

Editorial: Finish BART, repair streets with Measure B

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Federal and state governments have all but abandoned investments in transportation. Roads and bridges are crumbling, transit systems are deteriorating and a punishing recession and slow recovery have forced many local governments to fall behind on even basic street maintenance—particularly in Silicon Valley.

So yes, voters: It's time for Santa Clara County to pass a new local transportation measure. Vote yes on Measure B, a 30-year half-cent sales tax, on the November ballot.

Communities need to take responsibility for their own challenges and be ready with matching dollars to compete for whatever state or federal grants become available.

The Measure B spending plan was developed by city and county officials convened by the Silicon Valley Leadership Group over the past two years. It was vetted and refined through countless public meetings.

Since 2000, county transit measures have focused substantially on building BART to Silicon Valley. Connecting with Caltrain to ring the Bay with commuter rail is critical to the regional economy.

BART service will reach Berryessa next year. Measure B is needed to provide a local match for a final round of federal grants to complete the line through downtown San Jose to Santa Clara and eventually, we hope, to San Jose Mineta International Airport.

But planners recognize that great regional transit can only work if local roads and transit systems can efficiently take people from BART stops to work or to their homes. So of the \$6.314 billion Measure B will raise over 30 years, BART spending is capped at 25 percent — and 19 percent of the tax, or \$1.2 billion, will go toward street repairs and maintenance.

This will provide annual allocations to each of the county's 15 cities using a formula based on population and miles of roads. Over 30 years it will bring, as examples, \$30 million to Gilroy, \$69 million to Santa Clara and \$580 million to San Jose, which has half the county's population. This won't bring local streets up to grade A condition everywhere. But it will be sufficient to allow cities with the worst conditions to stabilize them, and cities already able to maintain their streets the leeway to make serious improvements.

Financing annual maintenance is critical because every dollar spent on the basic preventive work saves \$5 in the long run, according to San Jose's transportation department. Estimates by national organizations are as high as \$14 in savings per \$1 invested. It costs exponentially more to rebuild a deteriorated street than it does to just keep it in good condition.

Hundreds of millions of dollars in additional investments in roadways beyond that \$1.2 billion are highly strategic. For example, the county's nine expressways – the workhorses of the road system, used by more than half of county residents every day – will get grade-separated crossings at bottlenecks so that they flow more smoothly and will include full-road upgrades for bicycle lanes and pedestrian safety.

Some \$250 million will go toward other bike and pedestrian safety projects throughout the county, particularly around schools.

And \$500 million will go toward serving low-income residents and seniors, students and the disabled in areas where big buses on regular routes are neither adequate nor cost effective. Taxes are never popular. And sales taxes can hit the poor hardest – although 25 percent of sales tax revenue in this county is from business to business transactions. But everybody uses the roads, and many would like to use transit if it were more efficient for them.

The results of this tax will be tangible and worth the investment – not just near the BART line, but in neighborhoods throughout the county. Vote yes on Measure B.