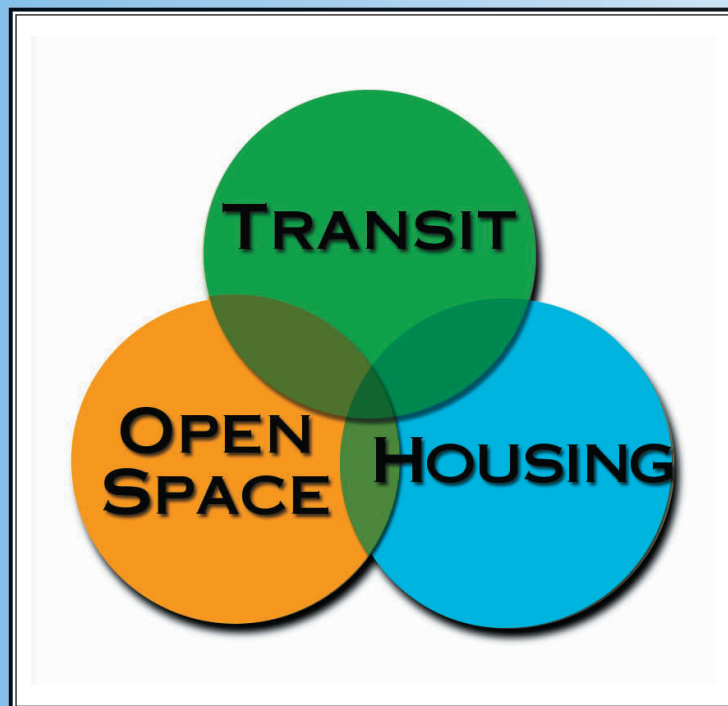


Santa Barbara Region Economic Community Project

2005

South Coast Community Survey Executive Summary



SANTA BARBARA REGION ECONOMIC COMMUNITY PROJECT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**A LETTER FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
SANTA BARBARA REGION ECONOMIC COMMUNITY PROJECT**

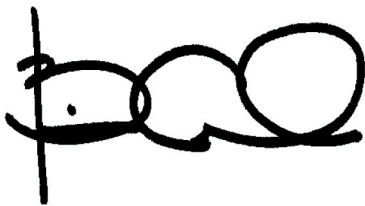
We are pleased to present, as a follow up to our Regional Impacts of Growth Study (RIGS), the results of our Housing/Open Space/Transportation survey of South Coast residents. As you will see in the coming pages, there is remarkable consensus among the citizens of the South Coast as to the problems we face and the direction our future should take.

The communities of the South Coast face serious social, environmental and fiscal challenges; our socioeconomic health is in peril. The vast majority of our workforce cannot buy homes in the communities where they work. Our goal for this survey is to bring the clarity, consensus, and courage that government agency staff and elected officials will need as they grapple with the very tough decisions they must make as our region approaches build-out.

The ECP, which began as an economic development effort in the mid-1990's, has evolved into an organization committed to a comprehensive regional approach to the South Coast's future. We categorically believe that doing nothing about growth is a choice. However, we positively believe that we can make better choices than that. We at the ECP certainly do not presume to have all the answers, but we certainly see a role in helping to find the right ones.

We want to acknowledge our benefactors, who over the past several years have allowed us to do this work. They include the James Irvine Foundation, the County of Santa Barbara, the City of Santa Barbara, the City of Carpinteria, Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, and La Piana Associates.

Thank you for your continued interest in the work of the ECP. We hope that this survey will be helpful to all in deciding how best to guide the future of our South Coast community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Cearnal". The signature is stylized with a vertical line on the left and several loops and curves.

Brian Cearnal
President of the Board

Key Findings

Housing

- The cost of housing is regarded as a very important problem by 75% of the South Coast public, and an even larger majority of 80% thinks that more housing construction should be allowed.
- Affordable housing—local government programs to help build homes that middle-income people can afford—is supported by 65% of the public.
- People who work in critical jobs—such as firefighters, police, nurses, and teachers—should not receive priority for affordable housing programs according to 59% of the public; instead, all people who qualify should be treated equally.
- Mixed-use housing is a good idea according to 73% of the public. Second units, or “granny flats,” should be easier to add according to 57% of the public. The public is evenly divided about whether building beyond our current urban boundaries is a good or bad idea. A majority of 60% opposes building on land that is now used for farming within our urban boundaries.

Open Space

- The amount of open space in or near neighborhoods is satisfactory to 84% of the public, but 68% says that it is “very important” to them to protect it from development.
- An open-space initiative that would require all new developments outside the urban boundary to be put to a vote is supported by 66% of the South Coast public.
- A new, half-cent sales tax to pay for more parks and open space is favored by 57% of the public—a level of support which is less than the required two-thirds margin for a tax increase.

Transportation

- Adding commuter trains (63%) and widening Highway 101 (61%) are the public’s top two priorities for transportation spending.
- Extending the existing, half-cent sales tax to pay for transportation projects is favored by 75% of the public.
- If there were a convenient bus route from their home to their job, 58% of commuters say they would take the bus. More commuters say they would ride the bus if it were convenient than if it were free.

Executive Summary

Introduction

The Santa Barbara Region Economic Community Project (ECP) is a decade-old, non-profit coalition of business, government, academia, and community leaders, promoting a sustainable economy and a high quality of life. ECP, working in conjunction with the Social Science Survey Center of the University of California at Santa Barbara, has conducted a public opinion survey of South Coast residents to learn their opinions about housing, open space, and transportation issues that confront the region. This report summarizes the survey's findings.

The survey was conducted by telephone between January 10 and February 28, 2005. The respondents were a representative sample of 1,624 adult residents of the South Coast from Carpinteria through the Goleta Valley. The sample was stratified so that at least 400 respondents were selected from each of four areas—the cities of Carpinteria, Goleta, and Santa Barbara, and the unincorporated areas of the South Coast (which include the eastern Goleta Valley, Isla Vista, Montecito, Mission Canyon, and the Las Positas Valley). As a result, we can make fairly accurate estimates of public opinion in each of the four areas in addition to the region as a whole. The sampling error for the entire sample is ± 2.4 percent at the 95 percent confidence level; the sampling error for each of our four subsamples of 400 respondents is ± 4.9 percent at the 95 percent confidence level.

All results included in this report are weighted to be representative of the population. See the Survey Methodology Appendix for more details.

Housing

The rising price of housing on the South Coast contributes to a variety of economic, environmental, and social problems. Families are moving out of the area because of the cost of housing. Demand for low-cost housing is putting pressure on the remaining open space in our communities. A growing number of our region's workers are commuting from outside the South Coast, which has both environmental and social impacts on our region. We therefore begin our study with an examination of the public's opinions on housing issues.

Importance and Impact of the Cost of Housing

The high cost of housing is seen as a "very important problem" by 75 percent of people living in the South Coast. Part of the debate about the cost of housing focuses on the ability of critical workers such as firefighters, police, teachers, and nurses to buy housing and live on the South Coast. Seventy-two percent of the public regards this as a very important problem as well.

Although people are concerned about the cost of housing, they generally underestimate housing prices. At the time of the survey, the Association of Realtors of Santa Barbara reported that the median price of a single family home was \$1.2 million. Most of the public thinks that the average price is significantly lower. A majority actually said it was under \$900,000, while only 25 percent offered estimates that were over \$1 million.

The cost of housing may impact local businesses because some renters say they may leave the area if they cannot afford to buy homes. Forty percent of people living in the South Coast are renters. We asked them whether they had

“thought seriously about buying a home in this area.” Fifty-two percent said they had. When asked, “Do you think you will ever be able to afford a home in this area?” only 31 percent said yes.

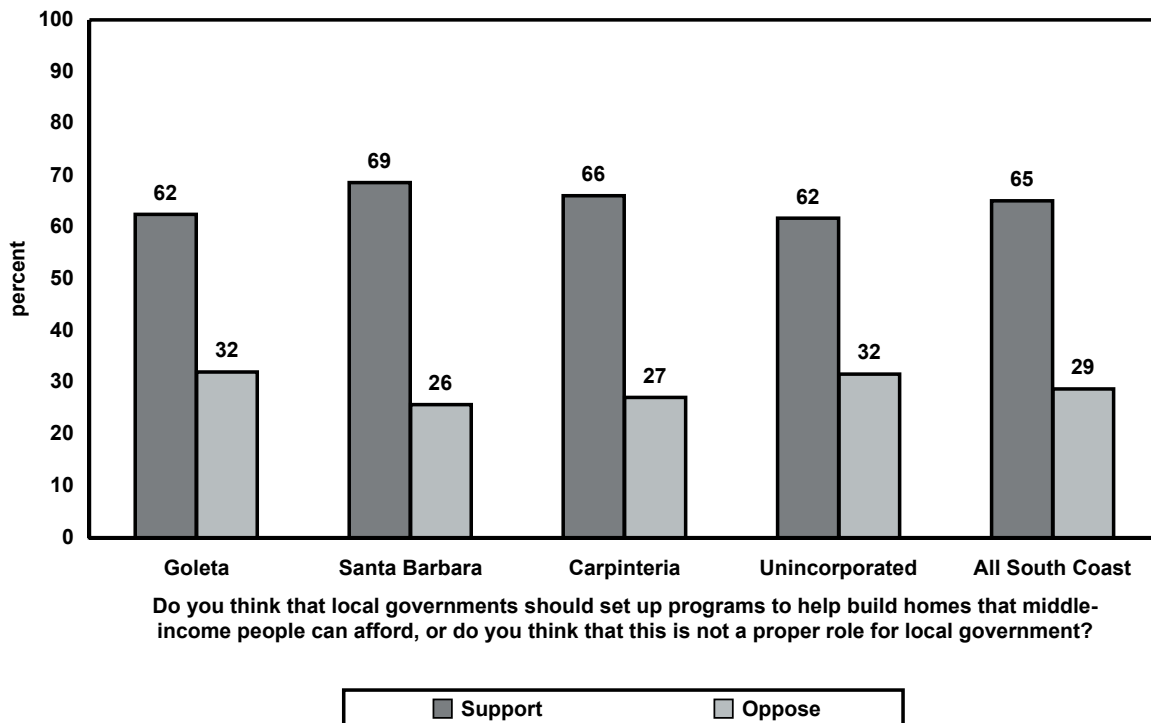
We also asked renters, “If you can never afford to buy a home here, are you likely to remain living in this area, or do you think you would be likely to move away?” Sixty-nine percent said they would be likely to move away. The groups most likely to say they will leave are the young and the college-educated. Eighty-four percent of the renters under thirty say they will move away; 79 percent of college graduates say they will move away.

Affordable Housing

Major employers, nonprofits, and local governments should step in to help their middle-income employees buy homes in the South Coast, according to 56 percent of the public. They should also help their low-income employees rent housing according to 55 percent.

Sixty-five percent of the public wants local governments to set up programs to help build homes that middle-income people can afford (see figure 1). An even larger majority, 78 percent, favor requiring developers to sell at least some of the homes they build at moderate prices so that people with middle incomes can afford them. When people are told that this requirement will also allow developers to build more homes on the same piece of land—that is, that there will be density bonuses—support falls to 55 percent. When people are told that price controls will be put on the homes so that they will remain moderately priced when their owners sell them, support rises to 63 percent.

Figure 1. Support for Affordable Housing Programs from Local Government



Fifty-nine percent of the public wants government programs that help people with housing to be available to everyone on an equal basis. They do not want to give priority to people in critical jobs such as firefighters, police, teachers, and nurses.

We examined two possible reasons why people might oppose affordable housing programs. First, we asked homeowners how they thought that new, affordable housing in their neighborhoods would affect them. We found that 33 percent of homeowners believe that if affordable housing were built in their neighborhoods, the price of their homes would fall.

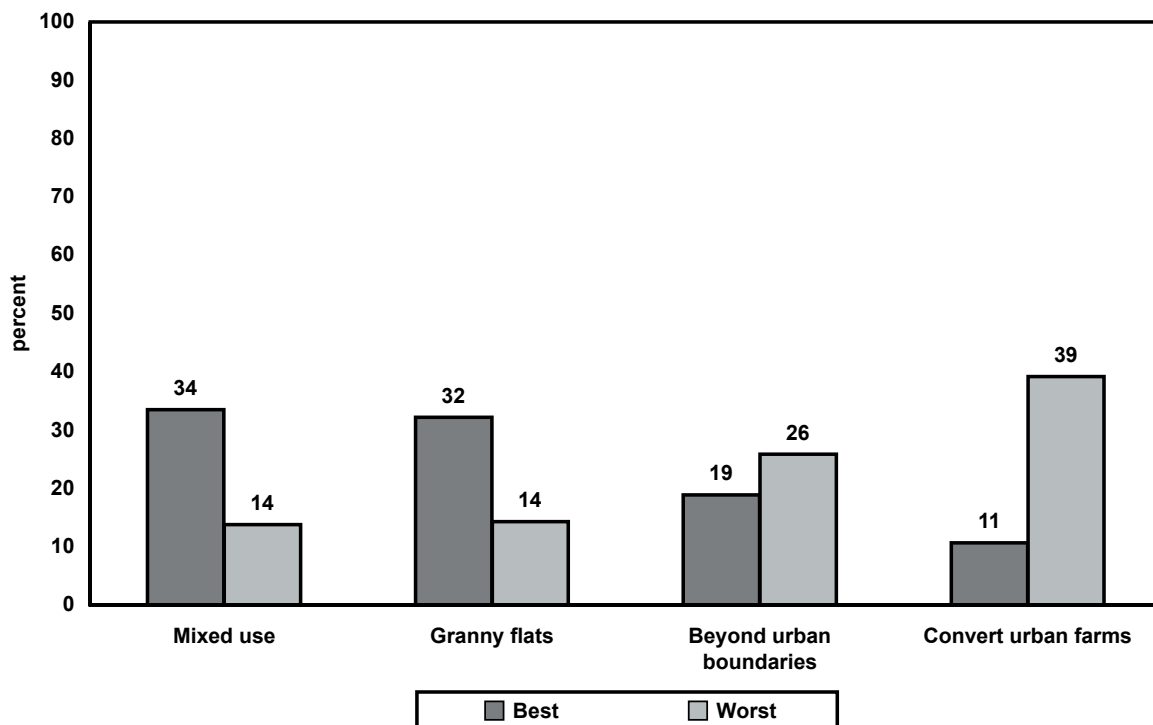
A second concern people have about affordable housing programs relates to their management. Among the entire South Coast public, 53 percent believe that housing programs have problems with fraud.

Whether and Where to Build More Housing

At least some new housing construction should be allowed according to 80 percent of the public. Our survey did not attempt to address exactly how much new housing because the question would be difficult for respondents to answer and difficult for decision-makers to interpret.

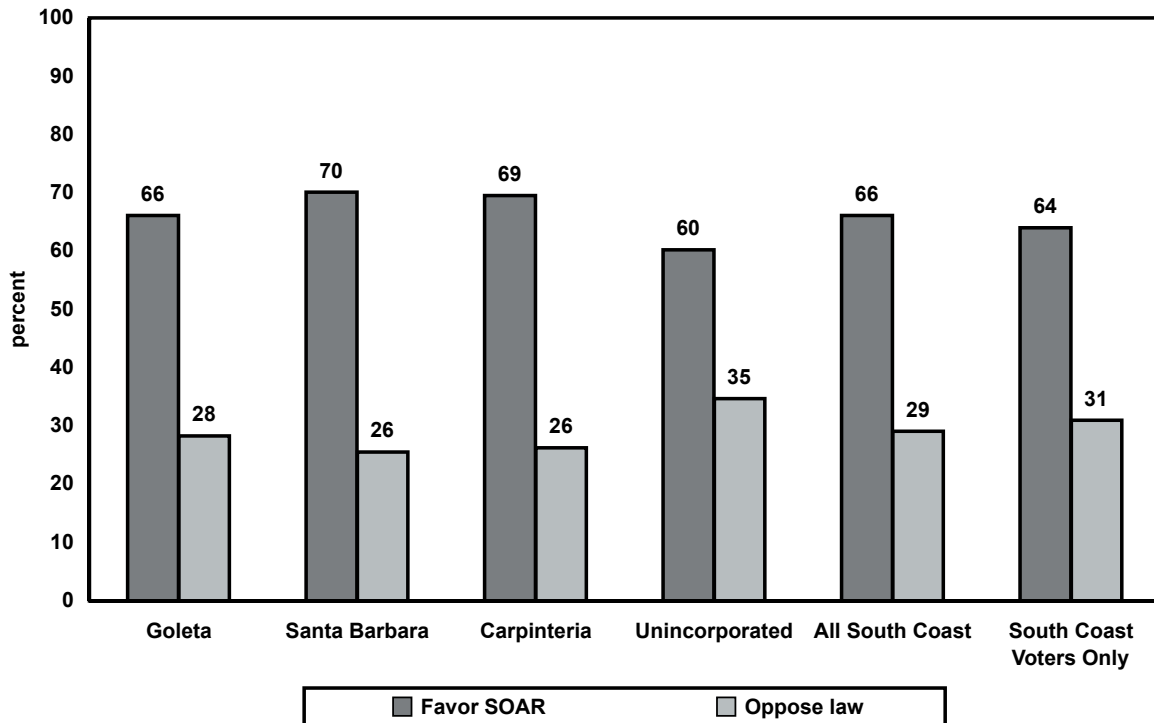
Mixed-use housing—building apartments over businesses in commercial areas—is favored by 73% of the public. Second units, or “granny flats,” should be easier to add according to 57% of the public. The public is evenly divided about whether building beyond our current urban boundaries is a good or bad idea. A majority of 60% opposes building on land that is now used for farming within our urban boundaries. Figure 2 shows what people regard as best and worst choices for new housing construction.

Figure 2. Best and Worst Choices for New Building



A majority of 66 percent says they would vote for a law that would make it harder to build more houses beyond the current boundaries of our towns—in the foothills, or up or down the coast—by requiring that any new developments outside our current urban boundaries be put to a vote at the ballot box (see figure 3). Some communities in Southern California have passed such laws, often called “Save Open-space and Agricultural Resources”—or SOAR initiatives.

Figure 3. Support for a SOAR Initiative Establishing Urban Boundaries



Open Space and Public Parks

The amount of open space in or near neighborhoods is satisfactory to 84% of the public. Sixty-eight percent of the public also says that it is “very important” to them to protect existing open space from development.

The amount of public parks and playing fields is satisfactory to 76 percent of the public.

If there were a measure on the ballot to increase the local sales tax by an additional one-half cent to pay for more local parks, playing fields, and open space, only 54 percent says they would vote for it. This level of support is below the two-thirds vote needed to pass tax increases.

Another way to provide parks, playing fields, and open space is to require developers to set aside land to be used for parks and open space, or to pay fees which would be used to buy parks and open space. Sixty-nine percent of the public favors this requirement.

Transportation

Seventy-nine percent of South Coast workers are drive-alone commuters. This is slightly higher than the statewide average of 75 percent. Bus and train use are correspondingly lower than the statewide average. Eighty-six percent of the public says they never ride buses or shuttles.

To find out what might be done to increase use of mass transit in the region, our survey asked people whether they would ride local buses and shuttles if they were free, and how often people thought they would ride them every week if they were free.

Sixty-two percent of the public said they would still not ride buses or shuttles, but 34 percent of the public said they would ride them more frequently than they do now. Although people are poor judges of their own behavior in hypothetical situations, this still suggests a substantial increase in ridership.

When commuters were asked whether they would ride the bus if there were a convenient bus route that left from near their house and stopped near their work, 58 percent said they would.

Commuters clearly find convenient bus routes more of an incentive to ride the bus than free buses. Whereas 58 percent of South Coast commuters said they would ride the bus if there were a convenient bus route, only 41 percent said they would take the bus if it were free.

When asked what should be done to improve bus and shuttle service in the South Coast, the public's top priorities were increasing the number of bus routes—favored by 36 percent—and increasing the number of express buses—favored by 33 percent.

Figure 4. Priorities for Public Transportation Improvement

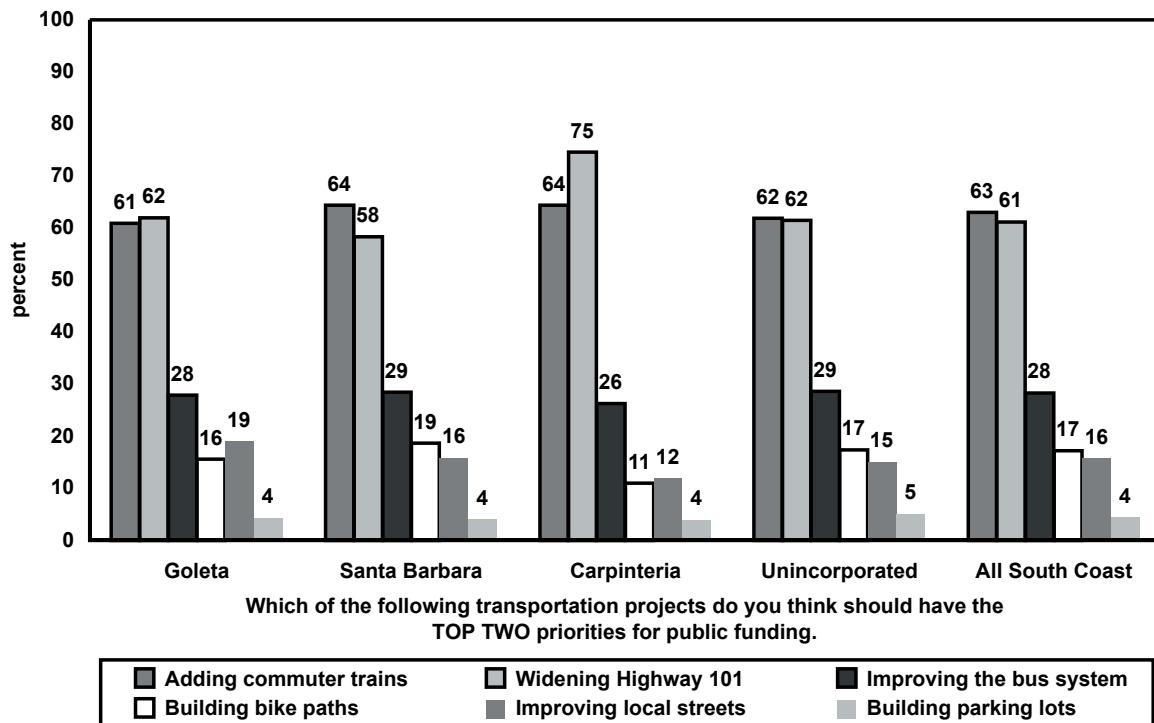
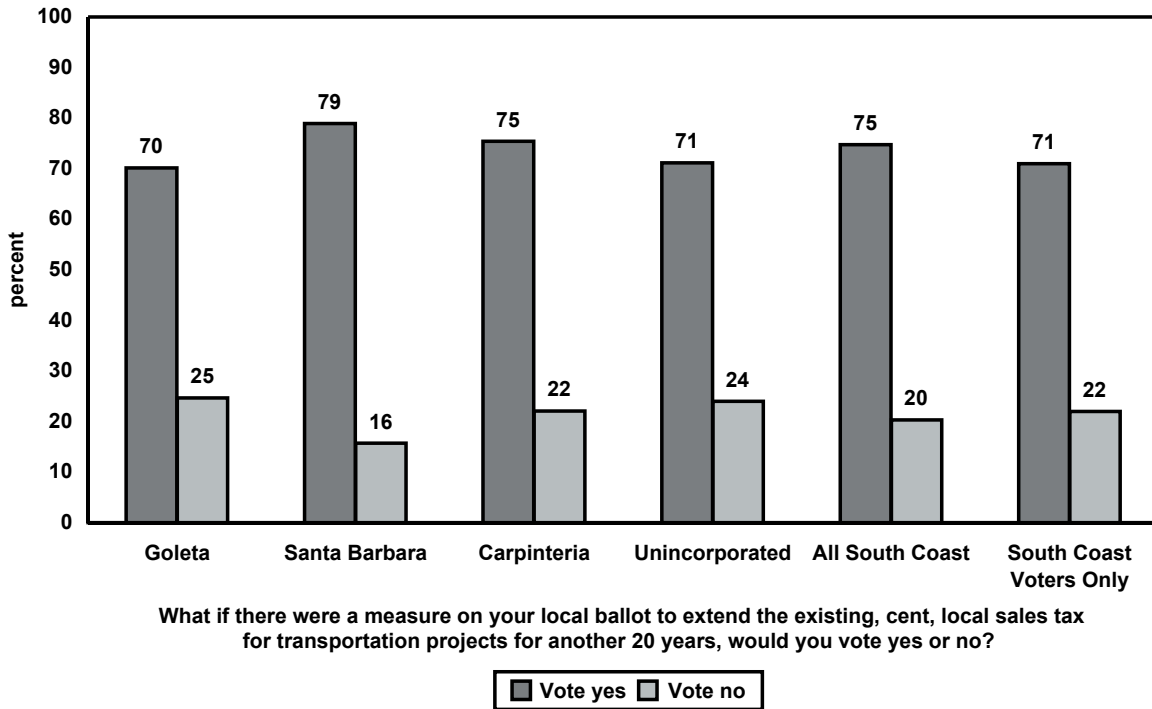


Figure 5. Support for Half-cent Tax for Transportation



Lowering bus fares is not a very high priority for any group. Only 10 percent of our respondents said that it would be the best way to improve the system. Improving the cleanliness of buses was favored by eight percent.

The public's top two transportation priorities are adding commuter trains and widening Highway 101, which were mentioned by 63 and 61 percent of the public, respectively (see figure 4). These two policies offer ways to make it easier for people to travel long distances within the region or to get in and out of the South Coast region entirely. The other policies mentioned in the question offer ways to make traveling shorter distances within the South Coast more convenient. Clearly, the public thinks that long-distance travel should be the top priority for improvement.

Notably, Carpinteria residents think that widening Highway 101 is more important than commuter trains. We presume this reflects the large number of commuters living there and the fact that for many Carpinterians there are no practical alternatives to driving on Highway 101.

Improving the bus system is the third choice of residents in all parts of the South Coast with 28 percent of the public saying it was one of their top two priorities. Building bike paths and improving local streets tie in fourth and fifth place. The lowest priority for South Coast residents is parking, which was mentioned by only 4 percent of our respondents.

The South Coast public is solidly behind extending the existing, half-cent sales tax to pay for transportation projects (see figure 5). When asked if they would vote to extend the tax, 71 percent of the public said yes. Almost every social group examined in our survey supports the tax by more than a two-thirds margin.

Visit our website at **WWW.SBECP.ORG** for a free copy of the South Coast Community Survey, the Regional Impacts of Growth Study (RIGS), supporting documents and data, as well as other publications on regional policy issues concerning Housing, Open Space and Transportation.

Cut along this line and mail with first class postage

Please add me to the ECP Mailing list. I am interested in the following information:

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