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Metro Board Acts to Put New Transportation Sales Tax on November Ballot

By RICK JAGER

(July 24, 2008) The Metro Board of Directors today took a critical step in placing on the November ballot a new half cent sales tax measure for Los Angeles County that would finance dozens of transportation projects from fixing potholes to major highway construction, buying clean fueled buses and building new rail lines spread throughout the county in a concerted effort to keep pace with major population and job growth.

Metro directors approved an ordinance including an [expenditure plan](#) that spells out in project detail how the sales tax – estimated to generate \$40 billion over 30 years – would be spent. These monies also could be leveraged with state, federal and private sector funding. The Metro Board also passed a resolution formally requesting the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to place the ordinance on the ballot for the Nov. 4, 2008 countywide general election. If the measure garners at least a two thirds vote, it would become law in January.

The ballot measure also is contingent on passage of state legislation, AB 2321 (Feuer), which would give Los Angeles County authority to levy the tax if voters approve it.

The new sales tax would fund an aggressive attack on gridlock in the nation's most traffic-choked region. It would finance such new transit projects as the Foothill Extension of the Metro Gold Line, a subway extension and Expo light rail line on the Westside, a rail connection to LAX, extending the Metro Green Line to the South Bay corridor, a downtown rail connector that would make transfers on the light rail lines seamless, an extension of the popular Metro Orange Line busway to Chatsworth and much more. Major highway projects such as adding capacity to the I-5 from the I-605 to the Orange County Line also would be funded.

In addition, the 88 cities and county unincorporated areas would receive 15 percent of sales tax revenue for local transit services, street resurfacing, left hand turn signals, bikeways, pedestrian improvements and other local transportation priorities.

Twenty percent of the monies would help subsidize countywide bus operations, which will help keep fares low for seniors, students and commuters. Another 5 percent will pay for Metrolink operations, maintenance and expansion and for purchasing Metro Rail train cars, rail yards and other system improvements.

To ensure that money will be spent in Los Angeles County for exactly what voters were promised, the ballot measure calls for an annual independent audit and report to taxpayers and ongoing monitoring and review of spending by an independent taxpayer oversight committee.

The private nonprofit Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC) estimates the sales tax would jump start the regional economy. Construction of new highway and transit projects would generate \$32 billion in local economic activity and create employment equivalent to 210,000 full-time, year-long jobs spread over a 30-year construction period.

The LAEDC also found that the tax increase would cost residents just \$25 more per person annually. Residents will pay about 42 percent of the sales tax raised with businesses and tourists footing the rest of the bill. In contrast, the American Automobile Association and the TRIP transportation research group estimate that traffic congestion costs county residents more than \$2,000 per person a year for wasted fuel, lost productivity and sales and other costs.

Once the measure is placed on the November ballot, Metro will develop and mail to 3.3 million households a voter information packet that details every aspect of the transportation sales tax measure.