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Board Chair Pam O'Connor leads a coalition of local officials, business and community leaders in calling on the Governor and state legislature to assure Southern California will receive its fair share of transportation funding in the state's new budget. The group held a news conference, Thursday, on the Plaza.



Photo by Ned Racine

Local Leaders Rally Support for Regional Transportation Funding

- Protest 'bait and switch' by Governor, legislature in funding transfer

By RICK JAGER

(July 19, 2007) Alarmed by the threat of losing up to \$1.3 billion statewide to fund new highways and transit projects, local leaders rallied support Thursday for transportation funding and called on the public to protest the Governor's budget proposals.

Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor and CEO Roger Snoble were joined by elected officials, transportation, business and community leaders from throughout Southern California at a news conference on the Plaza.

"The bottom line is that the Governor's budget will decimate our state's commitment to transportation funding, taking \$1.3 billion away from our efforts to improve our mobility, while cleaning our air," said O'Connor. "In LA County, alone, we stand to lose \$230 million jeopardizing new projects like the...Exposition light rail project...the I-10/605 interchange and numerous other worthwhile projects."

She said the Governor proposes shifting "spillover gas tax monies" from transportation to the state's general fund, then backfilling by taking some

money from the state transportation bonds voters approved in November 2007 for a variety of highway, public transit and goods movement projects.

As a result of the pending budget cuts, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) is poised to postpone funding upcoming transportation projects throughout the state, including \$43 million for the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and \$314 million for construction of the Expo Line.

‘Do the right thing’

“This move...will take billions of dollars away from Los Angeles and Southern California that’s necessary to be able to continue the quality of life here,” said Snoble. “Today we are calling upon Sacramento to do the right thing, restore vital transportation dollars for the region, and give LA its fair share....”

Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky termed the state budget proposal “a classic bait and switch operation.” He urged the “legislature and the Governor to reconsider and to do the right thing.”

“This area is starving for public mass transit,” Yaroslavsky said. “We voted for and supported Proposition 1B because we wanted to accelerate the construction of mass public transit.”

Board Member John Fasana, a Duarte City Councilmember, said the Governor previously stood on the side of improving transportation throughout the state and backed Proposition 1A to protect transportation funding. “We’ve seen a total change in priorities,” he said.

For decades the state budget has contributed very little funding to public transit systems, allocating almost all state revenue from fuel-related taxes to roads and highways.

More money is at stake

This budget year, more money is at stake for public transit systems than usual because the law requires lawmakers to invest more money in public transit systems when gas prices skyrocket so that they are able to cover increased fuel costs and take on additional riders.

Los Angeles City Councilmember Wendy Greuel called the proposal to reallocate transportation funding a “zero sum game” that jeopardizes projects “that are definitely needed in our cities to relieve gridlock.”

She urged the region’s residents who “are sitting in gridlock” to call the Governor and members of the legislature and “let them know that this region says ‘No,’ to raiding the funds....”

Gary Toeppen, President & CEO of the LA Area Chamber of Commerce, said the Governor’s proposal “will negatively impact commuters, businesses and the economy by further reducing needed investments in transportation.”

“We can’t afford to put the brakes on needed public transit projects. We have gridlock on our roads, ambitious global warming commitments to meet, and a growing population that will require more public transit,” said David Wyman, Campaign Director with The California Public Interest Research Group (CALPIRG).