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Metro Experiences Ground Swell of Public Support for Traffic Relief

More than 40,000 people have gone to Metro's web site this spring and several thousand others have attended community meetings to learn more about Metro's draft Long Range Transportation Plan while sharing their vision for a traffic-free future for Los Angeles County.

There's been unprecedented public interest in figuring out how to handle not only today's mobility needs but looking ahead to the year 2030 when the county's population will swell by 2.4 million people.

While demanding traffic relief, many also have told Metro that they are willing to pay for it and that includes widespread support for putting before voters a new half cent sales tax to fund an array of projects from filling potholes and widening streets to highway improvements and constructing new busways and rail lines.

At its meeting Thursday, June 26, the Metro Board of Directors will consider requesting that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors put a new half cent sales tax for transportation measure on the November ballot. The decision will coincide with Board consideration of Metro's draft Long Range Transportation Plan, which prioritizes dozens of new highway, street and public transit projects in virtually every corner of Los Angeles County.

Freeway gap closures, construction of carpool lanes, interchange improvements and truck lanes, traffic signalization on major streets, bikeways and pedestrian improvements would complement new public transit projects including new busways, freeway express bus service, and new rail lines crisscrossing the county to handle the county's projected population growth by the year 2030. The plan also looks at the cost of these projects combined with existing transit operations and projected funding.

Funding has been identified for many baseline projects that will make a difference in managing traffic such as State Route 138 widening, building the Expo light rail line to Santa Monica and a Crenshaw Corridor bus rapid transit or light rail project.

However, even more could be done if the strategic portion of the plan, currently unfunded, is implemented. This includes such projects as the Westside subway extension, extending the Metro Gold Line to Montclair, a regional connector that would link the Metro Gold, Blue and Expo lines in downtown Los Angeles, connecting the Metro Green Line to LAX, and highway projects such as the SR-710 gap closure.

If the Long Range Transportation Plan is fully implemented, coupled with changes in commuting behavior where more people opt for public transit, carpools and vanpools or take more trips during off peak hours, traffic congestion would be greatly reduced, according to Metro officials.

A lot has been done in the past decade to ease traffic in the Los Angeles region. In fact, the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) last Fall cited the multi-pronged approach Metro, Caltrans and their transportation partners have taken to relieve congestion.

While this region remains the nation's most congested, it also ranks number one in terms of operational improvements that squeeze more capacity out of local streets and highways and number three in savings as a result of the expanding public transportation system, according to TTI. The Long Range Transportation Plan would further those gains but funding to fully implement it remains a challenge.

Since Washington and Sacramento are strapped for funds, there has been a grassroots movement among local business and community leaders and elected officials to explore creative ways of financing the dream of hassle-free mobility with local monies that would ensure local control.

Some of the community and business organizations and local government that have expressed support for a state law authorizing Metro to put a new transportation sales tax measure on the ballot are the City of Los Angeles, CALPIRG, Environment California, Los Angeles Business Council, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and the Valley Industry & Commerce Association.

To generate public discussion about the county's transportation future, billboards, bus and rail advertising, and web and newspaper ads debuted in mid-March and these are steering the public to a new interactive Metro.net web page where the public can learn more about current and proposed highway and public transit projects and options for funding them. The draft Long Range Transportation Plan is posted on the web site, and, to date, more than 8,000 copies have been downloaded. Metro Board Chair Pam O'Connor also has hosted live chats on the Internet and cable television call-in shows on this topic.

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