

## Don't go backward

### Budget proposal would hit state transit agencies hard.

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Go back and read the ballot arguments in favor of Proposition 1B, the Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality and Port Security Bond Act of 2006. It was the largest public works bond in U.S. history.

Besides repairing and upgrading highways and local streets, voters were told some of the \$19.9 billion would be used to expand public transit. Since then, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and legislators have moved quickly to allocate billions for roads, but their plans for transit funding fall well short of what transit districts and the public have a right to expect.

Adding to the disappointment is the governor's budget proposal for 2007-08 in which Schwarzenegger calls for a major redirection of transportation funds.

If approved by the Legislature, the governor's budget would take \$1.1 billion in money local transit agencies have been counting on and shift it to other purposes, specifically to buy school buses, pay for transportation programs for the disabled and help pay down debt. In this way, the governor hopes to free up money to support other general fund programs, including health care, prisons and aid to the poor.

On the school bus money, there has been a complicated set of maneuvers at the Capitol. First transit money was diverted for school bus funding. The education lobby howled. Under arcane funding rules, the shift would have reduced the state's future payout to school districts. So this week, the governor redirected the transit funds into the general fund. From there, the money would be allocated to schools. That would protect future school funding, but the impact on transit districts would remain the same. They lose.

Voters might think the Proposition 1B funds they approved in November could help solve this problem. But that money can't be used for operations. It can be used only for capital expenditures -- buying buses or light-rail cars, for example, or building transit stations or bus stops.

Transit districts remain desperate for operations money to hire more drivers and expand service.

At a hearing before the Legislature, the California Transit Association unveiled a chart that showed the governor's budget proposal would reduce state funding in the State Transit Assistance Account by \$411 million compared with the current fiscal year.

When the governor and legislative leaders joined forces to push passage of Proposition 1B, they promised to use some of the money to expand transit. In his initial budget proposal, the governor is backpedaling on a commitment to support transit -- a commitment that should embrace both operations and construction projects for transit. The Legislature should not permit such transit backtracking.

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