

Transportation Tax Goes on the Ballot

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Source: VTA

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After nearly two years of reaching out to local municipalities and compiling a laundry list of transportation issues throughout the county, the 12-member VTA board voted unanimously to place a 30-year, countywide half-cent sales tax measure on the November ballot.

If passed, the measure is expected to generate between \$6 billion to \$6.5 billion in current dollars.

Revenue would go toward major transportation projects in the county, including phase 2 of the Bart extension to downtown San Jose and Santa Clara, as well as critical improvements to the county's roads.

"This is an important step in relieving traffic and fixing potholes," said Gilroy Mayor Perry Woodward, a member of the VTA Board of Directors.

While major projects like the BART extension usually require a variety of funding sources, the countywide sales tax will provide a local revenue source that qualifies for additional matching funds from regional, state and federal agencies.

Before it voted on June 2, the board heard results from a recent survey of 600 likely November voters conducted this spring by Silicon Valley Leadership Group (SVLG), an industry lobby for regional technology companies. SVLG was one of the many agencies involved in VTA's Envision Silicon Valley, a countywide effort that brought community stakeholders together to discuss current and future transportation needs while identifying solutions and crafting funding priorities.

The survey, which showed 69 percent of respondents supported the proposed sales tax measure, was the fifth one conducted by the group in the last 25 months.

While 25 percent stated they were opposed to the potential measure, Carl Guardino, SVLG CEO said, in Santa Clara County that figure is similar for any proposed fee or tax.

"We feel really good about those numbers," said Guardino, adding that the latest results have shown more support for the measure than at any other time in the polling.

Woodward said the survey results underscored people's eagerness for traffic relief.

"People are fed up with the congestion, which is understandable," he said, adding that the funds generated from the measure would also help improve pedestrian safety around schools, help relieve highway congestion and improve safety at CalTrain at-grade crossings.

"It will also have annual audits done by a citizen watchdog committee," said Woodward. "Overall it's a good measure."

More than a billion dollars is earmarked for fixing local and county roads.

"The condition of our local and county roads are below taxpayer expectations," said Guardino.

South County residents, he said, are especially impacted by a "hidden tax"—the cost of wear and tear on their vehicles from potholes and pockmarked streets both where they live and where they work.

With the unanimous vote from the VTA Board, Guardino said the next step for the group is continued outreach about the benefits of the measure.

"We will continue to build a broad coalition of citizens so together we can pass a measure that truly addresses the concerns that we all share," he said.

If passed in November by a two-thirds vote, tax collections could begin as early as April 2017, according to the VTA.

ON THE BALLOT

Projects and categories funded by the proposed half-cent transportation sales tax measure:

- BART Phase II: \$1.5 billion
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Program: \$250 million
- Caltrain Capacity Improvements: \$300 million
- Caltrain Grade Separations: \$700 million
- County Expressways: \$750 million
- Highway Interchanges: \$750 million
- Local Streets and Roads: \$1.2 billion
- SR 85 Corridor: \$350 million
- Transit Operations: \$500 million

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