar  
Los Angeles City Council District 14  
200 N. Spring Street, Room 465  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**Project Title:** SOTO STREET BRIDGE OVER MISSION ROAD & HUNTINGTON DRIVE SOUTH: BRIDGE NO. 53C-0013

Dear Councilmember Huizar,

We are writing to make you aware of a grave injustice and error that deserves your immediate attention. As it stands, the Soto Street Bridge over Mission Road is to be demolished within the next two months. Despite the community's objection to the destruction of this historic landmark, the project has proceeded forward on grounds that the Soto Street Bridge was determined not eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

A review of documents associated with the Soto Street Bridge project reveal that statements on Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523 Forms submitted in December of 2002 do not correspond to the statements in Dr. Portia Lee's original 2001 Historic Architectural Survey Report (HASR). The 2002 DPR 523 Form (attachment A) submitted for the Soto St Bridge over Mission Road claims to quote Dr. Portia Lee's HASR findings, stating,

*"The relevant historic content to determine the significance of the Soto Street Bridge appears to be Criteria A. Originally constructed as a grade separation for rail transportation (Pasadena Short Line) enhancement and safety, the bridge, now used strictly for automobile transportation, has lost its historic function and lacks integrity of material, design, feeling and association. It therefore does not appear to be eligible for listing in the National Register under Criteria A. Although it retains many of the original Art Deco design elements, they are not significant and the bridge lacks architectural quality and distinction. Therefore, it does not meet National Register Criterion C. The bridge is not associated with important historic personages, as no direct association with Henry Huntington or his successors can be made. Therefore, it does not appear eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion B."*

However, Dr. Portia Lee's original 2001 HASR reveals that her statements are the exact opposite of those in the DPR 523 Form (attachment B). Dr. Lee's report states that the bridge's relevant historic content falls under Criterion C, Architecture-Art Deco and that it retains many of the Art Deco ornamental elements for qualification under Criterion C, Design and Construction. Dr. Lee also points out that the Soto Street Bridge has historic significance under Criterion A, which also makes the Soto St Bridge eligible as a Historic Landmark. Dr. Portia Lee's original Significance statements are,

**"The relevant historic content to determine significance for the Soto Street Bridge over Mission Road and Huntington Drive appears to be Criterion C, Architecture: Art Deco Public Works Projects in Los Angeles in the 1930s. In addition to its significance through Art Deco ornamentation, it has some historic significance under Criterion A through its association with the Federal Aid Projects of the Depression era. In addition, the bridge conveys its significance as part of the historic Pasadena Short Line railroad. The Bridge has retained substantial integrity with the exception of association lost when the bridge was taken out of rail service. It also appears that some decorative features may have been lost in seismic upgrade.**

**Originally built as a grade separation for rail transportation enhancement and safety, the bridge has lost its historic function. However, it retains many of the Art Deco ornamental elements for qualification under Criterion C, Design and Construction. These elements are significant, although they do not appear to be strong enough to warrant an upgrading of the structure to Category 4, Eligible for the National Register."**

Even if the decorative elements, substantial artistic integrity, and historic significance as part of the Pasadena Short Line were not enough to upgrade its eligibility for the NRHP, the bridge is still eligible for preservation as a California Historic Landmark, under

**California Office of Historic Preservation.** The bridge also has great **historic significance at the local level** to merit preservation in the City's **Office of Historic Resources.**

In addition to the artistic and historic significance with the Pacific Electric's Pasadena Short Line, several other factors make this bridge worthy of preservation. For example, 1) It's the last 4 track Pacific Electric inter-urban bridge in the southland, 2) It's a rare example of a railway/railroad bridge converted to highway use, 3) It is a very rare four-track bridge not in or adjacent to a railroad or railway storage yard, and 4) The bridge is 77-years old.

The preservation of the Soto Street Bridge directly adheres to the North East Community Plan's Goal #14: a community which preserves and restores the monuments, cultural resources, neighborhoods and landmarks which have historical and/or cultural significance, and Objective 14.1, to ensure that the plan area's significant cultural and historical resources are protected, preserved and/or enhanced. The destruction of the Soto St Bridge goes against the goals and policies outlined in the North East Community Plan.

As Councilmember of District 14, you have been the lead advocate of the "Bringing Back Broadway" initiative. This initiative includes the proposed Downtown L.A. Streetcar, "an approximately 4-mile urban streetcar system reminiscent of LA's Historic Streetcar System operated by the Pacific Electric (P&E) Railway." The Soto Street Bridge was specifically built for P&E's streetcars during P&E's hay-day. To sit back and allow the destruction of this unique and iconic bridge would be a tragic mistake and a permanent stain on your legacy of work preserving and promoting our City's historic past.

As a great philosopher once said, "Original artwork and novel moments in time cannot be duplicated, only imitated." The Soto Street Bridge is an original, one of a kind Art Deco monument, the likes of which we will never again see once it is destroyed.

You have officially recognized El Sereno as the oldest community in LA, predating the City of Los Angeles by 10 years (Council File 09-1538). Yet, tragically, the historic working class community of El Sereno has neither "building, structure, site, or plant life recognized as being important to the history of the city, state, or nation." This is not because El Sereno has none to contribute. Many of the El Sereno's important historic buildings and landmarks have been destroyed without consideration of their historic significance. You can be the one that ends this destructive pattern, beginning with the Soto Street Bridge.

The destruction of the last rare and authentic Pacific Electric landmark will mark the end of any tangible connection to P&E's existence and its important contribution to our City and community's development. It will also be another profound and irreplaceable loss of El Sereno's historic past.

Whether through error and/or unintended misstatement of Dr Lee's original HASR findings, the result has been the misidentification of the Soto St Bridge as a non-historic landmark. Your immediate intervention is required to stop the unnecessary destruction of this historic bridge. We are asking you to stop this project until the historical significance of the Soto Street Bridge is reviewed and reevaluated by a qualified third party.

We hope your commitment to preserve the City's historic buildings and landmarks makes itself evident once again.

Sincerely,

Jorge Garcia  
El Sereno Historical Society

Cc: Honorable Mayor Eric Garcetti  
Board of Public Works Commission  
Los Angeles County Supervisor, 1<sup>st</sup> District, Gloria Molina  
Assemblymember, 51<sup>st</sup> District, Jimmy Gomez  
CA State Senate District 24, Dr. Ed Hernandez