



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE—May 25, 2017

Puget Sound, Los Angeles agencies seek fairness for local taxpayers and challenge call-out in Trump Administration budget document

The chief executive officers of Sound Transit and The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) issued the following statement in opposition to the Trump Administration’s proposed major cuts of transit funding programs.

The agencies disagree with being named in the administration’s FY 2018 budget proposal, which asserted the agencies “realize waiting for grant funding is not the most efficient way to meet their local transportation needs.” In fact, that very federal grant funding acts as a keystone to the consensus necessary to raise local funds for transit. Without that federal encouragement, we cannot succeed alone locally.

Full assertion:

“The Budget proposes reduced funding for this program, which provides Federal funding for local transit projects that should be funded by State and localities that benefit from their use. Localities are better equipped to scale and design infrastructure investment needed for their communities. Several major metropolitan areas, including Denver, Los Angeles, and Seattle, have already begun to move in this direction by asking residents to approve multi-billion dollar bond measures to speed the delivery of highway and transit investments. These regions realize waiting for Federal grant funding is not the most efficient way to meet their local transportation needs. Federal resources should be focused on making targeted investments that can leverage private sector investment and incentivize the creation of revenue streams where possible.” Source: See Page 76 (Page 87 of the PDF) at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/whitehouse.gov/files/omb/budget/fy2018/msar.pdf>

Agencies’ statement:

“The administration's assertion that our regions can deliver transit solutions for our citizens without federal partnership is unfair. The voters of our communities stepped up and voted to tax themselves to provide a path out of punishing

congestion. For that bold action, they should be rewarded at the federal level, not punished.

The ballot measures adopted by our voters assumed a reasonable level of federal matching funds to deliver our most challenging transit solutions through the continued funding of the Federal Transit Administration's Capital Investment Grant program. But the administration's budget proposes to terminate that federal partnership for challenging projects at a time when ever-worsening road congestion threatens to choke off our and other region's economic growth. This wrong-headed budget proposal ignores the will of our local voters and the real-world challenges we are facing in our rapidly growing cities."

Sound Transit background

Without congressional action, the most immediate impact of the budget proposal would be elimination of a \$1.17 billion federal commitment to the Lynnwood Link light rail extension that was identified last February when the Federal Transit Administration authorized the project to enter into the engineering phase. The region's congressional delegation recently secured a \$100 million FY 2017 initial installment toward the \$1.17 billion commitment.

Following regional voters' approval of a \$54 billion Sound Transit 3 ballot measure in November 2016, over the next 25 years Sound Transit's financial plans assume approximately \$5 billion in New Starts funding for voter approved capital projects. Sound Transit's next project in the pipeline is seeking \$500 million in federal funding to reach the City of Federal Way.

"Continued strong federal partnership will be instrumental to extending our light rail service north to Lynnwood and south to Federal Way, giving our commuters the choice of getting out of the ever-worsening congestion on I-5. From there, we can extend onto Everett and Tacoma," said Sound Transit CEO Peter Rogoff. "The voters of Puget Sound have already voted to tax themselves for the local share to make these projects happen. They now have the right to expect a reasonable return on their federal taxes to also address these critical regional needs."

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) background

The Metro Purple Line Extension, from downtown Los Angeles to Westwood and the Veterans' Administration Medical Center, is Metro's most challenging project. It serves one of the densest and most diverse population and job corridors in the entire nation. More than 1.1 million jobs are located in this internationally significant employment center and the transit line will ultimately serve more than 40,000 trips daily and almost 14 million trips annually. Our local tax proposal, Measure M, accelerated the Purple Line Extension by requiring a significant local share from the county's taxpayers AND a federally funded portion, reflecting Southern California's prominence as a global economic engine. In this manner, the federal funds serve a critical "leveraging" role in the funding proposal package.

In contrast to the administration's contention that Metro believes federal funds are inefficient, we, in fact, find federal funds essential to our local success in raising funds for critical national transportation needs. These federal funds are serving international objectives for the United States as well as our local population, which lives in a truly global economic center. In Los Angeles County, federal funds are not only efficient, they are critical to the national and international objectives of our economy.

"These budget cuts will force cities and states around the country that cannot raise additional funds to cancel projects and repairs entirely," said Los Angeles Metro CEO Phillip A. Washington. "In Los Angeles County, where voters are aggressively addressing traffic congestion by taxing themselves to support new transit options, we also depend on a strong federal partnership. Elimination of federal matching funds will have a negative effect on our region. In particular, it will delay completion of the Purple Line Extension subway project through one of the most congested corridors in our region. Without a continued federal partnership, there is little chance of that happening.

"If the goal of this administration is to build out and repair our crumbling national infrastructure, these proposed cuts will do the opposite. And we plan to fight vigorously through our congressional delegation to see that the cuts are eliminated from the budget."

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