

Transit supporters back lower threshold for sales tax measures

Corey Moore | January 31st, 2013, 5:04pm

As transportation advocates prepare to gather Friday **to discuss ways to speed up transit projects** (<http://movela.org/sp/agenda-move-la-5th-annual-transportation-conversation/>), they are also thinking about electoral reform. Stung by last November's razor-thin defeat of L.A. County's Measure J, transit backers are supporting a push in Sacramento to lower the threshold for voter approval of a sales tax from two-thirds to 55 percent.

Voters supported Measure J two to one. But it fell short of a two-thirds "yes" vote by just half a percentage point.

L.A. County Metro CEO Art Leahy supports lowering the two-thirds requirement. He says that could pave the way for measures to speed up work on projects such as the Green and Gold line extensions.

Meanwhile, Leahy is thankful for the county's existing half-cent transit sales tax, Measure R.

Measure R - which voters approved four years ago and which expires in 2039 - has completely funded eight projects, including the Expo and Gold lines and the upcoming Crenshaw line.

Over the next year, authorities will try to get federal money to help pay for three subway segments and to fund the regional connector in downtown LA.

Public-private partnerships could help pay for projects, too ... such as a big one that Metro chief Leahy says planners are thinking about.

"A potential tunnel under the Sepulveda Pass from the area of Westwood out to the area of Van Nuys that might be a toll road," says Leahy. "Maybe we have a toll road and a tunnel as well as transit project connecting Van Nuys with the Westside of Los Angeles."

Some transit activists say big ideas like that will have a better chance of winning public approval if community groups have a say in how they're designed. Bart Reed, head of The Transit Coalition, says failure to get community input helped sidetrack the recent proposal to put a \$3 billion bond on the L.A. city ballot to fund street repairs.

"There are things that voters would support and there's a way to do it," says Reed. "It's just a matter of bringing it to a community based initiative, not a city council imposed initiative."

That will be one of many topics discussed at Friday's fifth annual **Move LA transit conference** (<http://movela.org/sp/agenda-move-la-5th-annual-transportation-conversation/>). LA political leaders will join with business, labor, environmentalists and others to discuss how to speed up transit projects, increase housing for transit users, and encourage more cycling and walking.



Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
Metro's Gold Line.



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