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## Measure for Half-Cent Sales Tax Increase Clears Hurdles

- Challenges remain for placing transportation funding measure on Nov. 4 ballot
- [Timeline](#): Measure R wends its way to the November ballot

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Sept. 3, 2008) When the Metro Board voted to support a new half-cent sales tax measure on the November ballot, a measure that would finance dozens of transportation projects, its July 24 action capped months of work and set a complex process in motion.

The tax measure, Measure R, which will end after 30 years, would provide funds to fix potholes, fund major highway construction, buy clean fueled buses and build new rail lines spread throughout Los Angeles County in a concerted effort to keep pace with major population and job growth.

Measure R would also block a fare increase for the Metro System proposed for 2009, as well as delay fare increases for five years for riders with disabilities, seniors, students and those receiving Medicare benefits.

"The likelihood in the next few years of getting the support [in federal dollars] we need is not likely," said Metro Board Chair Antonio Villaraigosa, when the Board voted on June 26 to draft the sales tax increase.

In voting to draft the measure, Metro directors included an [expenditure plan](#) that details how the sales tax—estimated to generate \$40 billion over 30 years—may be spent. These monies also could be leveraged with state, federal and private-sector funding.

The idea behind the measure—the first sales tax increase for transportation since 1990—is to generate funding for transportation within Los Angeles County.

Because the measure is a tax increase, voters must approve it by a two-thirds majority. If approved, the measure would become law in January.

## Several hurdles remain

Several hurdles remain and an unexpected one appeared Aug. 5. At that time the five-member Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors deadlocked 2 to 2 (Supervisor Gloria Molina abstaining) whether to

put the measure on the Nov. 4 general election ballot. That hurdle fell Aug. 12, when the supervisors voted 3 to 2, with Supervisor Don Knabe reversing his previous 'no,' to place the measure on the ballot.

The ballot measure's future also rests on passage of Assembly Bill 2321 by Assemblyman Mike Feuer, D-West Hollywood, which would give Los Angeles County authority to levy the tax if voters approve it. (The bill is necessary to amend the current sales tax cap.)

The bill, introduced in February 2008, would affect only Los Angeles County.

AB 2321 identifies several projects that may receive new sales tax revenue generated from Measure R. These include Phase 2 of the Expo Line (from Culver City to Santa Monica), a project along Crenshaw Boulevard (that mode is undefined) and extension of the Gold Line farther east in the San Gabriel Valley.

Other projects identified are a subway extension west, improvements to the 5 (Golden State) Freeway and 210 (Foothill) freeways and \$200 million for extending the Metro Green Line to Los Angeles International Airport.

**Lawmakers approve AB 2321**

Another hurdle fell on Aug. 31, when the California State Legislature approved AB 2321. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has 30 days from the date of the bill's passage to sign it.

Although the governor has threatened to veto all bills coming to him until the Legislature passes a state budget, he recently made an exception and signed a bill pertaining to a high-speed rail system bond measure on California's November ballot

CEO Roger Snoble has stated that approximately 35 percent of the funds generated by the measure "would go directly to new transit projects, primarily light-rail projects and the subway. Twenty percent would go to highway bottlenecks to really help move regular vehicles and, of course, buses on the highways."

Snoble has stated that another 20 percent of the funds would go to bus operations, and five percent would go to operating the upcoming rail services, the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and the Expo Line.

According to Snoble, the remaining 20 percent would go to local cities, with a goal of their fixing potholes, improving traffic light synchronization, maintaining local streets and improvements for bicyclists and pedestrians.