

## Transportation

# Here's which cities are for, against a half-cent LA county transportation tax



Students walk home after school near heavy traffic along Florence Avenue bridge over the I-5 Freeway in Santa Fe Springs on Tuesday, Oct. 15, 2013. Florence Avenue is expected to be reduced from four to two lanes as part of the I-5 widening construction project. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda/San Gabriel Valley Tribune)

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Lurking beneath a unanimous vote Tuesday by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors placing a half-cent sales tax measure on the November ballot to fund \$132 billion in

transportation improvements was some hefty opposition from cities in the southeast and South Bay.

While others praised [Measure R-2's list of rail, highway and bikeway projects](#) as equitable, the South Bay Cities Council of Governments and the [Gateway Cities Council of Governments disagree](#), saying the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) kicked their freeway and railway projects to the back of the line in favor of added projects for the west side of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley.

Last month, the Gateway Cities voted 21-1 to oppose the measure, with Long Beach abstaining. The South Bay cities voted 9-0 in opposition, including Carson, El Segundo, Gardena, Hermosa Beach, Lawndale, Palos Verdes Estates, Rancho Palos Verdes, Rolling Hills and Torrance, records show. Inglewood, Lomita, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach and Rolling Hills Estates abstained.

The two organizations, representing 43 out of the 88 cities in the county, may stir up enough opposing votes that could place Metro's ballot measure — one it has asked the county to name Measure M — in jeopardy of gaining the necessary two-thirds vote on Nov. 8.

Ballot watchers and Metro insiders say obscure regional city groups angry over missing out on local transit dollars may not sway traffic-weary motorists from voting for congestion relief. On the other hand, elected officials from tight-knit communities such as Bell, Cudahy or Huntington Park could influence voters through word of mouth and informational fliers mailed to thousands of homes from City Hall, said Karen Heit, transportation consultant for the Gateway Cities.

“In these small communities, where their councilman also coaches football or soccer teams, it could be a very real factor in the way people vote,” she said.

Dan Schnur, director of the Jesse Unruh Institute of Politics at USC, said people vote for tax measures when they believe the dollars will come home. Already, Metro is benefiting from Proposition A, approved by voters in 1980; Proposition C, approved by voters in 1990; and Measure R, approved by voters in 2008. Metro opened two light-rail line extensions this spring using sales tax dollars. The new measure would bring the total sales tax for transportation to 2 percent. It does not have a sunset date.

“No community organization has absolute influence on these types of votes,” said Schnur, who added: “It is not determinative but it doesn't help.”

A Metro survey conducted in May found 72 percent in favor of a permanent, half-cent transportation measure, said Pauletta Tonilas, Metro spokeswoman. Of those, 70 percent in favor lived in the South Bay and 71 percent in favor lived in southeast Los Angeles County.

Still, if Metro loses votes from these and other Gateway Cities such as Artesia, Bell, Bellflower, Cerritos, Commerce, Compton, Downey, Hawaiian Gardens, La Mirada, Lakewood, Lynwood, Maywood, Norwalk, Paramount, Pico Rivera, Santa Fe Springs, Signal Hill, South Gate and Whittier, it could doom the measure.

Because voters in many of these cities are mostly Democrats and are more likely to approve a local tax, losing them means Metro has to work harder in more conservative parts of the county to increase voter support, Schnur said.

“If community leaders in one part of the county come out against the measure, then you need to increase support to an even greater degree in areas that support it ... or in communities that are more likely to benefit,” Schnur said.

Unlike presidential politics, strategies don’t focus on race or ethnic groups but rather on location, he said. “On a transportation measure in particular, geographic considerations have a huge impact,” he said, calling transportation taxes a zero-sum game. “You either get the light-rail route or you don’t.”

### **Where the projects are**

The measure’s project list includes 19 of the 44 projects that are new, added since 2008’s Measure R. Eleven are scheduled for groundbreaking in the first 15 years. The Gateway Cities argue that two of their projects, the widening of the 5 Freeway from the 605 to the 710, and the proposed [Eco-Rapid rail line](#) from downtown L.A. to Artesia, were pushed aside to make room for new ones.

“We do have a problem with all these other projects marching up front,” Heit said.

The 5 Freeway project would not break ground for another 20 years (2036), well after the southern half of the 5 project is finished. [But a tunnel through the Sepulveda Pass](#) would begin in 2024, part of a \$9 billion project to connect the west side of L.A. with the San Fernando Valley, most likely by rail. In addition, the last segment of the Purple Line subway under Wilshire Boulevard finishing in Westwood would break ground in 2018, while the Eco-Rapid line would not be completed until 2041.

“If you read the ballot measure, the first thing it says is that it will fix the freeways. What they don’t tell you is not for 20 years,” Heit said.

### **A line drawn in the county**

It appears the middle, north and east end of the county may favor the measure, while the southern and southeastern areas may not, creating a north versus south scenario.

The San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments voted in support of the measure last week. “From our perspective, we kind of got what we wanted from the tax measure,” said Mark Christoffels, a consultant to the SGVCOG and chief executive officer of the Alameda Corridor-East Construction Authority.

The east San Gabriel Valley’s next foothill extension of the Gold Line from Azusa to Claremont is scheduled to begin construction in 2019 and will receive more than \$1 billion from the measure, about 99 percent of the cost.

[The San Fernando Valley Council of Governments](#) has not yet take a position but may vote in support in September. Seven Los Angeles City Council members from the San Fernando Valley, led by Bob Blumenfield, wrote a letter of support to Metro in June. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, a Metro board member, has ardently supported the measure.

The East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor Project and the extension of the Orange Line busway to the Gold Line would both begin within the first few years. A light-rail station at 96th Street that would allow a people-mover to take passengers directly into LAX would start construction in 2018.

South Bay Supervisor Don Knabe said Tuesday he believes Measure M is geographically unbalanced. Yet, conservative Supervisor Mike Antonovich praised the tax measure, saying Metro got it right by asking each COG for a list of projects.

“The proposal before us today includes input from the bottom up for a regional transportation system,” he said before the historic vote.

Supervisor Hilda Solis, whose district includes the San Gabriel Valley as well as many southeast cities, said she believed the measure includes an inclusive list of projects. “It didn’t necessarily mean a dollar would be attached to every item (cities asked for). That is impossible,” she said.

#### **About the Author**

