



August 23, 2023

Governor Gavin Newsom  
State of California  
1021 O Street, Suite 9000  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Urgent need for funding following Tropical Storm Hilary

Dear Gov. Newsom:

Thank you for your recent visit to the City of Palm Springs as we braced for Tropical Storm Hilary. When we met with you on Sunday, we expressed our concerns that the desert would be immobilized by devastating flood waters and high winds. The storm's destruction will no doubt impact our community for the weeks and months to come.

Your decision to mobilize state resources was hugely beneficial. But additional funding is critical if we are going to not only rebuild our communities' infrastructure and also ensure we are better positioned for future storms.

One of the hardest hit roadways was Indian Canyon Drive, a critical connection point for the Cities of Palm Springs and Desert Hot Springs and the quickest route from Interstate 10 to reach the Coachella Valley's only Level 1 trauma center. As you will see from the photos and news coverage on [www.cvag.org/flooding](http://www.cvag.org/flooding), large chunks of Indian Canyon are washed away and the remaining roadway has sustained considerable damage. Our most optimistic estimates say the road will be closed for weeks, but it may take longer. This closure is already paralyzing the region's transportation network and preventing our residents from accessing work, school and other essential services. Alternative routes are turning into parking lots as frustrated residents try to make it to their destinations.



Climate data trends for the Palm Springs area indicate that unpredictable weather events such as extended droughts and major flood events are becoming even more frequent with climate change. Our cities have been working closely with the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) to address roadways like Indian Canyon Drive, which has long been a top priority project for the entire Coachella Valley. Last month, CVAG submitted an application to the California Transportation Commission's (CTC) Local Transportation Climate Adaptation Program for what we are calling the Addressing Climate Change, Emergencies and Sand Storms (ACCESS) – Indian Canyon Drive Project. The ACCESS project includes improvements that increase our climate resiliency, enhance mobility, preserve the environment, and improve public health and safety for residents and

visitors. Specifically, the project includes two bridges to elevate at-grade crossings along the Whitewater River. It also includes a solar-shaded active transportation pathway that connects Desert Hot Springs to CV Link, a 40-mile bike, pedestrian, and low-speed electric vehicle pathway. The project also includes wildlife undercrossings that protects the ecosystem for threatened and endangered species, which aligns with the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan. We are seeking \$50 million for this \$74 million project, with CVAG and our local agencies covering the remaining costs.

The solution for Indian Canyon stemmed from a Flood and Blowsand Risk Assessment and Improvement Plan that CVAG wrapped in 2019. The study identified solutions to increase the resilience of impacted local roads and find more cost-effective alternatives to keep roads like Indian Canyon open. Thoughtful placement of pre-fabricated bridges and culverts have replaced previous plans of a \$250 million bridge that extends across the entirety of the Whitewater River.

Tropical Storm Hilary is unfortunately just the latest climate related event to wreak havoc on our community and local roads. In 2019, the Coachella Valley experienced the Valentine's Day deluge that also flooded Indian Canyon Drive Gene Autry and Vista Chino – the same roads that are now damaged and closed as a result of Tropical Storm Hilary. Even before this storm, in 2023 alone, Indian Canyon Drive has been closed for 38 days due to flood and blowsand events. It becomes nearly impossible to get in and out of our cities after these events. Emergency response times are compromised due to the impassable roads, putting lives at risk during critical situations. The repair of these roads is not just a matter of convenience but a necessity for the safety, economic stability and overall wellbeing of our residents.

As we have after previous storms, our communities are now banding together to clear our roads and repair the damage. But as the Coachella Valley continues to feel the impacts of climate change, we need the State's continued partnership in order to take a more proactive approach – and to secure funding for long-term solutions that will keep roads such as Indian Canyon open during future weather events. Should you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Tom Kirk, CVAG Executive Director, at 760-346-1127 or at [tkirk@cvag.org](mailto:tkirk@cvag.org).

Sincerely,



Grace Garner  
Mayor, City of Palm Springs



Lisa Middleton  
Councilmember, City of Palm Springs



Scott Matas  
Mayor, City of Desert Hot Springs  
Chair, Coachella Valley Association of Governments

CC:

Eleni Kounalakis, Lt. Governor, State of California  
Assemblymember Greg Wallis, Assembly District 47  
Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia, Assembly District 36  
Senator Kelly Seyarto, Senate District 32  
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Carl Guardino, Vice Chair, California Transportation Commission  
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Nancy Ross, Councilmember, City of Cathedral City  
Ernesto Gutierrez, Councilmember, City of Cathedral City  
Raymond Gregory, Councilmember, City of Cathedral City  
Charlie McClendon, City Manager, City of Cathedral City  
Roger Nunez, Mayor Pro Tem, City of Desert Hot Springs  
Russell Betts, Councilmember, City of Desert Hot Springs  
Gary Gardner, Councilmember, City of Desert Hot Springs  
Jan Pye, Councilmember, City of Desert Hot Springs  
Doria Wilms, Interim City Manager, City of Desert Hot Springs  
Jeffrey Bernstein, Mayor Pro Tem, City of Palm Springs  
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Christy Holstege, Councilmember, City of Palm Springs  
Scott Stiles, City Manager, City of Palm Springs