

Effort to extend Measure R advances

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Extending Measure R would accelerate the creation of construction jobs, Metro says.

Metro's Board of Directors on Thursday approved a plan to let voters decide on a 30-year extension of Measure R, the ½-cent sales tax measure passed in 2008 to fund transportation improvements in the county.

The board voted 10-3 in favor of placing the extension measure on the November ballot. The original Measure R keeps the sales tax in place through 2039. The extension, if approved, would continue it for 30 years beyond that, or until voters decide to end it.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the extension measure's most vocal proponent, said it would create more jobs faster and would allow Metro to accelerate the pace on important transportation projects while saving money on lower construction costs in a slumping economy. Extending Measure R would also create a larger pot of future revenues that Metro could borrow against to receive low-interest federal funding, he said.

"It's a game-changer and a big win for L.A. County," Villaraigosa said.

According to a [Metro report](#), the extension would accelerate creation of 260,000 of the 410,000 jobs projected under the original Measure R, and would send \$43 billion of the originally projected \$67 billion into the local economy sooner. It would allow a speeded-up timetable on projects ranging from the Westside Subway to the Eastside Gold Line Extension, the agency said.

Voting against placing the measure on the ballot were Supervisors Michael D. Antonovich, Don Knabe and Mark Ridley-Thomas.

Knabe said the extension would give Metro “a blank check” and would erode the fiscal discipline of the original measure’s 30-year duration.

“The sales tax currently does not expire until 2039, so there is no reason to extend it unless we want to spend the next generation’s money today,” Knabe said in a statement after the vote.

The Metro board’s action is one in a series of steps needed to place the Measure R extension before voters. A [bill](#) sponsored by Assemblyman Mike Feuer that would allow the measure to go forward is working its way through the Legislature and requires the governor’s approval to become law.

Then the county Board of Supervisors must formally approve placing it on the ballot. Even though three of the five supervisors voted against it on Thursday, Villaraigosa said he expects the board to approve the ballot placement when it comes before them as a routine, “ministerial” matter.

Metro’s staff had recommended an indefinite extension of Measure R, but the board opted instead to ask voters to approve a 30-year increase. The extension requires two-thirds voter approval to take effect.

The last time out, county voters handily approved the measure, with nearly 68% voting in favor of the ½-cent tax. And they did so even though the economy had just begun its great economic collapse, Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky reminded his colleagues on the Metro board.

“The public is way ahead of us on this issue,” Yaroslavsky said, “and are willing to spend their resources—for traffic improvements, for public transportation alternatives, for the creation of jobs and the improvement of the economy.”

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