

# Dan Walters: Financing bonds could be sticking point on infrastructure accord

**By Dan Walters -- Bee Columnist**

***Published 2:15 am PST Wednesday, February 22, 2006***

Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Legislature's Democratic leaders are patting each other on the back for their recent collegiality and pledging that they'll jointly fashion a multibillion-dollar infrastructure improvement program this year.

Quietly, however, major conflicts are emerging on how the massive public works program would be financed, mirroring the division that underlies the state's five-year-long political stalemate over closing the state budget deficit.

Schwarzenegger wants infrastructure bonds to be largely financed from a budget that's already gushing red ink and is resisting major new taxes, such as a boost in the gas tax. But his approach would commit a substantial portion of the state budget to bond service for many years, thereby denying those funds to other forms of spending, and that raises the hackles of Democratic legislators.

The conflicts over financing surfaced obliquely Tuesday when Schwarzenegger's budget director, Mike Genest, and Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez made a joint appearance, along with the Legislature's budget analyst, Elizabeth Hill, on a panel to discuss chances for infrastructure improvements.

Núñez told the panel, part of a seminar on governance issues sponsored by three foundations, that Democrats want to hold the level of bonding to less than half of the \$68 billion that Schwarzenegger is seeking over the next decade and also envision more user fees - possibly including gas taxes - to offset their cost.

Committing too much from the budget to infrastructure, Núñez said, "can create a human infrastructure deficit" - his way of saying that money spent on public works bonds is not money available for health programs and education, the Democrats' top priorities. Later, in formally unveiling his alternative proposal, Núñez declared: "Supersizing bond proposals doesn't make them better. To get the biggest bang for our buck, it's fiscally prudent to address our greatest needs while also striving to erase our structural deficit."

The Núñez alternative would hold the bond commitment to about \$30 billion over four years - a step he said would entail debt payments "less than half of the governor's \$4.4 billion" and thus keep more money in play for other spending. The alternative would also rearrange priorities, eliminating the prisons that Schwarzenegger wants, putting more money into non-automotive mass transit and school construction, and adding resources, such as parks, and housing to the list.

Genest, however, insisted that the debt service costs of the Núñez alternative would not be substantially less than those of the Schwarzenegger plan, at least in the initial

years, because of lag time in getting projects built and bonds issued. And he told the panel discussion that the governor's plan represents the priorities that the administration carefully chose from a list of potential recipients.

The emerging conflict over the size and repayment of bonds reflects the long-standing stalemate over whether the state budget deficit should be eliminated - if, in fact, it is to be erased - through holding down spending or raising taxes.

The political reality is that the voting public appears to want neither, and both parties are being coy about their true intentions in this election year. Schwarzenegger has preached spending restraint but in his latest budget proposal appears to have abandoned budget-balancing in favor of more spending as he seeks re-election. Democrats want more taxes - perhaps \$10 billion more a year to cover the deficit and finance more school spending - but are equally shy about pushing them, saying they'll wait until after the election. As a result, the budget deficit remains stuck at around \$7 billion and may even grow later in the decade.

It's unclear whether the differences over financing infrastructure improvements could be fatal, but at the very least, they make agreement on a package for the June primary election increasingly unlikely. And were the March deadline for placing measures on the June election to pass without action, the whole infrastructure discussion - the one about which there is such public comity these days - could become entangled with the annual budget wrangle and what could be a very fractious campaign for governor.

### **About the writer:**

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COMMUNICATION

SBCAG-Commissioners

2-17-2006

Subject: Enough busses

The proposed Measure D renewal budget has a huge amount of funds for bus service, commuters and rail to the tune of \$249 million away and beyond what is needed. Lets remember that these transportation funds are socialism in the raw. Money is taken from our gas taxes that are paid by car drivers and given to the state and federal government. They then give them back to local state, county and city governments as transportation funds. MTD, COLT, SMAT, BREEZE and SMOOTH are all social transportation services in that they do not pay for themselves. The governments only require that the bus you ride on pays only 20% of the cost of the ride. The remaining 80% is financed by gas taxes and other general funds

An extreme example of transportation socialism at work occurred when the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments(SBCAG) was sued by a private person because he felt that there was an unmet transportation need between Lompoc and Santa Maria. So instead of their fighting the suit, they caved in and agreed to set up a bus service called BREEZE to provide the so called lacking service. This "service" now costs the taxpayers \$344,000 per year to move anywhere from 36,000 and 50,000 passengers a year. If you do the math, you will find that this is about 6-9 dollars a rider that is financed by the taxpayers so this so called unmet need can be filled. The rider payes only 10% of the cost. Is this socialism or what? Is the SBCAG irresponsible and cannot be trusted with the management of out tax dollars in the future? We believe that this is the case.

The local Lompoc City COLT bus system is subsidized by our taxes to the tune of 80%, As is the Santa Barbara MTD and the Santa Maria SMAT bus systems. Bus systems are not profitable ventures. They are only sustainable by very large tax subsidies.

The privately owned Greyhound Bus service has to operate on a for profit basis. For this reason it recently dropped a number of county bus stops one of which was Lompoc because they did not generate enough revenue. There was a time in the distant past when bus systems and rail systems were privately owned and could operate at a profit. The cost of labor has driven most of these out of business. So the transportation that you see around you is socialism at work.

Is enough money being spent on transportation? We believe that it is. Measure D renewal should be cut back and only a fraction of the proposed funds assigned to transportation and the majority of funds spent on widening 101 and 246 where the car drivers pay the bills for the roads as well as subsidizing busses. Busses need roads to ride on but it is the cars the pay the bills.

The people who manage our road funds are the county supervisors and the city councilpersons. They need to hear from we taxpayers about the way they are proposing to use our tax dollars in the future.

Concerned Taxpayers, I.N.C.

Justin M. Ruhge, Lompoc, jaruhge@Hotmail.com

**Subject:** FW:

Article in the LA Times - 3/6/06 - "Slow Growth" has come at a cost in Santa Barbara

## THE STATE

'Slow Growth' Has Come at a Cost in Santa Barbara  
By Jeffrey L. Rabin and Daryl Kelley, Times Staff Writers  
March 6, 2006

After a 1969 explosion beneath a Union Oil platform off Santa Barbara, stark images of dead birds and an oil-scarred coastline helped spark the nation's environmental movement.

Protecting this picturesque stretch of California's coast became a rallying cry, and it wasn't long before this new commitment to conservation gave rise to a steely determination to keep residential developers at bay.

Three and a half decades later, the south coast of Santa Barbara County is still spectacular, a monument to the successful efforts of those who fought to control growth and its effects.

Preserving "our environment and our quality of life ... is like a mantra," said Susan Rose, chairwoman of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, who represents a district stretching from the edge of Santa Barbara to Goleta.

But now this bastion of "slow growth" is learning that it comes with some steep economic, social and even environmental costs:

- Soaring housing prices. With the supply so limited, prices last year rose faster than in any other region in the state. The median price of a single-family house is now \$1.1 million, out of reach for all but the well-to-do.
- Traffic congestion, energy consumption and air pollution. An estimated 30,000 commuters, forced by housing prices to live far from where they work, clog U.S. Highway 101 and choke side streets during peak drive times.
- An exodus of big employers. Half a dozen Fortune 500 companies have left for less costly locales. Almost every business and government agency that remains struggles with recruiting and retaining workers who cannot afford to live nearby.
- Altered communities. Poor families have been forced to double- and triple-up in rental housing. Unable to buy homes, many middle-class families with children have moved away. UC Santa Barbara economist Bill Watkins warns that parts of the south coast are at risk of becoming a "geriatric ghetto."
- Spillover growth. Seventy-five miles away, in northern Santa Barbara County, houses are engulfing farmland. Sprawling Santa Maria is soon expected to pass Santa Barbara as the county's most populous city. But prices are on the rise there, too, largely because of demand from Santa Barbara-area workers.

Many of these ripple effects could not have been foreseen 30 years ago.

"There are intended and unintended consequences to these growth policies," said Dave Davis, who retired two years ago as Santa Barbara's community development director and now heads the city's Community Environmental Council. "It's truly a mixed bag."

The area from Goleta and Santa Barbara to Montecito and Carpinteria is one of the least affordable regions in the state, according to the California Assn. of Realtors. As of December, only 6% of the county's households could afford to buy a median-price home there, less than in the San Francisco Bay Area.

But, as Rose knows firsthand, the issue of building more housing is "very contentious." Her mere suggestion that more affordable housing be built in the Goleta Valley sparked threats of a recall.

Slow-growth advocates are unapologetic, saying they are leading a fight of statewide importance.

"It's not just us," said Gary Earle, president of the Coalition for Sensible Planning, which threatened to recall Rose. "It's all of coastal California."

The Mediterranean climate, beautiful beaches, scenic views and open space make the coastal plateau a highly desirable place to live. But from 2000 through 2004, only one in five of the housing units built or approved in the county was located there.

In the face of strong demand and a limited supply, the median price of a single-family home shot up 35% in the last year alone, from \$960,000 in December 2004 to \$1.3 million at the end of 2005, according to the California Assn. of Realtors. It has since fallen slightly.

With prices so high, said Watkins, director of the economic forecast project at UC Santa Barbara, "everybody who has a home has a financial incentive to oppose growth here."

Meanwhile, 30% of south coast workers — many shut out of the local housing market — buy homes elsewhere and commute long distances. They drive an average of 49 miles one way from northern Santa Barbara County and an average of 41 from Ventura County, according to the Coastal Housing Partnership, an employer-backed group.

From Ventura County alone, an estimated 17,000 people now commute each weekday to the Santa Barbara area. The county's housing director, Ed Moses, who lives in Oxnard, said he leaves at 4:05 a.m. to get to Santa Barbara in 35 minutes, ahead of the traffic. "If I leave at 6," he said, "it takes an hour or hour and a half."

The backup worsens near Montecito. Residents of the wealthy enclave have fought for decades against widening the freeway, which is two lanes in each direction for 13 miles between the Ventura County line and Santa Barbara.

Caltrans District Director Gregg Albright recalls what happened in 1993 — the last time the state proposed a widening.

"I was part of the project team, sitting in the Miramar Hotel, presenting a six-lane freeway... The message was quite clear: 'This is not what we want. Please leave.' "

A decade later, traffic has grown far worse. In response, the Santa Barbara County Assn. of Governments agreed unanimously last fall on a compromise called "the lane and the train." The package calls for adding a carpool lane to the two-lane sections of freeway and commuter rail service between

Ventura County and Santa Barbara.

But there is a huge potential roadblock: It would take at least \$400 million to widen the freeway and \$200 million for the rail service. And most of the money depends on an endorsement from two-thirds of the county's voters as early as this fall.

Brett Buyan, 37, a county mapping technician, lives in Ojai and commutes to work in Santa Barbara with his wife. "We wanted to stay in Santa Barbara, but couldn't afford to buy a house," Buyan said.

They are among many middle-class workers in Santa Barbara to reluctantly pick up stakes and leave.

"And that gap between the rich and the poor is just going to widen," Buyan said. "I don't think it's healthy."

Neither does Davis, the former Santa Barbara development director. Three decades ago, he said, the city's population was perfectly balanced between low-, moderate- and upper-income residents. Not anymore.

"The loss of the middle class ends up changing the culture of the community," Davis said. Little Leagues and PTAs suffer. "It's not the same."

Economist Watkins said that retiring baby boomers are likely to hang on to their homes but that nearly "every job they leave has to be filled by those who can't afford the housing."

For employers, recruiting and retaining employees are growing challenges. In the last two years, two major corporate headquarters moved out of Santa Barbara: Fidelity Title and 500 jobs went to Jacksonville, Fla. Tenet Health Care and 115 employees headed for Dallas.

"Our biggest problem in California," Fidelity chief executive William Foley told the business publication Site Selection, "is that people we wanted to move there couldn't afford to live there."

Remaining businesses have the same complaint.

"Housing problems make it difficult to recruit people here," said John Wiemann, vice chancellor of UC Santa Barbara. "It's a challenge, especially for younger faculty."

The university has been trying to build about 240 units of faculty housing on campus for years. But it's been slow going.

"The obstacles that we've encountered are the same that any developer trying to build in the coastal zone would encounter: sensitive habitat, wetlands and coastal access," Wiemann said.

Westmont College also ran into hurdles when it sought to build affordable homes for its faculty: It took seven years to win approval for 41 units, said Randy Jones, director of campus planning. The Montecito college is in "an area where growth is not appreciated," he said.

The Christian liberal arts college now wants to build an arts center, a science building and residence halls for 144 students. But that project has run into intense neighborhood opposition. One anti-growth website contains an editorial cartoon showing the Westmont College crest with high-rise buildings towering over homes. A caption reads: "God Gave Us An Inch — We Took a Mile."

Officials at Santa Barbara's Cottage Hospital, which is undergoing a \$550-million expansion, are fighting their own development battle. To help recruit nurses, technicians and pharmacists, the hospital wants to build

115 town house units where the shuttered St. Francis Hospital stands. But it faces strong neighborhood opposition.

Meanwhile, a major medical group recently proposed mortgage assistance for a group not normally in need of help: doctors.

The Montecito Fire Protection District also is in a fix. Half of its employees live outside the south coast area. The fire chief worries that far-flung employees won't be able to get to work in an emergency.

So, the district recently spent \$2.1 million for three small houses to rent to firefighters.

Possibly the greatest impact of the slow-growth movement on the south coast, however, has been elsewhere in the region.

Santa Barbara's population grew by just 400 people from January 2001 to January 2005, according to state estimates. In the same period, Santa Maria added 10,200. Santa Maria accounted for nearly half the residential units built or approved in Santa Barbara County from 2000 through 2004.

"You can't buy a home in Santa Barbara, so you buy it in Santa Maria," said Marty Mariscal, a Santa Maria city councilman. The buying frenzy there has pushed the median price to nearly \$500,000.

The surging population in the north county area also has produced a shift in political power. Three of the five members of the county Board of Supervisors now come from the more pro-development north county.

Fearful that pro-growth supervisors could usher major developers into the Goleta Valley, west of Santa Barbara, residents in part of that area voted in 2001 to form the city of Goleta.

"We have a community that wants to be very careful about growth," said Goleta Mayor Jonny Wallis, a student at UC Santa Barbara during the 1969 oil spill.

But environmental politics have shifted. Conservation groups that were promoters of slow growth now often endorse "smart growth" — targeted development along transportation corridors or in already dense areas.

Linda Krop, chief counsel for the Environmental Defense Center of Santa Barbara, said her organization would tend to support middle-income housing if it could be built without encroaching on agricultural land or opening new areas to development.

The hard-liners are neighborhood associations, homeowner groups and umbrella organizations like the Coalition for Sensible Planning.

"To me, the Santa Barbara south coast is the last livable community on the Southern California coast," said coalition president Earle, who also was a student during the 1969 spill. "It is worth fighting to keep it that way."

On its website, Earle's group presents the choice as stark: between remaining the pristine Goleta Valley or becoming the next smog-choked San Fernando Valley.

Others say it's not that simple. Retired county Supervisor Naomi Schwartz, a leading architect of the county's slow-growth movement, now favors "smart growth." She believes construction of housing for workers makes environmental and economic sense.

But "it's not an intellectual" discussion, she said. "It's more of an emotional conversation."

Davis agreed, adding that coastal homeowners aren't looking at the big

picture.

"Existing homeowners in a neighborhood don't want to see increased traffic. They would trade that for congestion on the 101 to Ventura or Lompoc. Regional congestion and pollution are out of sight, out of mind."

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(BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX)

Santa Barbara: shrinking and growing

The population of Santa Barbara County's south coast, a stronghold of slow-growth sentiment for years, dropped slightly in 2004. Residential development has been spilling over to the north county, led by Santa Maria, which may soon pass Santa Barbara as the county's largest city.

Population	Total	Change*	Percent change*
Santa Barbara County	419,260	+4,129	+1.0%

South County

Santa Barbara	90,518	-51	-0.1
Goleta	30,679	-94	-0.3
Carpinteria	14,340	-38	-0.3

North County

Santa Maria	88,793	+3,377	+4.0
Lompoc	42,320	+28	+0.1
Guadalupe	6,296	-21	-0.3
Solvang	5,429	-11	-0.2
Buellton	4,552	+91	+2.0

Countywide

Unincorporated areas	136,333	+848	+0.6
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# Measure D no relief for Lompoc

Bess Christensen recently offered a very good appraisal of why people should question the renewal of Measure D. I would like to add to the discussion.

Measure D was supposed to fix all of our transportation problems. Gasoline sales tax and vehicle license fees (VLF) are supposed to do the same thing, so have they been fixed and should we renew Measure D?

The VLF is an annual fee on the ownership of a registered vehicle in California. It takes the place of taxing vehicles as personal property. This fee is charged in addition to other fees, such as the vehicle registration fee, air quality fees, and commercial vehicle weight fees.

As I understand it, 75 percent of this tax was originally intended to be deposited in the Transportation Tax Fund and the rest was supposed to go to the Local Revenue Fund. But politicians can't help but meddle in the huge slush fund called "tax revenue," so Sacramento raided this fund and used it for other purposes. This was a bad idea, but Sacramento has never been known to have many good ideas, so it was no surprise.

California charges about 16 cents a

## COMMENTARY

gallon in excise taxes and the feds add another 18 cents for a total of 34 cents. When you add other "special taxes," such as for cleaning up leaking underground storage tanks, the total rises to about 45 cents a gallon.

On November 7, 1989, 55 percent of the voters in Santa Barbara County approved Measure D, a half-cent increase in local sales tax for transportation projects. Since then, much of this money has been spent studying the need to widen the highway 101 corridor through Montecito.

Of course, the snobby Montecitians don't want the road widened, so they have consistently obstructed

the process, and meanwhile millions have been wasted. Gov. Schwarzenegger recently proposed about \$80 million for this project, but who knows if Oprah and her neighbors will allow it to happen.

How much money do politicians need to maintain the transportation infrastructure? How much more will they ask for? Will they ever use the taxes collected for the intended purpose? Will the south coast elite ever concede

and allow the much needed widening of highway 101?

Locally, there are several very important and very expensive projects that need serious consideration. Highway 246 needs to be improved to four-lane status for the full length between Buellton and Lompoc; both Lompoc bridges over the Santa Ynez need to be improved and widened; Floradale Avenue needs to be rebuilt; La Purisima Road needs to be improved; and the Central Avenue extension across the Santa Ynez should either be finalized or killed once and for all.

Now, will any of these projects happen if Measure D is renewed? I doubt it. This tax has been with us for nearly 20 years and these projects have remained on the back burner, so I suspect that all we'll get for our investment is more studies of the 101 corridor and some new top coat on existing roads.

I voted for Measure D in 1989, but I don't think I'll be in any mood to support it again, no matter how many times SBCAG floats it between now and its expiration. As Mrs. Christensen pointed out, the political entity (Santa Barbara County Association of Governments) that governs the use of this money seems to be ineffective at resolving transportation issues.

*Ron Fink is a longtime Lompoc resident and a community activist.*

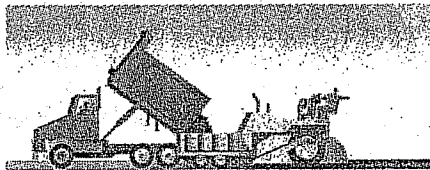


### Carpinteria City Hall News

FEB 16 2006 *b2-5*

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT?

Measure D funds, derived from a voter approved 1/2 cent sales tax increase in 1989, have been used since their inception for a variety of City of Carpinteria projects. Some of the City's current Measure D projects are listed below:



### Measure D Funds used to pave City streets

As promised in September 2005, Linden Avenue will receive a Rubberized Asphalt Overlay between Carpinteria Avenue and Eighth Street this coming Spring. Palmetto Way (from Via Real to the cul-de-sac) will also receive an overlay with Rubberized Asphalt.

### Measure D Funds used for City's curb, gutter, and sidewalk repairs

Within the next two months, the City will initiate contracts for concrete curb, gutter and sidewalk repairs at approximately 70 locations throughout the City. Additionally, repairs will be made on Linden Avenue between Carpinteria Avenue and Fifth Street.

### Measure D Funds used to replace Sandyland Road cross-gutters

Plans and specifications are being completed and construction of the concrete cross-gutters at Linden, Elm, Holly, and Ash Avenues will be completed this coming Spring.

# How one thing leads to another

**M**oney, the freeway and water are all involved. The Times on Jan. 24 announced "More money needed for Highway 101 widening project."

Transportation funding from Measure D will be expiring, and voters must approve extending the measure, possibly increasing the tax rate. Nipomo Community Services District (NCSD) wants to buy water from Santa Maria, but NCSD will have to build a pipeline across the river and the pipeline may be hung under the bridge.

Millions of dollars are allocated for transportation in this county, including federal and state gasoline taxes, and the county Measure D sales tax. According to a grand jury report in 1998, Measure D was passed by the voters in 1989 with a list of projects to be completed using the funds generated from the half-percent sales tax.

The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) was formed to implement the projects. SBCAG is composed of one representative from each of the eight incorporated cities in the county and all five county supervisors.

SBCAG chose to sell bonds rather than waiting for the sales taxes to accumulate. Measure D generates around \$12 million per year, which is allocated to local agencies, plus some \$120 million total for the projects listed in Measure D.

Seventy percent of the Measure D funds go to each city and the county for high-priority projects that were part of each jurisdiction's plans for local roads, bike lanes

and public transit. The remaining 30 percent was allocated for state and regional projects.

The projects using this portion of the tax in the Santa Maria area, as approved by the voters, included overpasses at 101 and Betteravia Road (\$6 million), Stowell Road (\$3 million), Main Street (\$5 million) and Donovan Road (\$2.5 million).

These four projects have been completed, including the nice logo of the city on each overpass. These overpasses are big enough to accommodate the widening of the freeway to three lanes in each direction.

Why do we need to have the freeway widened? There are no rush-hour traffic jams on the freeway through Santa Maria.

There are many north/south major arterials through the city, with College Drive completed and Blosser Road soon to be widened. The real traffic jams are through Santa Barbara, where the freeway narrows down from three lanes to two.

What will happen if the freeway through Santa Maria is widened to three lanes from Santa Maria Way to the bridge over the river? Are drivers expected to exit the freeway before the lanes narrow down again to just two?

Building a new bridge over the river would involve San Luis Obispo County and is another expensive project. That is where the NCSD comes in. The general manager of the NCSD explained that Nipomo needs more water to handle the new development there, and Santa Maria would like to sell some water to help pay for our share of the State Water Project.



**Joan Leon**  
*Looking Forward*

Nipomo would buy the city's blended water (80 percent state water and 20 percent ground water). Nipomo would pay the highest rate in the tier structure, so this sale would benefit the rate payers in Santa Maria.

But in order to buy the water from Santa Maria, the NCSD must pay to build the pipeline to Nipomo. They could hang the pipeline under the existing bridge. Perhaps the old bridge will handle one direction of traffic and a new bridge will be built for the other direction. But when might the funding be available to build this new bridge?

Obviously, by widening the overpasses in Santa Maria, there was a plan to eventually widen the freeway. But shouldn't the money be spent where it is more urgently needed? Our congressional representative was able to get some federal money for the freeway project, and the state has allocated some money, but so far not enough.

Competition for funding is fierce. Will a new Mission County be able to compete? How will the Measure D funding be distributed if a new county is formed? What happens to SBCAG, which is a joint powers agreement among the cities and Santa Barbara County?

The good news is that we have the freeway overpasses completed as specified in the Measure D list. The prospect of freeway bottlenecks where the freeway narrows down again to two lanes is the bad news. But on the bright side, eventually Nipomo may build that pipeline over (or under) the river and our city water rate payers may benefit.

*Joan Leon is a local resident. She can be reached at joanleon@juno.com. Looking Forward runs every Friday, providing a progressive viewpoint on local issues.*

# FORK IN THE ROAD

Bus service left out in the cold as officials push for renewal of sales tax

S.B. News-Press FEB 12 2006

**F**OR THOSE CONCERNED ABOUT TRAFFIC, pollution, and the future sustainability of Santa Barbara County, it's time to wake up. The next three months will be critical for the future of public transportation.

Measure D, the 1989 voter-approved ½-cent countywide sales tax that provided hundreds of millions of dollars in road projects over the past 17 years, is about to expire. To keep the money flowing, 67 percent of the voters need to approve its continuance.

However, after 20 years of paying this tax and getting little in return, bus riders, environmentalists and community organizations are asking for a revised and balanced Measure D that not only funds roads and highways, but also funds public transit.

The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, which is made up of the five county supervisors and a representative from each city in Santa Barbara County, will decide in April what exactly goes on the ballot.

To get the 67 percent voter approval needed, SBCAG will need to send voters a balanced Measure D with significant funds for public transit. Otherwise, it will continue the practice of bus riders subsidizing roads and highways in Santa Barbara County.



Harley Augustino

The author is a bus rider and social activist in Santa Barbara County.

The current Measure D sales tax passed by only 55 percent of voters in 1989 has proved unacceptable for today's transportation needs. Over the last 30 years, a mere 8 percent of the funds generated through Measure D has gone to buses, bikeways and sidewalk improvements combined. This is, sadly, the lowest percentage spent on alternative transportation of any transit sales tax measure in California.

The small percentage that does go to bus service has generally not benefited the tax-paying residents of Santa Barbara County. For example, Santa Barbara uses more Measure D money for alternative transportation than any other community in the county (about \$1.5 million). However, the vast majority of these funds go to the Downtown Waterfront Shuttle, which primarily caters to tourists and shoppers, rather than services that benefit residents who pay sales taxes all year.

SBCAG's proposal for Measure D renewal continues the trend of leaving public transit out in the cold. Why would bus riders support a sales tax that does not directly benefit them? Bus riders have the least to lose if this proposal fails, since current Measure D funding for transit is so

Please see **AUGUSTINO** on G4

## More Measure D money for eco-friendly transit

### AUGUSTINO

Continued from Page G1

meager.

While current discussions are heading in the wrong direction, there is still time for SBCAG to listen to the community and put a Measure D on the ballot that is balanced between roads and public transit. When this happens, we would happily carry the "Yes on D" message door to door and bus stop to bus stop.

We are also prepared to work to defeat Measure D if SBCAG puts a Measure D on the ballot that ignores voter support for alternative transportation, increases traffic and pollution, and continues the practice of bus riders subsidizing roads.

Many local jurisdictions want to keep the current tax as is and argue for "local control," where 70 percent of the funds would be given to each jurisdiction to allocate as they see fit. However, if the last 20 years is any indication, "local control" might as well mean "no transit" for the vast majority of

county residents.

Santa Barbara County, the city of Santa Maria, and the city of Goleta currently provide no funds whatsoever for public transit out of their Measure D coffers. Other communities simply don't do enough.

Meanwhile, many local officials will not acknowledge that public transportation is perhaps the most cost-effective method to reduce traffic, air pollution, and wear on the roads.

Investing in public transit is politically practical. Consider the following:

- SBCAG's polling demonstrates a high voter interest in funding public transportation through Measure D.

- Successful tax measures that have passed in other communities have included substantial allocations to public transit.

- Unsuccessful measures have included very little funding for transit. A failed tax measure in Ventura County is the latest example.

- A wide array of organizations oppose the current proposal and

many would campaign against it November, if there are not significant changes.

SBCAG's latest scheme is particularly devious. It proposes to put two taxes on the ballot: First, a ½-cent renewal tax to fund new road development, and second, an additional ¼-cent sales tax (which only would only pass if the first one does) to provide more funding for transit.

Bus riders and environmentalists will not support a measure to fund new roads, with the faint hope that voters will then support the additional tax.

SBCAG must realize that community members and organizations asking for adequate funding for transit represent a sizable constituency that will be voting on the proposed renewal of Measure D.

If Measure D fails due to SBCAG's stubborn unwillingness to submit a more balanced tax, how will these officials explain to their constituents why the highway can't be widened and potholes can't be fixed, and why the traffic has increased exponentially?

# Consultant directed to hold workshops, hearings on tax plan

## TRANSIT

Continued from Page A16

### Cont'd From Previous Page

\$75 million for small commuter rail operations, association officials said. The grant program expires in three years, and local governments must provide at least a 20 percent match to qualify.

"It's right up our alley," said Steve VanDenburgh, association deputy director. "But we are concerned that if Measure D doesn't pass this fall, by the time we get to 2008, all these dollars could be gone."

Tramutola was hired by the board because the company has a record of success: It has helped California cities and counties pass 169 tax measures, including three for transportation. In 2004, for example, Tramutola guided Marin County to success with a sales tax measure that allocated 55 percent of future revenues to bus services.

Since last fall, Tramutola has polled 1,000 Santa Barbara County residents about future sales tax expenditures for transportation. The polls showed that just more than 60 percent of voters would support two ballot measures to pay for such projects as road maintenance, bus service, safe streets, bridge repair, carpooling, shuttle buses, freeway interchanges, bike paths, six lanes for Highway 101 south of Milpas Street, and commuter rail between Ventura and Goleta.

"People want to see a balanced approach," said David Basmajian, Tramutola vice-president. "Everybody's got to understand they've got to make compromises, or it's not going to work."

But Russ Hicks, a Buellton city councilman and association board member, said Thursday that cities' discretionary funding would suffer under the A-plus-B proposal. With the exception of Santa Barbara, most cities have used these funds for road maintenance.

"That's a hard hit for a lot of people," Mr. Hicks said. "It's really going to be taken as a letdown to reduce that original share."

In Santa Maria, the local share has enabled the city to work through a backlog of reconstruction on bad roads and keep up with asphalt overlays, said Bruce Nybo, the city

engineer for capital projects.

"Without the Measure D money, we're screwed," Mr. Nybo said. "The streets would start collapsing."

At a recent presentation on the A-plus-B plan, the Committee to Improve North County (Committee INC), a citizens group headed by Marty Mariscal, a Santa Maria councilman and association board member, voiced opposition to paying for commuter trains out of Measure A. Mr. Mariscal said the consensus was that all of the transit-related expenditures should be placed in Measure B.

"The Committee INC people really believe that infrastructure is much more of a priority," he said.

But this view collides with the hopes of the Coalition for a Fair Measure D, representing 15 South Coast environmentalist groups that seek to obtain more funding for buses, bicycles, trains and programs such as Safe Routes to School to benefit pedestrians. In case Measure B doesn't pass, the coalition says, Measure A should commit more than 39 percent of revenues to alternative transportation.

"It's going in the right direction," said the coalition's Eva Inbar. "But we would like to see them put more balance in A and B. The folks isn't spread evenly."

At the same time, the Metropolitan Transit District, a South Coast agency, is angling for guaranteed funding to expand its bus service from Carpinteria to Goleta. So far, neither Measure A nor B sets aside funds specifically for the MTD, leaving it to the association's North County majority to decide how and where the bus money is spent.

At a meeting of the MTD board on Wednesday night, Director Dick Weinberg said, "Here we are, faced with a situation where everybody in this county is concerned about traffic congestion, and they don't want to give us a plug nickel to plan ahead."

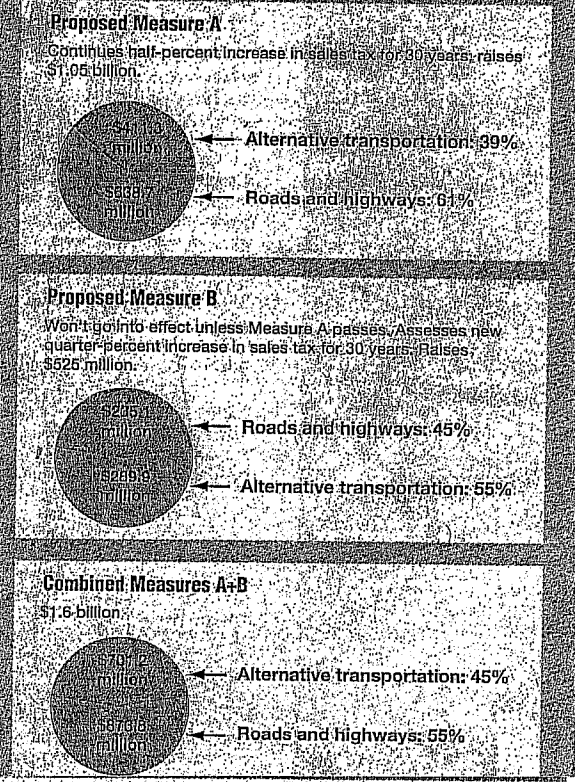
Director Dave Davis said the North County was "essentially holding the South County hostage."

"The folks in the North County that don't share our values are trying to strangle the future of transit on the South Coast," he said. "I know that the votes aren't there to protect us over the next 30 years."

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## Raising local money to ease congestion: A 30-year plan

Measure D, a half-percent increase in the local sales tax, primarily for roads and highways, will expire in 2010. The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments is asking the public to weigh in on two potential ballot measures to increase transportation spending through 2040.



SOURCE: Santa Barbara County Association of Governments. TOM DEWALT/NEWS-PRESS

### PROPOSED MEASURE A

- Road maintenance and repair: \$484.7 million
- Widen Highway 101 south of Milpas Street: \$95 million
- Improve North County highways: \$59 million
- Unspecified alternative transportation: \$145.3 million
- Bus service: \$138.6 million
- Car pools, van pools, telecommuting: \$17 million
- Reduce bus fares for seniors and disabled: \$6 million
- Regional bicycle programs: \$27.5 million
- Safe Routes to School program: \$25 million
- Commuter rail: \$52 million

### PROPOSED MEASURE B

- Road maintenance and repair: \$123.1 million
- Improve North County highways: \$67 million
- Widen Highway 101 south of Milpas Street: \$45 million
- Unspecified alternative transportation: \$33.9 million
- Bus service: \$129 million
- Car pools, van pools, telecommuting: \$19 million
- Reduce bus fares for seniors and disabled: \$3 million
- Regional bicycle programs: \$20 million
- Safe Routes to School program: \$20 million
- Commuter rail: \$74 million

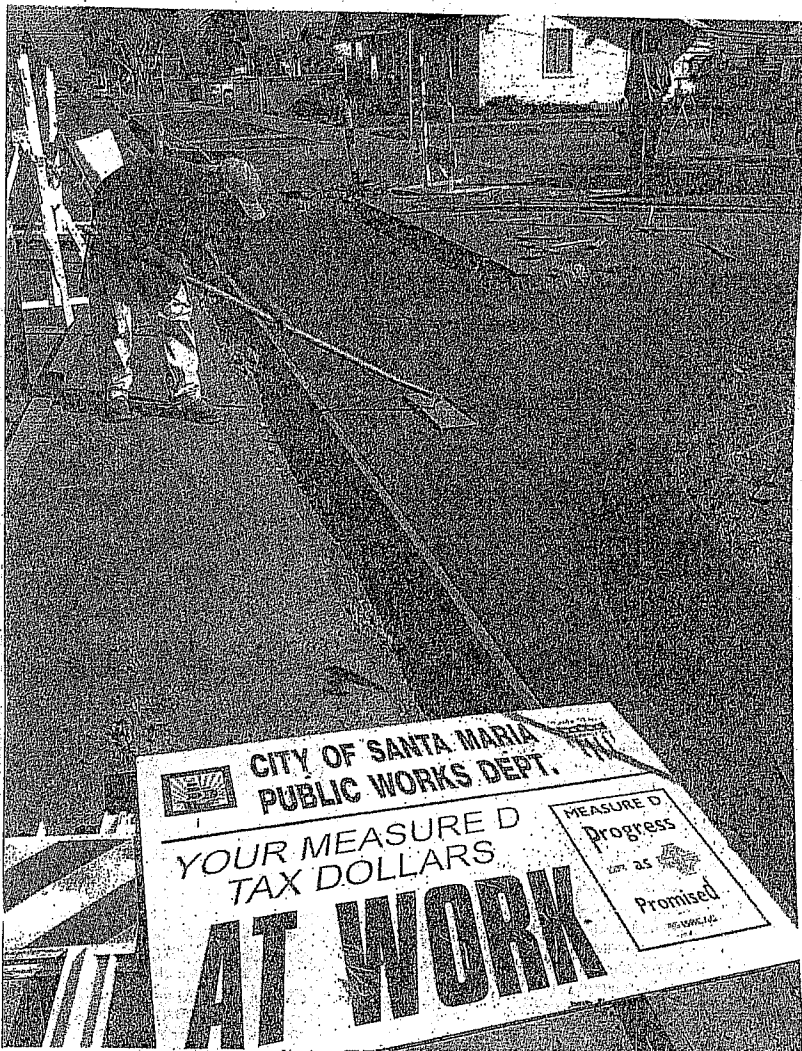
## SANTA BARBARA COUNTY FEB 17, 2006 Discussion focuses on transportation needs

The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments heard testimony Thursday from people who felt there were unmet transit needs affecting county residents.

The hearing is part of an annual process to determine how to allocate federal transportation dollars that need to first be used for mass transit. However,

if the board determines there aren't any transit needs, local governments can use the funds for road maintenance.

Marc Chytlo, a Santa Barbara lawyer representing farmworker advocates, told the board that mass transit countywide is deficient, especially for the poor segments that need transportation to the farms for work. Next month, SBCAG staff will present a draft needs assessment for review based on the public comments.



Ed Souza/Staff

Sidewalk ramps that meet standards made by the Americans With Disabilities Act are installed Wednesday afternoon at the intersection of West Cook and South Smith Streets.

# Proposal would funnel road funds to bus and bicycle transportation

Santa Maria Times FEB 16 2006

BY RANDI BLOCK  
STAFF WRITER

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In response to advocates of alternative transportation, government officials have changed a proposal for spending money that would be raised if voters renew a Santa Barbara County sales tax known as Measure D.

The new proposal would shift \$97 million from local control — funds traditionally used for road maintenance — to regional bus and bicycle transportation as well as to the "Safe Routes to Schools" program.

Regional programs are under the direction of the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG) board of directors, composed of the five county supervisors and one elected official from each city government.

Measure D, a half-cent sales tax to fund transportation projects, will expire in 2010 unless two-thirds of Santa Barbara County voters approve an extension of the levy, which is expected to raise \$1 billion over 30 years. As an additional benefit, cities and the county can use that revenue as matching money to obtain more federal and state grants to increase the pool of available transportation dollars.

The issue is slated to go before voters in November. Over the next few months, SBCAG staff

and a consulting team will be taking the new plan to a number of public workshops for comments, then return for a formal board discussion in April.

SBCAG is considering asking voters not only to extend the existing half-cent Measure D but also to approve an additional quarter-cent tax to supplement regional and local transportation projects.

The extra tax is expected to raise an additional \$500 million over the 30-year period, but it would take effect only if the first tier of funding is approved at the same time.

At last month's SBCAG meeting, numerous people lobbied the board for more money for mass transit and alternative transportation, which they said were being underrepresented, in favor of funding for street repairs and highway congestion relief.

In response, the Oakland-based Tramutola Co. consulting firm, which is guiding SBCAG staff through the effort to get Measure D renewed, changed the allocations to allow more money for alternative modes of transportation.

"(Tramutola) has been watching this process, and knows very well what all the different interests are," said Gregg Hart, government affairs director of SBCAG. "They've tried to synthesize public testimony and all dialogue with public works directors and city managers to try to navigate a course between all the interests to get something people will pass."

The prolonged debate about how to use the new tax revenue has generally pitted South Coast advocates of more rail, bus and bicycle transportation against North County officials who have used the money primarily for street and road repair.

The new proposal divvies up an expected \$630 million among the local jurisdictions if Measure D is renewed at its current half-cent level. Local governments stand to take in an additional \$157 million if the tax increase also passes.

Those numbers represent a shift of \$97 million from the original two-tier plan, money that the SBCAG staff proposes to be absorbed into regional bus, highway safety, bicycle and safe routes to schools programs.

"This is what advocates for alternative transportation have been wanting, to be fairly represented on the table," Hart said.

Santa Maria City Manager Tim Ness said cities will feel an immediate impact if they lose a chunk of their funding, but he won't know how big the effect will be on Santa Maria until he can study the proposal more thoroughly.

"At first blush it appears as though it's not as beneficial to Santa Maria as the one prior to this," Ness said.

Under the new plan, buses would receive \$29.5 million more if the entire three-quarter-cent tax is passed, and none of that money could be used for streets and roads, unlike under the earlier proposal.

Bicycles would receive a combined \$47.5 million if both tax measures pass, which is a \$32.5 million increase.

"I think this is a very good plan and a very measured one. This is one that is designed to have voters approve both parts of it," said Ralph Fertig, president of the Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition.

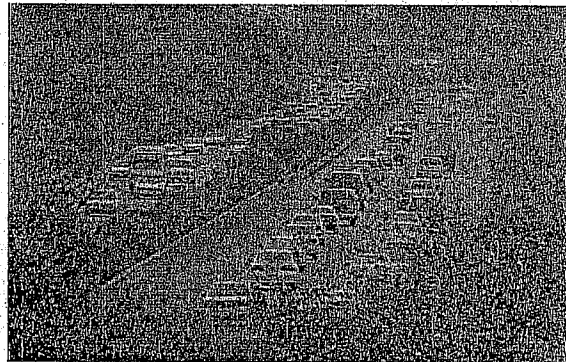
Finally, the proposal calls for giving safe routes to schools \$45 million, an increase of \$30 million. This program is designed to paint crosswalks or complete sidewalk systems to generally improve a student's ability to get to school safely.

The public meetings to receive comment on the proposal have not been scheduled, but the SBCAG staff plans to hold six of them around the county before the April SBCAG board meeting.

For more information, call SBCAG at 961-8900.

Randi Block can be reached at 347-4580 or rblock@santamaria-times.com.

# Transit tax plan stalls in driveway



STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS FILE

North- and southbound traffic routinely backs up around Highway 101's Salinas Street ramps in Santa Barbara.

City, county officials reject consultant's proposal; want more input by public

By MELINDA BURNS  
NEWS-PRESS SENIOR WRITER

S.B. News-Press FEB 19 2006  
Amid fractious debate, county leaders will be asking the public to weigh in on a 30-year plan to raise \$1.6 billion in local sales taxes for transportation, nearly half of it for buses, bicycles, safe sidewalks and commuter rail.

As drawn up by Tramutola LLC, an Oakland-based consulting firm hired by the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, the proposal calls for two ballot measures in November: Measure A, which would continue the present half-percent increase in the sales tax for transportation, and Measure B, which would levy a new quarter-percent increase. Measure B would go into effect only if Measure A passed as well.

The 13-member association board, made up of the five county supervisors and eight city council members from cities around the county, took pains to say last week that it has not endorsed the plan. In fact, several members said they didn't like it at all.

"Tramutola has totally and completely missed the point and gotten out in front of the board," Supervisor Joni Gray of Orcutt angrily told her colleagues Thursday. "I'm not prepared to support it at this time."

If approved as proposed, the A-plus-B plan would represent a fundamental shift in the way the county chooses to spend its transportation dollars, allocating 45 percent of the total for alternatives to cars.

In the past, 92 percent of the local sales tax money for transportation has been used to repair roads and build highways, and only 8 percent has gone toward improving services for bus riders, bicyclists and pedestrians.

At Thursday's board meeting,

Please see **TRANSIT** on A16

## Supervisor says consultant 'completely missed the point'

### TRANSIT

Continued from Page A1

Supervisor Salud Carbajal of Santa Barbara said current priorities in transportation funding were "out of whack with the public." He said he would support increasing Tramutola's \$195,000 contract by \$22,500 to help conduct public workshops, meetings and presentations on the A-plus-B plan. Tramutola will revise it to reflect the public's views, then return to the board for more fine-tuning in April.

"We're at a crossroads," Mr. Carbajal said. "Are we going to get a good product and move forward this year, or not?"

Ms. Gray responded that she was "incredibly disappointed" in Tramutola, and added: "Are you just going to let him continue to run amok, as he's doing now? If this were a private business, I'm confident he would be fired."

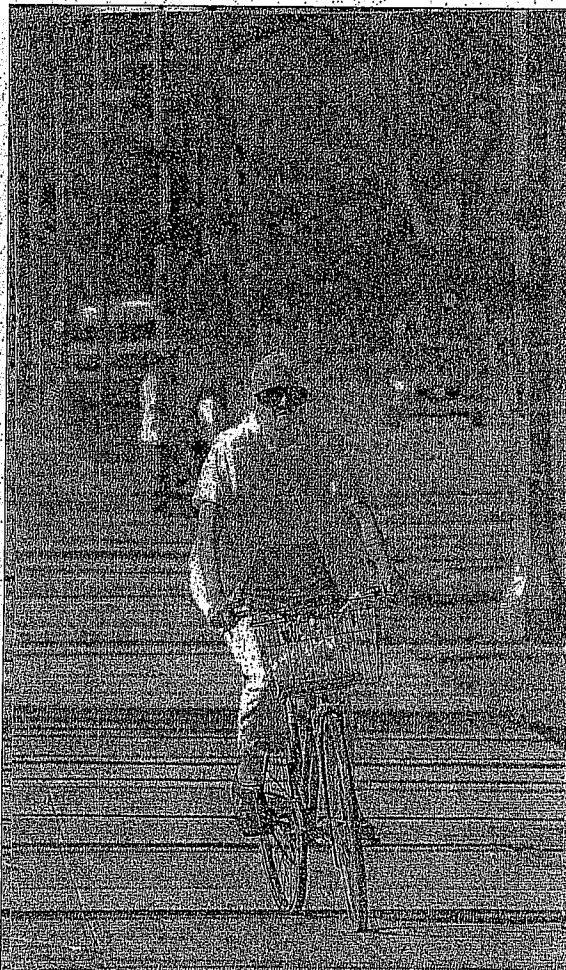
While the board voted 10-2, with one abstention, to approve the extra spending, the testy north-south exchange underscores the difficulty members are having in reaching a consensus. At stake is the transportation future of the county for the next 30 years, and the deadline for a decision is approaching. The current half-percent sales tax increase, approved by the voters as Measure D, expires in 2010. It supplies about \$32 million yearly for local projects.

Measure A and B would both require a two-thirds vote for approval. If they do not make the November ballot, the next chance for a vote likely would not come until general elections in 2008.

Absent an agreement by the board, each city would be left to its own devices to pass a separate sales-tax increase, dooming such regional projects as widening Highway 101 south of Milpas Street, bringing commuter trains to the South Coast, and expanding commuter bus services.

A timely renewal of the sales tax increase would help the county compete for new federal grants of up to

Cont'd To Next Page  
Please see **TRANSIT** on A17.



STEVE MALONE / NEWS-PRESS FILE

One of the debates over extending Measure D-type funding for transportation projects is how much to distribute to car-based solutions and how much to alternative methods like bike riding.