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A Taxing Proposition: A Century of Ballot Box Transportation Planning in Los Angeles

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### **Authors**

Wachs, Martin  
Chung, Michelle  
Garrett, Mark  
[et al.](#)

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# **A TAXING PROPOSITION:**

## A CENTURY OF BALLOT BOX TRANSPORTATION PLANNING IN LOS ANGELES

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MARTIN WACHS

*and*

MICHELLE CHUNG

MARK GARRETT

HANNAH KING

RYLAND LU

MICHAEL MANVILLE

MELISSA SATHER

BRIAN D. TAYLOR



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ballot measures that raise money for transportation through local sales taxes have become startlingly successful across the United States. This is especially true in California, and particularly in Los Angeles County. In November of 2016, more than seven out of ten (71.5%) of those casting ballots approved Measure M which added a half percent to the county sales tax for transportation improvements. The extra half-percent is forecast to raise over \$120 billion over the coming 40 years to construct the region's ambitious new rail transit system and other street and highway improvements. Measure M was the ninth transportation sales tax ballot measure in 40 years to be put before LA County voters, and the fourth to be approved. As a result of voter-approved taxes, LA County today raises well over half of its annual budget for transportation programs through county sales taxes.

This report presents an historical analysis of the evolution of and support for local transportation finance in Los Angeles, with a focus on the nine transportation sales tax measures considered since 1968. LOSTs have come to play a central role in not just funding, but in shaping the transportation future of this ethnically diverse region famous for freeways and traffic. We examine the political motivations for the nine measures, consider their principal supporters and opponents and their arguments, the campaigns and media coverage, and their outcomes.

This study is based on archival research of published analyses, media accounts, public records of important meetings, the papers of political figures, statistical analyses of voting on recent measures, and interviews with former local public officials who participated in the campaigns for and against the ballot measures.

We begin with a review of transportation ballot measures in Los Angeles that stretch back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and then analyze in more detail three unsuccessful transit ballot measures in the 1960s and 1970s, together with the campaign arguments both for and against, and the various transportation investment projects proposed to be funded by each measure. Despite their failure to win voter approval, these efforts marked the beginning of a comprehensive approach to ballot box transportation planning in Los Angeles designed to deal with both serious traffic congestion and the region's air quality concerns. We turn then to two successful ballot measures in 1980 and 1990 that together increased the local sales tax by one percent to fund rail construction and other public transit projects in the region. These

measures provided the foundation for the present countywide rail transit system. We also look at a subsequent 1990s measure crafted to respond to public perceptions of mismanagement by the regional transportation authority and which sought to reform agency practices as well as limiting the use of sales tax funds for future subway construction. Lastly, we examine another trio of ballot measures that collectively raised the sales tax by another one percent for a variety of local highway and transit projects. We statistically analyze the geographic voting patterns to determine the role population, socio-economic, and demographic characteristics (including educational level, income, race, and gender) played in support for or opposition to the proposed measures and consider whether and how residents' proximity to proposed transportation investments affected the voting outcomes.

Because there have been nine different transportation ballot measures over four decades, it is possible to consider how the outcomes of each election influenced voter attitudes toward later ballot measures and the ways in which electoral politics influenced transportation policy choices over time. We conclude with a discussion of the evolution of regional electoral politics and transportation, and what local option sales tax finance may mean for the future of Los Angeles and, by extension, metropolitan areas around the country. Los Angeles County now depends heavily on voter-approved sales tax revenues for transportation – the MTA today receives over half of its total revenues (\$2.3 billion/year) from local sales taxes – and these revenues are profoundly shaping the region. We conclude that the ballot measures crafted for voter approval to generate these enormous sums of money have likely had more influence of the development of the region's transportation (and particularly public transit) systems than the transportation planning processes ostensibly intended to guide that development.

While tax ballot measures have undeniably increased transportation funding in LA County, it is possible that in building support for transportation tax increases the county has also sacrificed some efficiency and efficacy in its transportation system. It may be that the most politically acceptable transportation proposals—those that could win two-thirds of the vote in an election—are not the proposals that would provide Angelinos with mobility most cost-effectively. Elected officials may be tempted to propose LOST-funded projects that will attract voter support over more mundane, but necessary, system maintenance and operating expenditures. Promises that appeal to the car-driving middle class, that does most of the county's voting, may be emphasized over improvements that would serve low-income residents who do most of the county's transit riding. It may also be that public transit services would be better financed through mechanisms that are less opaque and regressive than sales taxes.

## LOS ANGELES HAS A LONG HISTORY OF FUNDING TRANSPORTATION

While many observers have marveled at the Los Angeles “innovation” of funding transportation through ballot measures since 1980, historically a large proportion of the transportation infrastructure in LA was built through local voter-approved revenues, mainly bonds. This began in 1868 when voters narrowly approved a \$225,000 bond measure to build the region’s first railroad between downtown and the port at San Pedro Bay. That was followed in 1876 by a measure to grant the Southern Pacific railroad a \$602,000 subsidy to entice the company to route its transcontinental line through the region. These public investments helped to expand the region’s economy and led to rapid and sustained population growth.

Between the passage of the Good Roads Act in 1908 and the end of the New Deal in 1937 – a key period of Los Angeles’ history that saw further significant population increase and with it political contention over the direction of the region’s growth – Angelenos voted on 23 different transportation related ballot measures including major improvements to the Port of Los Angeles and construction of a downtown Union Station to improve railroad operations. Not all of these measures passed: attempts to fund rapid transit fell short as voters’ growing dissatisfaction with local transit service was met with increasing public support for extensive road building and road expansion. In 1924, voters backed a \$5 million bond measure to implement the city’s *Major Street Traffic Plan*. Two other unsuccessful rail transit proposals, one in 1939 and another nine years later for developing rapid transit in roadway medians engendered strong opposition from suburban business interests as too downtown centered. Though they failed these measures did underscore the need for widespread regional representation in any future transit proposals, which continues to be a theme in current debates over transportation planning in Los Angeles.

Overall, these early transportation measures fared well with voters. Of the 25 transportation-related ballot measures in Los Angeles County and its municipalities from 1860 to 1960, only seven (28%) failed to pass, a far better record than non-transportation measures of which 21 of 31 (71%) went down to defeat. Whether, as some contend, Los Angeles missed a golden opportunity to create the backbone of an effective public transit system that would have reduced the need for automobiles and perhaps the need to spend many billions on freeways it is clear that ever since local voters have regularly been presented with competing visions for the future of Los Angeles in these ballot measures, and arguments over whether to fund transportation systems to serve these visions. These debates came to the fore in the 1960s as regional planners again considered building a rail rapid transit network.

## EARLY FAILED EFFORTS TO FUND REGIONAL TRANSIT

In 1965, as construction of the regional network of state and federally-financed postwar freeways neared completion, the Los Angeles Rapid Transit District (RTD) began planning for a high-capacity rail rapid transit network designed to lessen traffic and strengthen the downtown economy by linking it to the growing number of suburban workers. Twice the RTD sought voter approval, first in 1968 with Measure A, a half-cent sales tax proposal to fund construction of a \$2.5 billion (\$17.8 billion in 2017 dollars) 89-mile rail system, including a subway running from downtown to Hollywood, and lines to the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys, Beverly Hills, West Los Angeles, Long Beach and LAX, and again in 1974 with Proposition A for a 1-cent county sales tax to construct an even more ambitious 140-mile fixed guideway system estimated to cost between \$8 and \$10 billion and to subsidize 25-cent bus fares and other near and long-term bus improvements. Both measures received support from business organizations, labor unions, prominent politicians, and citizens' groups, but in what would become a familiar pattern, others opposed the measures because they did not provide service to their communities or commercial interests.

The 1968 campaign sought to convince multiple constituencies in the county that a rapid transit system would serve all their interests. Campaign materials for Measure A highlighted the new rail rapid transit system's space-age equipment and state-of-the-art "computer-controlled" operation the RTD claimed would transport passengers at speeds as high as 75 miles per hour. The RTD promised service to over 40 percent of employment locations and two-thirds of the housing in the county.

Measure A fell 16 percentage points short of the 60 percent threshold required by law in 1968 for passage and carried a majority of voters only in unincorporated areas in South and Central Los Angeles and several municipalities on the Westside and inner San Gabriel Valley. Support was higher in upper and lower income areas, near a proposed transit line, and among African-Americans but weaker in moderate income areas and among Hispanic- and Asian-Americans. Two *Los Angeles Times* editorials asserted that voters were not convinced of the benefits of a rail-focused transit system centered on downtown Los Angeles. Over the ensuing years, rail proponents would continually have to fight the notion that rail transit was just a scheme to prop up a declining downtown, and that led to proposals to "share the wealth" by promising more benefits to outlying areas to garner votes.

With lessons learned from the 1968 election, for the 1974 campaign the RTD was deliberately vague on particular modes (rail lines v. bus ways) and routes in an effort to attract support from a dispersed electorate leery of any measure that would not deliver immediate benefits to their own



communities. The agency presented the proposed expanded system as one that would benefit the poor, minorities, the elderly, and the young, as well as increase access to jobs. Despite the attempt to reach a more suburban electorate, opponents again focused on how the system would primarily benefit downtown Los Angeles at the expense of outlying areas and questioned the rail system's compatibility with Los Angeles' low density urban form.

Proposition A in 1974 lost by 6 points (46.3% to 53.7%). While a majority of LA city residents, and those in adjoining unincorporated areas in Central and South Los Angeles voted in favor of the measure, it fared poorly among suburbanites. Rather than revise and resubmit a third regional rail transit measure to voters. RTD officials decided to pursue a scaled-down rail guideway system, to be constructed in stages beginning with the Wilshire "Starter Line" using state gasoline tax funds to secure federal matching UMTA grants. Still, the RTD's new plan focused on improving travel in a few highly congested corridors connecting to the downtown, while County politicians were starting to envision a far larger regional transit system that would tie together the area's far-flung communities. At the time, though, there were no committed funds to implement either concept.

In 1975, County Supervisor Baxter Ward, put forward his own expansive rail project, a fantastically expansive 281-mile "Sunset Coast Line" rail system, which far exceeded the scale of the previous plans, rivaling the subways in New York and London in length. It included 230 miles of heavy rail "main lines" along 11 corridors and 51 miles of light rail and monorail "feeder" lines—that would mostly run along freeway medians and flood control channels. Ward's plan had an estimated cost of \$7.5 billion (\$33.3 billion in 2017 dollars) and, unlike the previous measures, provided detailed description of chosen route alignments to enable citizens to see how they would benefit and permit them to monitor the county's progress in constructing the system. While critics charged Ward's plan amounted to little more than "lines on a map" lacking any serious technical analyses the inclusion of several suburb-to-suburb lines spoke to the genuine frustration of suburban politicians (like Ward) who believed that previous plans reflected too much favoritism towards the Central City. Despite questions over the plan's financial and technical feasibility the RTD Board placed two half-cent sales tax measures on the June 1976 primary ballot. Proposition R would fund construction of the regional rail system and Proposition T would fund rail operations and maintenance.

Campaign literature supporting Propositions R and T highlighted the system's vast geographic scope, even listing all the municipalities to be served by the new system in contrast to previous measures' focus on "limited corridors." Supporters enumerated the system's benefits to automobile users, suggesting on the one hand that drivers could save money

by switching to rapid transit and, on the other hand, how the system would reduce freeway traffic. Opposition to Propositions R and T highlighted the system's high costs and its vague, exceedingly optimistic financial plan. Ultimately, Propositions R and T lost by larger margins than either of the previous two sales tax measures, garnering only 40 and 39 percent of voter support respectively. The measures failed in every city in the county except Compton, and lost in the City of Los Angeles by 75,000 votes, winning a majority of votes in low-income South Los Angeles, despite their focus on suburban rail lines.

After three strikes at the ballot box in just eight years, it appeared that the voters of Los Angeles County simply did not share public officials' enthusiasm for rail transit. But by 1980, several factors coalesced to overcome voter resistance. Spurred by the availability of federal funding for new transit projects, regional politicians and planners went back to the drawing board in an attempt to forge a successful coalition to improve public transit in Los Angeles.

## LOS ANGELES VOTERS APPROVE A RAIL PROGRAM

The following year the newly created Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) proposed a "balanced" transit funding program. To reach consensus on a half-cent sales tax the LACTC agreed to subsidize bus fares for three years and to return some of the funds raised to local communities. These "local return" funds proved to be popular and so continued to play central roles in building support across the county for subsequent sales tax measures. After three years, 40 percent of funding would support discretionary transit expenditures, 25 percent would be returned to municipalities to fund local transit projects (the Local Return), and 35 percent would fund the rail rapid transit program that would serve, at a minimum, seven broadly defined corridors covering the entire county shown on a map included in the official ballot pamphlet. The entire proposed system included 180 miles of rail lines and was projected to take 35 to 40 years to complete, at a cost of \$3 billion.

The combination of fare reductions and local returns proved to be a winning formula. Despite polls showing that less than 25 percent of county residents supported a sales tax for transit, Proposition A in 1980, when a simple majority vote was needed to enact the measure, won 54 percent of the vote. This time the measure won in the San Fernando Valley, South Bay cities, and Pasadena, though nearby Glendale and many cities in the San Gabriel Valley opposed it.

Managers at the recently formed Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) soon realized that even with the Proposition A funds, they would not be able to construct the entire planned system. To implement

the rail plan, the commission began to borrow against future Proposition A tax revenues. Interest and premium payments quickly consumed a significant portion of annually available funds. Ever mounting budget deficits reached over \$5 million in FY1987/88, particularly as the Blue Line between downtown LA and downtown Long Beach proved far more expensive than proponents had hoped. The LACTC faced the prospect of having to delay or drop several proposed light rail segments. So in 1990, the County Board of Supervisors placed Proposition C on the ballot: another half-cent sales tax for twenty years to fund local street, freeway, and transportation systems management improvements. Some 40 percent of the projected revenue was designated for “improving and expanding” rail and bus transit service; 25 percent designated for countywide “transit-related improvements” on streets and highways; 20 percent allocated to a new Local Return program that cities could use to fund improvements on streets heavily used by transit; 10 percent designated for commuter rail and freeway bus facilities; and 5 percent for bus and rail security. The trend away from single-project or single-mode transportation ballot measures and toward something-for-everyone packages was now in full swing.

With respect to public transit, supporters of Proposition C tried to convince voters of the need for additional funding, to operate intercounty and commuter rail service, meet state and local requirements for cleaner, fuel-efficient buses, and importantly, to speed the construction and operations of the 150-mile rail system. However, the measure itself made no hard funding commitments. Critics pointed to cost overruns and mismanagement that accompanied the Blue Line light rail and Red Line Wilshire subway projects, concluding that Proposition C would only “throw more money” away without achieving tangible results.

Proposition C eked out a victory by a narrow margin of only 14,000 votes (50.43%), winning razor-thin voter approval by maintaining the shaky regional coalition in support of major rail transit improvements. It won in the traditional transit-friendly liberal voting areas of the Westside and Central Los Angeles by comfortable margins but lost in the San Fernando Valley. In contrast to previous elections Proposition C carried many cities in the San Gabriel Valley, perhaps due to the promise of commuter rail service.

Following the vote, LACTC staff identified specific highway and rail projects that would be undertaken with the approved funds. The final 30-Year Plan, for buses, commuter rail, express transit service, and new high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes reflected, but did not resolve, the ongoing bus versus rail debate, and the tension between subway and light rail proponents. Throughout the 1980s, the “centrists” at the RTD had pursued its subway project linking downtown, mid-Wilshire Miracle Mile, Hollywood, and the San Fernando Valley. The LACTC Board, dominated by county rather than city interests, viewed the RTD and its subway as pursuing a parochial agenda

that failed to serve the broader interests of the entire region. To many of the new “regionalists” in the LACTC, the downtown subway project was a product of old technology and outmoded politics. With the passage of Propositions A and C, the LACTC was poised to create what it considered to be a truly modern, truly *regional*, rail system for Southern California.

In April 1993, following years of interagency wrangling, the state Legislature ordered the consolidation of the LACTC and the RTD into the current Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority, placing transportation planning and operations under one entity with the aim of providing more unified delivery of transit service in the Los Angeles region. This did not, however, address the precarious and overcommitted financial situation inherited from the LA MTA’s predecessors. The ambitious rail program adopted by LACTC consumed all of the revenues dedicated by the measure, but most of Proposition C’s 40% Discretionary Funds as well. With so much revenue tied up in capital-intensive rail construction, the MTA had few uncommitted funds left to cover rising rail and bus operating costs. There was growing sentiment, especially among those favoring transportation improvements other than rail transit construction, that the MTA was focusing too many resources on a single, very expensive subway that was eating up the agency’s limited funds while ultimately benefiting only a small percentage of system riders. By 1994, the MTA faced a \$300 million budget shortfall and even the most ardent rail proponents began to recognize that the agency could no longer adhere to the 30-Year Plan.

Responding to the rising crescendo of public criticism, LA County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky sponsored a ballot measure entitled the “MTA Reform and Accountability Act,” which sought to force the agency to change its course in order to free up future dollars for a more affordable and effective transit system, including a larger role for buses. Yaroslavsky had not come to the decision to oppose subway construction lightly, as he had once supported the project, but which, in his words, was “based on a set of assumptions that [had] gone up in smoke.” In addition to ending subway construction after completion of the North Hollywood line, the initiative would create a five-member Citizens Oversight Committee to monitor the MTA’s spending of sales tax revenues and require an annual independent audit of the agency to ensure it complied with voter-approved restrictions on the use of transit tax monies.

County voters approved Yaroslavsky’s measure in November of 1998 with 68.5 percent of the vote. The initiative passed in every State Assembly district in the county. Even Eastside residents voted for the measure, though the area was next in line for rail transit and despite opposition from Eastside Latino politicians and transit advocates who had argued that it was unfair to punish the Eastside for past subway mismanagement and unfair to deprive

one of the most densely populated and transit-dependent parts of the region from getting a subway.

During the eighties and nineties federal grant programs dominated transportation politics. Local planners sought to maximize federal grants by shifting away from freeway building and turning instead toward rail transit, to reflect shifting federal priorities. This led Los Angeles transportation planners and engineers to craft a proposal for one significant federally sponsored “starter line” that was cost-justified and could anticipate high ridership, though over time rail plans became more grandiose and less driven by technical criteria than by political considerations. Regional transportation agencies repeatedly faced reform efforts as both the press and the public increasingly perceived them as not up to addressing the rapidly changing national political environment and Los Angeles’ maturation as a region.

By the end of the twentieth century the reformulated LA MTA had faltered, lost public confidence, changed leadership and direction several times, but was part of a gradually emerging new regional transportation politics emphasizing multi-modalism and focusing on developing local financial support and governance. In retrospect the early emphasis on a single starter rail line seems just a few decades later to have been misguided and almost quaint. As the County entered the new millennium transportation politics meant depending less on federal financial support and financing its own programs with supermajority transportation sales tax approvals by an increasingly diverse LA County population. That in turn led to plans that self-consciously provided something for every community in the county and addressed users of multiple modes of transportation. Before long that shift led to the largest locally financed transportation investment program in the nation’s history.

## GOING MULTIMODAL AND GETTING THE VOTES

In early 2008 hundreds of transit advocates met to discuss a potential ballot measure to raise even more funds for their favored mode. The event was perhaps the most pivotal in the development of the next generation of transportation planning in Los Angeles. It was sponsored by MoveLA, a broad-based coalition of environmental, labor, and business leaders who supported increased spending on transit. Participants learned that recent polling showed that 60 percent of respondents expressed initial support for a sales tax measure while 69 percent expressed support after hearing more about what projects the measure might fund and why it was needed.

It was clear that the attempt to again raise the sales tax would have to include a wide variety of projects to appeal to two-thirds of voters in the county. A key element was the proposed “Subway to the Sea,” an extension

of the Wilshire Red (later named Purple) Line to Santa Monica. The areas to be served by the project comprised just 5.5 percent of the countywide population, so asking the whole county to pay for the project would be a difficult sell. As a representative of northern Los Angeles County, Supervisor Mike Antonovich was opposed to the measure from the beginning, on grounds that that all of the money “would be drained into the subway”.

The completion of the Wilshire Subway was the driving force behind the new sales tax measure, but the original draft spending plan tried to give everyone a “slice of the pie.” Still, it was met with opposition from key stakeholders, some of whom wanted more money for bus improvements, so the final plan decreased the rail funding allocation from 40% to 35% and increased the bus allocation by a like amount, from 25% to 30%. The Automobile Club of Southern California wanted more funding dedicated to highway improvements. Its support for the measure was critical because its large membership gives it a great deal of influence. In response, the final plan increased funding for highway improvement projects from 15% to 20% while local redistribution was reduced from 20 to 15 percent.

The MTA Board proposed raising the local sales tax another half cent for 30 years and the County Board of Supervisors agreed to put Measure R on the November 2008 ballot. The ballot language was kept vague, alluding to few specific projects, to appeal to a broad voter base. The ballot text led with the provisions for road improvements including repairing potholes, synchronizing traffic signals, and improving safety – all intended to resonate with the majority of voters who did not use transit; it only briefly mentioned new light rail and subways and made no mention of new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines, better local bus service, or Metrolink commuter rail improvements. The ballot argument in support of Measure R was creatively crafted for broad appeal, claiming it would bring “traffic relief for every part of Los Angeles County” for an average cost of only \$25 per person per year, half the cost of a tank of gas.

Measure R had a number of opponents, but no coordinated opposition campaign. The ballot argument against Measure R, endorsed by County Supervisor and MTA Board Director Michael Antonovich focused on geographic equity emphasizing that areas outside of Central LA would not receive their fair share of funds and claiming that residents in these regions would be subsidizing subway construction in other parts of the county with little benefit to their own communities.

Set to appear on the November 2008 presidential election ballot to attract an electorate more amenable to mass transit, the measure competed with four other tax-related measures. The large number of new tax-related initiatives on the ballot coupled with the start of the Great Recession increased uncertainty as to how people would vote. Unemployment was growing,

consumer confidence was decreasing, and people were starting to worry about the security of their financial assets. Still, Measure R was approved with 67.9 percent of the vote. While dense and liberal West Hollywood supported the measure most strongly among municipalities in the county, the measure won the majority of the vote in almost every community in the San Fernando Valley, the South Bay and the southeast county—three areas which Proposition C and many of the earlier measures had failed to carry. In the San Gabriel Valley, the measure won in all but a few communities on the northern and southern fringes, amounting to a significant improvement over the voting patterns in 1990 despite the opposition of local politicians.

Measure R took effect on July 1, 2009 and increased the Los Angeles County sales tax rate to 9.75 percent until 2039. Due to the poor economic conditions, new forecasts predicted it would generate \$1.8 billion less in sales tax revenue over its 30-year life than initially projected. Revenues from Proposition A and Proposition C sales taxes were also in decline due to the recession, down 19.5 percent in the first quarter of 2009 compared with the same quarter in 2008.

With local construction employment having fallen by half in the previous two years, shortly after Measure R was approved by the voters, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa began lobbying the MTA board to accelerate construction of major projects to create jobs and revitalize Los Angeles' declining economy. In the fall of 2009, he released his "Los Angeles 30/10 Initiative," a plan to construct Measure R's transit projects over a 10-year period instead of a 30-year timeframe. Villaraigosa proposed a new ballot measure that would extend Measure R beyond 2039 so the agency could borrow against future sales tax revenues. As initially proposed, Measure J—the "J" stood for the "jobs" it would create—would have made Measure R's tax permanent thereby enhancing the MTA's financing capacity and allowing it to speed up project timeframes so major projects would be completed in 13 rather than 27 years.

Despite lukewarm polling results, the MTA board voted to put Measure J on the November 2012 ballot. An argument made against the measure was that interest payments from heavy borrowing against future sales tax revenue for current projects would reduce the funds available for future projects. Some argued that it was unfair to burden future generations with a tax they would have no say in. Many distrusted the MTA's ability to manage its finances and did not believe that the agency would stop borrowing when it had enough money to complete the Measure R projects.

Measure J came close but was defeated, garnering 66.1 percent of the vote just short of the 2/3 vote needed for passage. Beverly Hills, Pasadena, and several other cities that had supported Measure R overwhelmingly, flipped and voted Measure J down resoundingly. The measure also fell short of a

super-majority by losing votes in scattered suburban precincts and on the Westside. Analysis of election data and review of interviews the MTA conducted with people involved in the campaign for Measure M, led us to conclude that although Measure J did not propose any new taxes, it also did not deliver any new projects; it only advanced projects voters had already approved. It also did nothing to assuage hard feelings that had arisen during the contentious campaign for Measure R that because some parts of the county – particularly the North County, the San Gabriel Valley, and the South Bay – would pay more in taxes than they would get back in benefits.

With local officials gaining confidence in ballot measures for transportation, the 2016 Measure M campaign took root soon after 2012’s Measure J failed, particularly because it had come close to the required super-majority. Polls showed strong support for another tax increase, but most wanted to see street and freeway improvements, perhaps reflecting increasing concern with traffic congestion. Another common theme heard from public outreach efforts was that people wanted to see the capital improvement projects accelerated.

The MTA presented voters with an ambitious \$120 billion 40-year expenditure plan for the November 2016 ballot, funded by a new permanent half-cent sales tax and a permanent extension of Measure R which would effectively implement the goals of the barely failed Measure J. Measure M was multimodal, including funding for road and highway improvements as well as transit, though the largest category would be for new rail service.

The campaign for Measure M stressed its concrete benefits — higher employment and reduced congestion for people who continued to drive. The ballot measure was officially titled the “Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan” and ballot language emphasized improving freeway traffic flow over all other transportation improvements even as the measure provided for major transit investments. As in 2008, there was no mention of how long it would take for any of these projects to be completed.

Opponents’ argued that blue collar communities would not see traffic relief for decades while mega-projects in wealthier communities would be first in line for funding. The major argument against Measure M was that it was a “forever tax” with “no end date, oversight or accountability.” There would be no way to stop the MTA from continuing to rack up debt by borrowing against future sales tax revenues. Measure M received 71.15 percent of the vote. It was supported by at least 75 percent of voters in census tracts across the central and southern Los Angeles basin, including in the low-income and minority neighborhoods to the south and east of downtown that would presumably be receptive to the opposition’s equity-focused arguments. But the measure performed worse than Measure R in census tracts in and near Beverly Hills and on the Palos Verdes Peninsula.



## WHAT EXPLAINS RECENT VOTING OUTCOMES

Statistical analysis of voting for Measures R, J, and M shows that all had high levels of support in most areas. Support was generally highest in tracts with lower socioeconomic status but Measure M in particular was remarkably successful throughout the county. The *median* tract vote in favor of Measure M was 76 percent, and even the 25 percent of tracts which supported Measure M the least, nearly attained the 2/3 majority necessary for approval. Measure R was slightly less popular, but still had levels of support above 70 percent. Even Measure J, which narrowly lost, had median support above two-thirds, and it was only in the least supportive 25 percent of census tracts that its average support fell under 60 percent.

Each of these elections coincided with a presidential election, and in general support for the measures was highly correlated with support for the Democratic candidate. Turnout was much lower in 2012 than it was in 2008 or 2016. Moreover, all county measures and propositions in general fared more poorly in 2012 than in 2008 or 2016 so Measure J's failure may have been in part an artifact of low turnout and a political climate more hostile to ballot measures. Our analysis underscores how narrow the difference was between failure in 2012 and success in 2016. In 2012, the Measure J received a simple majority in all but a few tracts and even where it did not meet the 2/3 threshold the mean level of support was 52 percent, and 25 percent of these tracts exceeded 63 percent support. So Measure J also was popular—just not quite popular enough.

Many of those interviewed for this research expressed the belief that Measure M patched the holes that had sunk Measure J by addressing regional concerns that had been overlooked by Measures R and J. Much of the political work surrounding Measure M took place long before it was placed on the ballot. Creating a list of projects the measure would finance, and building a coalition to support it, took over three years. Like Measure R, Measure M promised voters many transportation improvement projects. Getting the needed votes often required sacrificing some transportation system effectiveness for political expediency, and the measure included more capital projects than might be ideal, many of which were located in places where they would generate the most votes rather than the most transit riders or traffic improvements.

Campaign messaging largely ignored existing transit riders and environmentally-minded voters, both of whom were considered guaranteed “yes” votes, to focus instead on drivers. The political professionals who created the messages made very clear that the political campaign was *not* built around selling public transportation to the typical Angelino as an appealing *form of travel* – in dramatic contrast to the failed ballot measures

of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, Measure M's campaign was designed to *avoid* suggesting that LA County voters might change their travel behavior. The focus was on convincing drivers, many of whom had no intention of getting out of their cars, that others would get out of *their* cars and off of the freeways. When a late internal poll showed Measure M at only 61 percent support, the political team quickly created and aired a television ad featuring Mayor Eric Garcetti driving along a traffic-free freeway, talking about the importance of a strong transportation system.

Measure M was held out as a transformative step for Los Angeles County, changing the way Angelinos move around. But it also was sold to voters as a package of amenities that would benefit people who *didn't* plan to change the way *they* moved around. Of course, the fact that the campaign stressed Measure M's benefits to people who drive did not mean that Measure M would not reduce driving and increase transit use. But it is worth noting that as the county steadily rolled out more public transit service over the last 20 years, transit ridership has fallen in the 2010s. Thus, despite increasingly effective campaigns to the contrary, the construction of new public transit facilities has not (yet) increased in transit travel.

## CONCLUSIONS

Why have LOSTs been so politically successful in Los Angeles? First, voters may value transportation investments more than in years past, as existing infrastructure has aged and traffic congestion has worsened. Second, proponents may be smarter about when to place these measures on the ballot, often choosing to do so in national elections, when turnout tends to be higher and more politically liberal. Third, proponents have grown more sophisticated in crafting tax measures and associated project plans that appeal to a broad cross-section of voters in a county that has become more dense, multi-ethnic and liberal of the years. For example, proposals are more likely to spread the promised benefits of a transportation sales tax over a broader geographic area and across more interest groups, and to better tailor promised projects to particular voters who will decide their fate. Finally, it may be that success begets success: in recent years advocates have been better able to learn from other campaigns; there are now manuals, web sites, and consultants to help localities get their own LOSTs approved.

Clearly over the years Los Angeles has become denser, more diverse, and more liberal and the MTA and its allies have become much wiser about how to craft ballot measures responding to those changes. While the earlier ballots were narrow in both mode and geography, and later measures narrow in mode (just transit), by the 1980s, they began to look more like national and state highway bills, embodying careful tradeoffs geographically, modally, and temporally. The ballot measure campaigns eventually hit on a winning formula that is increasingly refined with each election. Still, with a

high local sales tax rate now locked in for perpetuity, and much of the revenue already committed to a list of expensive, capital intensive projects with uncertain prospects for operating and maintenance funds in light of declining ridership, this history of ballot box transportation finance and planning in Los Angeles County raises questions whether we have mortgaged the future to pay for politically popular transportation projects today.

Transportation policy in Los Angeles evolved over the last three decades of the 20th century and the first two of the 21st from a primary focus on securing federal and state funding for transportation to a focus on crafting packages of transportation projects to appeal to at least two-thirds of the electorate. The passage of recent measures by solid majorities in virtually every part of the county and across diverse ethnic groups is by any reckoning a remarkable accomplishment. What began with an unsuccessful effort to get voters to pay for part of a geographically limited and vaguely defined rail rapid transit proposals in order to attract federal dollars, has evolved into an increasingly sophisticated process of crafting and selling complex countywide expenditure plans with something in it for everybody, including highway, local streets and roads, bike and pedestrian facilities, and bus system improvements, in addition to rail.

The campaigns for recent ballot measures have relied heavily on selling the benefits of transit alternatives to automobile commuters stuck in traffic, implying – but not explicitly promising—that transit investments will alleviate that congestion. But even “Smart Growth” policies concentrating new development at transit accessible locations also generates additional traffic on nearby streets and freeways. No matter how well designed and run, public transit cannot possibly reach as many destinations as quickly as private vehicles, even on congested roads. As long as motor vehicle travel and parking remain widespread and underpriced, traffic congestion will persist, and likely worsen, even in parts of the region increasingly well served by new public transit investments.

Voters in Los Angeles have now repeatedly taxed themselves to pay for tangible improvements to their local and regional transportation networks. Whether the sales tax -- which generates huge sums of money with very small incremental increases in the levy -- continues to be the finance instrument of choice, and whether shiny new rail transit lines continue to be the mode of choice for voters remains to be seen. New transportation technologies are already transforming urban travel, and many more such innovations are on the way. LA Metro is already planning “first and last mile” connections to their stations and stops that rely to an increasing extent on transportation network companies like Lyft and Uber. What these new services, and the autonomous vehicles following behind them, portend for travel in LA and in metropolitan areas around the country remains to be

seen. We may see increasingly collective forms of personal and public provisioned mobility, or people may choose to drive alone (or be driven alone) even more than they do now. Only time will tell.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## BALLOT BOX TRANSPORTATION PLANNING AND FINANCE

In November of 2016, more than seven out of ten (71.5%) of those casting ballots approved a fourth incremental increase in the Los Angeles County sales tax in order to fund a variety of transportation improvements. Measure M added a half percent to the county sales tax, bringing the total county sales tax to between 9.5 and 10.5 percent (depending on the level of municipal sales taxes in each city); the extra half-percent is forecast to raise over \$120 billion over the coming 40 years (Elkind 2017). Measure M was the ninth transportation sales tax ballot measure in 40 years to be put before LA County voters, the fourth to be approved, and the second approved in the last decade.

So easily clearing the two-thirds supermajority threshold required for passage in California<sup>1</sup> is especially remarkable given conventional political wisdom that voters are almost always hostile to new taxes (Albrecht, et al, 2017). The first successful local option sales tax for transportation in Los Angeles was approved in 1980, just two years after the widely heralded Proposition 13 “tax revolt” of 1978, and amidst the rise of anti-tax conservatism in both Washington (under President Reagan) and California (under Governors Deukmejian and Wilson). But by 2018, LA County voters had approved four transportation sales tax measures that collectively levied an additional two percent on all taxable purchases for transportation.

As a result of these voter-approved taxes, LA County today raises well over half of its annual budget for transportation programs through county sales taxes. This relatively new fund source —motor fuel taxes for transportation stretch back nearly a century—is vitally important to the region and has national significance because hundreds of other jurisdictions have emulated Los Angeles County by proposing, and in many cases, successfully enacting voter-approved local transportation taxes.

How did the residents of this famously car-centric and historically tax averse place come to tax themselves, not once or twice, but four separate times in order to fund, among other things, an ambitious new rail transit system? To examine this question and in order to better understand this relatively new

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<sup>1</sup> The early Los Angeles County ballot measures required only simple majority votes for approval. In 1996, however, voters approved a state proposition requiring that “special purpose taxes” be enacted by a “super majority” of two-thirds + 1 of ballots cast. Soon after, the California courts ruled in a case brought against the Santa Clara County LOST that local sales tax measures are indeed special purpose taxes and subsequent measures have been required to achieve the specified super majority vote.

and enormously consequential trend in the public finance of transportation, this study presents a historical analysis of the evolution of and support for the nine Los Angeles transportation sales tax measures. In doing so, we seek to explain why Local Option Sales Taxes (LOSTs) have come to play a central role in, not just funding, but shaping the region's transportation future. We explore the factors that explain the outcomes of the transportation sales tax elections, and the ways in which the use of this financing mechanism has shaped transportation policy in an ethnically diverse region famous for its freeways and traffic, which is today building one of the nation's largest public transit systems. For each of the nine measures, we examine the political motivations behind them, their principal supporters and opponents, the campaigns and media coverage, and the outcomes. While there have been analyses of individual elections and speculation in the media as to the significance of many possible influences on voting behavior, no single comparative study has comprehensively analyzed and contrasted all nine sales tax elections.

While the twists and turns of four decades of ballot box planning the nation's most populous county makes for an interesting story, this significance of this work stretches well beyond the San Gabriel Mountains and San Pedro Bay to the nation as whole. LA County's transportation sales tax program is one of the nation's oldest and certainly the most ambitious. But the LA experience foreshadows trends in many other U.S. regions that increasingly rely on local option sales taxes for transportation. As of 2018, 24 of California's 58 counties, home to 88 percent of the state's population, rely on LOSTs to pay for transportation. Sales tax revenues dedicated to transportation in these 24 "self help" counties produce over \$4 billion per year for transportation construction and maintenance. Sixteen counties have enacted more than one sales tax measure: in addition to the four in Los Angeles County, Alameda and Santa Clara counties in the San Francisco Bay Area have passed three and five measures respectively (Albrecht, et al, 2017).

Many areas outside California are following the path blazed by the Golden State. LOSTs are increasingly important nationwide because federal and state resources for transportation are not keeping pace with the growth of travel and costs. The nonprofit Center for Transit Excellence has tracked state and local transportation ballot measures—mostly sales taxes but including some property and payroll taxes—over time and they report on hundreds of such measures (CFTE n.d.). Over the past decade more than 70 percent of LOSTs in hundreds of localities have been approved by voters across the country. Moreover, measures that emphasize funding public transit, as opposed to just street and highway programs, appear to be particularly successful, even though most voters in most places use public transit only rarely, if at all.

Given that taxation in general is unpopular, transportation sales taxes are startlingly successful. The federal and state legislatures have trouble raising taxes of any type, and since 1996 raising taxes in California has been especially difficult because specialized tax increases require approval from over two-thirds of voters. Despite this high bar, since the first LOST was enacted in 1976 in Santa Clara County (Silicon Valley), 76 such measures have appeared on county ballots, 48 of which (63%) were approved by voters.

Why are local transportation sales taxes increasingly popular? One possible answer is that voters value transportation investments more than in years past, as existing infrastructure has aged and traffic congestion has worsened. A second explanation is that proponents are smarter about when to place these measures on the ballot, often choosing to do so in national elections, when turnout tends to be higher and more politically liberal. A third theory, also related to increasing sophistication among measure sponsors, is that measure proponents have grown more sophisticated in crafting measures, and associated project plans, that appeal to a broad cross-section of voters. For example, proponents may now be more likely to spread the promised benefits of a transportation sales tax over a broader geographic area and across more interest groups, and to better tailor these projects to particular voters who will decide their fate. Finally, it may be that success begets success: in recent years advocates have been better able to learn from other campaigns; there are now manuals, web sites, and consultants to help localities get their own LOSTs approved (Haas and Estrada 2011; Werbel, et al. 2001).

## SALES TAXES AND THE FUTURE OF TRANSPORTATION FINANCE

State and federal transportation funding is likely to remain austere, and local governments in California and elsewhere will increasingly need to “go it alone” by raising money locally to tackle their transportation challenges. They can do this in California because in 1911, citizens in California changed the state constitution by creating a system of initiatives and referenda by which voters could participate in making policy through what many have called “direct democracy.” That tradition has been carried forward in state law authorizing voter approval, in some cases by supermajority votes, of LOSTs for transportation purposes. The transportation sales tax measures in Los Angeles County when taken together provide a window on the relationships between policy and politics in this important government sector.

To date, most LOST policy discussions have centered on how to make them more popular by crafting a winning measure. Not enough attention has been paid to how these measures influence the dynamism and turbulence of transportation planning and development. In LA County ballooning debt from heavy capital investments in past decades threatened the finances of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), which is responsible for both transportation planning and transit operation in the county. Still, transit governance is frequently roiled by geographic conflict over where the next big capital project should go. Each mayor and city council member in every one of the county's 88 incorporated cities fights for what to each is a "fair share" slice of the growing pie. Voters in each of those cities and all 140 unincorporated areas expect their elected officials to "bring home the bacon," delivering on promises made to do so if elected. No matter how much money is raised in total, sharing funds to create a regional transportation network is increasingly contentious.

In California, a county or a city may enact local sales taxes up to two percent in 0.125 percent increments to be used for transportation purposes, with a two-thirds vote of the governing body of the locality and two-thirds of qualified electors voting on the issue.<sup>2</sup>

A successful LOST usually involves creating a list of popular transportation projects that will build a coalition of supporters, and then marshalling those supporters to work toward its passage. As a result, LOST proposals are often long, diverse, and complicated. The tax that LA voters approved in November 2016, for example, included dozens of projects spread all across LA County, some of which will not break ground until after 2050. LOSTs also frequently include funds for programs and projects not directly dedicated to transportation in order to gain support from groups that have traditionally opposed transportation capital investments. LOSTs in San Diego and Orange counties included environmental improvements like large land reserves to mitigate harm done by new transportation projects. The resulting support from environmental activists helped those LOSTs win approval.

In addition to favoring measures that bring capital investment projects to their communities, voters appear to support measures that ensure local control of projects by cities and counties rather than those managed by state bodies such as the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Research also suggests that measures are more popular when they are time limited—when they "sunset" in fifteen, twenty or thirty years and must be "reauthorized" by the voters or expire (Haas and Estrada, 2011; Albrecht, et al, 2017). Los Angeles is a notable exception in that three of the four successful local measures imposed permanent sales taxes. An important factor in Los Angeles County is the allocation of some of the funds raised by

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<sup>2</sup> California. Revenue & Tax Code §7285.5 (authority for counties) (West Supp. 2016).

these measures to cities within the county. The level of these “local return” funds appears to play an important role in passage of some measures, and we examine that hypothesis in this study.

It is difficult to know whether ballot measures become less popular if the community already has the tax burden of several active measures in place, or whether the apparent success of earlier measures might increase the probability of success of later measures. We consider this question as well.

## LOST(s) IN LA

While not the first locality to approve a LOST for transportation, LA was among the earliest and most aggressive adopters. LA County’s MTA is building an expansive rail transit system, operating the nation’s second-largest transit bus fleet, and maintaining, operating, and growing a complex street and freeway network in partnership with its cities and the state. This agency has grown in stature despite the especially complex political environment in which it functions because of its ability to raise funding locally via ballot measures. In recent years, the county has rapidly expanded its transportation system even as federal and state revenues for transportation have declined to a point where observers routinely describe them as being in crisis.

The MTA, known best for the transportation services it delivers under the brand of “Metro,” was formed in 1992 by Assembly Bill 152 which merged the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) and the Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD).<sup>3</sup> The LACTC was the primary transportation planning and programming agency in the region while the RTD operated the county-wide bus system. The LA MTA was given responsibility for planning and administering all transportation services for the county and allocating state and federal funds to local transit providers.

By law, the 13-member MTA Board consists of elected officials, including the five Los Angeles County Supervisors, the mayor of the City of Los Angeles, three members appointed by the mayor of Los Angeles and four representatives from outlying cities selected by the Los Angeles County City Selection Committee (Public Utilities Code §135001).<sup>4</sup> The governor also appoints one non-voting member. The agency’s fiscal year 2016 budget showed anticipated revenue of about \$2 billion from traditional sources including about \$1 billion in federal assistance, about \$488 million in state

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<sup>3</sup> Assembly Bill 152 (Katz) Stats. 1992, ch. 60. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Reform Act of 1992, May 19, 1992.

<sup>4</sup> The Mayor of the City of Los Angeles must appoint two public members and one member of the City Council.

aid, and \$523 million in operating revenue from transit fares, roadway tolls, and advertising. By contrast, the agency projected it would raise \$2.3 billion—over half its total—from local sales taxes.

Los Angeles, long considered—albeit not always fairly—a laggard in public transit provision and use, is today a pioneer and national leader in transit funding, and particularly in local “self-help” funding. Media accounts of transportation in Los Angeles often miss this important story. Journalists and others have written extensively about LA’s gradual transformation to a more transit-oriented region (e.g. Elkind 2014, 151), but have focused primarily on new rail construction, mostly neglecting the novel funding mechanism that has made this transformation possible. Yet the sales tax funding mechanism may in some ways be more influential than the projects themselves since it has heavily influenced the type and location of transit the county has built and has been copied by other regions across the nation.

The long-term implications of the political success of LOSTs, however, remain unknown. While tax ballot measures have undeniably increased transportation funding in LA County, it is possible that in building support for transportation tax increases the county has also sacrificed some efficiency and efficacy in its transportation system. It may be that the most politically acceptable transportation proposals—those that can win two-thirds of the vote in an election—are not the proposals that would provide the most cost-effective benefits for Angelenos. In other words, elected officials may be tempted to propose LOST-funded projects that will attract voter support over more mundane, but necessary, system maintenance and operating expenditures. Promises that appeal to the car-driving middle class that does most of the county’s voting, may be emphasized over improvements that would serve low-income residents who do most of the county’s transit riding (a substantial share of whom are not citizens and therefore cannot vote). For that matter, it may also be that public transit services would be better financed through mechanisms that are less opaque and regressive than sales taxes. But the alternative to an imperfect local funding schema may be no local funding at all.

Why have voters approved some LOST measures and defeated others? This study examines this question. We also explore to what extent LA County’s reliance on local direct democracy for transit funding has changed the provision and use of public transportation. More specifically we address three principal questions:

Why have Local Option Sales Taxes (LOSTs) become so central to LA transit financing?

What factors best explain the outcomes of local transportation sales tax elections? And

How has the use of this financing mechanism shaped transportation outcomes in LA County?

We address these questions by examining the history and evolution of LA County's transit self-help sales tax measures. We trace the evolution of transportation tax ballot proposals in the county, beginning with failed measures in 1968, 1974, and the two separate measures in 1976, and then the successful efforts in 1980 (Proposition A), 1990 (Proposition C), and 2008 (Measure R). We also examine the measure that was narrowly defeated in 2012, and the unusual measure in 1998 where county voters decided *how* to spend locally-raised money, by approving a measure to halt further subway spending. Finally, we examine the campaign and result of the November 2016 election, in which voters approved the ninth LOST proposal (Measure M)—this one to raise the sales tax rate by another half percent and make permanent the half cent sales tax increase enacted in 2008, which would otherwise have expired in 2039.

## THE CHAPTERS THAT FOLLOW

In Chapter 2 we review the antecedents of the recent history of LOSTs by exploring the many ways in which voters in this dynamic county have participated in transportation policymaking for well over a century. We also evaluate several factors that can influence public support for new transportation taxes. This review provides a rich backdrop for the deeper analysis that follows of voters' consideration of transportation funding since the late 1960s, the decade which marks the beginning of the transition leading to the current multimodal transportation policy environment in Los Angeles.

In Chapter 3 we analyze three several unsuccessful transit ballot measures in the 1960s and 1970s, together with the campaign arguments both for and against. We also consider the various transportation investment projects proposed to be funded by each measure. These efforts marked the beginning of a comprehensive approach to transportation planning in Los Angeles, designed to deal with both serious traffic and air quality concerns in the region.

In Chapter 4, we turn to two successful measures in 1980 and 1990 that together increased the local sales tax by one percent to fund rail construction and other public transit projects in the region. These measures provided the foundation for the present countywide transit system. We also look at a subsequent 1990s measure that responded to public perceptions of mismanagement by the regional transportation authority and sought to reform agency practices as well as limiting the use of sales tax funds for future subway construction.

In Chapter 5 we examine another trio of ballot measures, designed to raise additional revenues for a variety of local highway and transit projects. We statistically analyze the geographic voting patterns to determine the role population, socio-economic, and demographic characteristics (including educational level, income, race, and gender) played in support for or opposition to the proposed measures. We also consider whether and how residents' proximity to proposed transportation investments affected the voting outcomes. Finally, we compare those votes with the results of polls that were reported prior to each election.

Because there have been nine different transportation ballot measures over four decades, it is possible for the first time to consider how the outcomes of each election influenced voter attitudes toward later ballot measures and the ways in which electoral politics influenced transportation policy choices over time. Statistical research was coupled with detailed reviews of published analyses, media accounts, public records of important meetings, and the papers of political figures, as well as interviews with former local public officials who participated in the campaigns for and against the ballot measures.

In our concluding Chapter 6, we offer an interpretation of the evolution of regional electoral politics and transportation, and what it may mean for the future of Los Angeles and, by extension, metropolitan areas around the country. While we focus on interpreting transportation electoral politics particular to Southern California, we consider how what has transpired in LA may be more broadly informative as many other regions turn to their local electoral processes to finance expansions of their transportation systems and to facilitate their ongoing maintenance and operations.



## **II. EARLY TRANSPORTATION BALLOT MEASURES, 1860-1960**

Los Angeles County has a long history of enacting and funding public projects through ballot measures. Since at least 1868, County residents have voted on dozens of ballot measures to fund and implement a wide array of transportation planning, infrastructure, and services, as well as for education, sewage, libraries, parks, emergency services, post-earthquake redevelopment, and even the 1918 World's Fair. This chapter provides an overview of transportation-related ballot measures before 1960, followed by a discussion of these early trends in ballot measure passage. The material in this chapter provides historical context for later chapters that explore in greater depth transportation ballot measures in Los Angeles County since 1960.

A list of all transportation-related ballot measures between 1860 and 1960 identified for this project can be found in the appendix. While no transportation-related ballot measures from this period were intentionally excluded, it is likely that we missed at least one measure given that our research relied heavily on non-comprehensive secondary sources such as digitized newspapers. It is particularly likely that we missed ballot measures that were proposed but never actually voted on, as these may have not been written about in contemporaneous news sources.

### **LONG-TERM GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS**

Prior to the New Deal, municipal infrastructure and services were financed primarily by long-term general obligation (GO) bonds (Erie 1992, 522). Article XVI, section 18 of the California Constitution outlines requirements regarding local government indebtedness. Under this section, local governments are required to obtain two-thirds voter approval for long-term GO bonds, which are funded through general tax revenues. In contrast, local governments are authorized to issue revenue bonds without voter approval because they are less risky than GO bonds for taxpayers since repayment is tied to revenues streaming from particular projects.

### **EARLY BOND MEASURES, RAILWAY EXPANSION AND THE FREE HARBOR FIGHT**

The earliest transportation-related ballot measures related to intercity freight and passenger rail transportation. As Los Angeles' population grew, bigger

and more efficient links to the national and global economy were needed, which resulted in voter support for government-funded local railways. In effect, voters approved public subsidies of private, for profit companies. In 1868, county voters narrowly passed a \$225,000 bond measure to fund the building of the independent Los Angeles and San Pedro Railroad (LA&SP). The issue, which passed by a margin of 28 votes in the county and 102 in the city, was spearheaded by state Senator Phineas Banning, who was part of a group of local residents who had established a wharf in the salt marshes at San Pedro Bay in 1857 (Guinn 1911, 189; Morris 2015). In exchange for their financial contribution to the LA&SP's construction, the county received \$150,000 in the capital stock of the railroad and the City of Los Angeles \$75,000 (Guinn 1911).

Banning's railroad carried passengers and freight from his wharf 22 miles north to downtown Los Angeles where ore wagons, along with the growing army of agricultural producers, could unload their cargo instead of proceeding all the way to the port (Rolle 1995). In 1871 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built jetties to deepen Wilmington lagoon, which facilitated a growing lumber trade in shallow draft schooners (Matson 1922). Public investment in this latest transportation innovation greatly increased commerce in the region, and led to growing calls to connect LA to the San Francisco Bay Area, then the terminus of the first transcontinental railroad joining the Central Pacific Railroad and the Union Pacific from Sacramento to Omaha, Nebraska, with connections from there to eastern markets. In 1872, local officials negotiated an agreement with the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP), a subsidiary of the Central Pacific, to route the southern line it was then constructing between San Francisco to Yuma, Arizona through Los Angeles. In 1876, County voters approved a set of conditions that amounted to granting the railroad a \$602,000 subsidy, representing 5 percent of the county's assessed land valuation, the maximum permitted under state law. The city and county turned their interest in the LA&SP, worth \$225,000, over to the SP, and the city on its own donated 15 acres of land north of the Plaza for a depot, and provided free rights of way for the railroad through the city, while the county paid the SP \$375,000 paid for by 20-year, 7 percent bonds (Guinn 1911, 190).

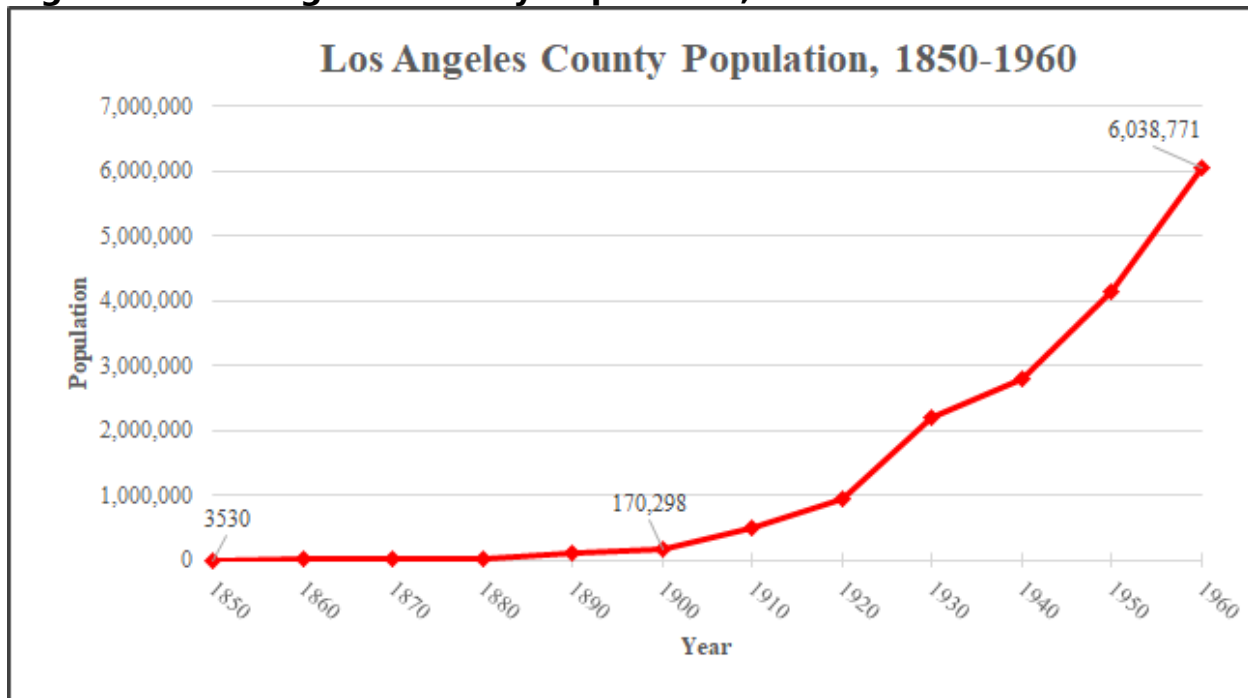
For its part, the Southern Pacific agreed to build 50 miles of main trunk line through the county and also promised to build a branch line to Anaheim to win support from residents in the southern portion of the county who initially favored a connection with San Diego (Fogelson 1993). Judge Robert M. Widney, who would later establish one of the city's first cable railways, penned a widely-distributed pamphlet which helped to sway public opinion in favor of the Southern Pacific proposal. That southern portion, that would one day become part of Orange County, voted against the proposal, but it passed countywide by a wide margin of 1,018 votes out of nearly 1,900 cast (Guinn 1911).

Southern Pacific was attracted to Los Angeles despite its lack of a deep-water port. At the time, Los Angeles “had only shallow sloughs and unprotected open-sea anchorages,” while San Diego possessed a naturally deep harbor. The company saw San Diego’s natural harbor as a potentially serious competitor to its own facilities in San Francisco and its plans to dominate passenger and freight shipping business on the West Coast (Erie 1992, 530). Despite its spectacular natural harbor, San Diego was hamstrung by challenging land access to points east of San Diego. Hemmed in by the Mexican Border to the south, all road and rail connections from San Diego to the east must traverse the rugged Cuyamaca Mountains to an elevation of at least 1,280 meters (4,190 feet) before dropping steeply down to the desert (and back to sea level) on the way to Yuma. By contrast, San Geronimo (sometimes call Beaumont) pass linking Los Angeles with the Sonoran Desert and points east entails gradual slopes on both sides that meet at a summit of only 790 meters (2,600 feet). So while the trip to Yuma (and its comparatively low mountain passes south of the Rocky Mountains) is much shorter (177 miles) from San Diego Harbor, the longer trip to Yuma from San Pedro Bay (286 miles) is much flatter and easier to traverse, which is an important consideration for railroad construction and operations.

When the SP completed its line through to New Orleans (and from there to New York via the company’s Morgan Line steamships) it effectively sidelined development in San Diego as the port at Los Angeles became the primary shipping facility in the region. With a transcontinental rail connection secured, land in Southern California became much more valuable for development and SP locomotives carried lumber taken off waiting schooners from the Pacific Northwest that would build the cities springing up throughout the region and supply the blossoming local furniture industry. So dozens of towns throughout the San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Valley, San Bernardino, Riverside and Orange counties owe their existence to the 1872 vote.

By 1884, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad had also reached Los Angeles from Kansas City, which broke the monopoly the SP had on travel to and from California. The ensuing competition between the two railroads led to a population explosion that propelled Los Angeles into becoming a major urban center (Fogelson 1993). Los Angeles County’s population grew from 3,530 in 1850 to 170,298 in 1900 (an increase of over 4,700% in just 50 years) (See Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1. Los Angeles County Population, 1850-1960**



By the 1880s, Southern Pacific had extended its tracks from Banning's Landing to the west side of the channel and was building rail yards there at the entrance to the harbor, where the first customs house was located. However, in 1891, the California Investment Company threatened the SP's control of the local freight market by purchasing a local railroad, the Los Angeles Terminal (LAT), and shortly thereafter built a line from the company's depot in downtown Los Angeles south to the port at San Pedro and established wharves on the east side of the channel on what was then called Rattlesnake Island (now Terminal Island) opposite the SP facilities (Almeida et al. 1988; Crump 1970). By 1893, a jetty connecting Rattlesnake Island to Dead Man's Island (now Reservation Point) was completed and the channel was dredged to 16 feet. However, the conflict between San Pedro, Santa Monica, and Redondo Beach to become the region's principal port persisted (Board of Harbor Commissioners 1938). Also in 1893, the Southern Pacific, leery of potential competition from the LAT and the Santa Fe Railroad, which had established wharves at a deeper water port in Redondo Beach, acquired the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad, which ran from downtown to Santa Monica, and constructed a mile-long "Long Wharf" pier just north of the city and shifted its operations there (Willard 1899).

The region's growing population, however, rendered existing infrastructure at San Pedro increasingly inadequate for importing sufficient volume of building materials, thus creating a need for a larger harbor (Erie 1992, 531). At the time, Congress was considering funding construction of a deep water port in the region and San Pedro was one site under consideration, along

with Santa Monica, Redondo, and Newport. The SP had strong political connections, but its business practices had angered many local farming and commercial interests who joined forces to oppose the company.

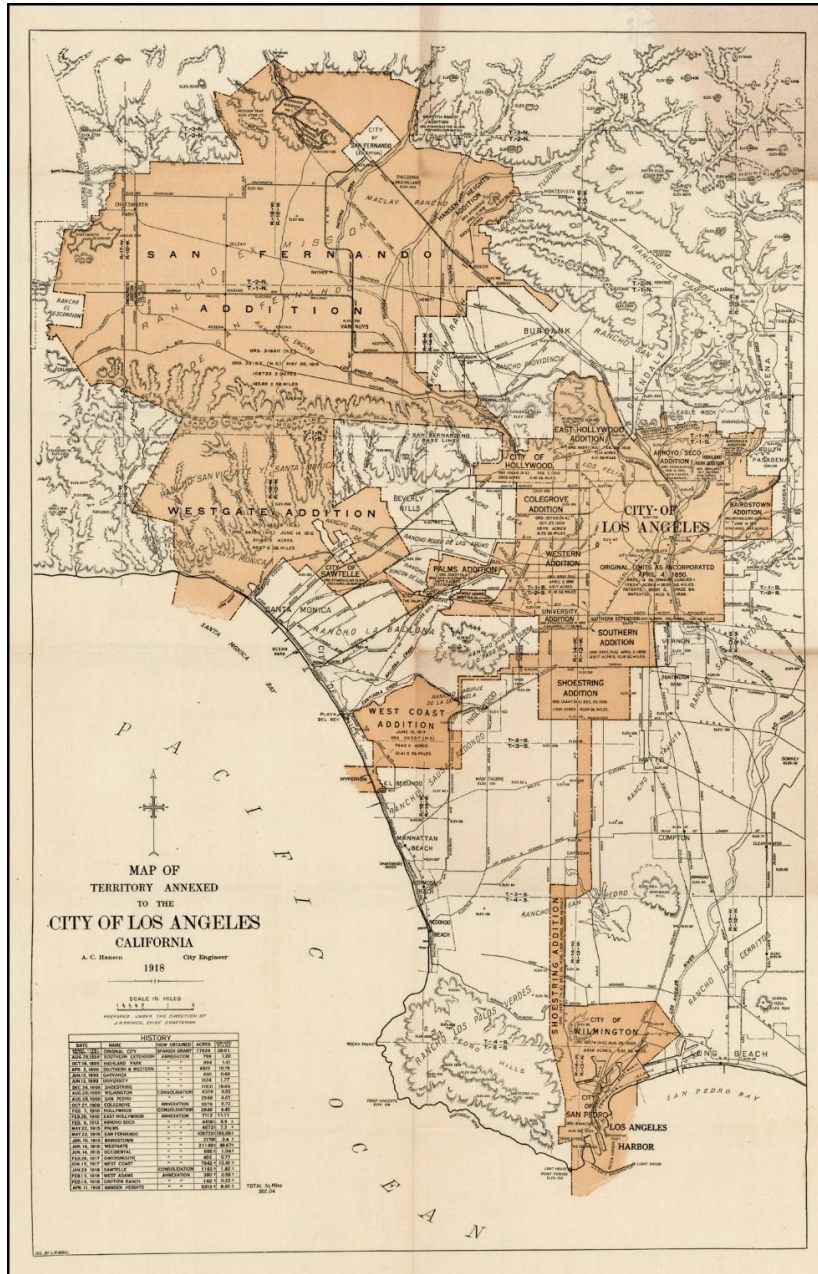
Southern Pacific and its allies favored the development of a port at Santa Monica, where the railroad controlled access to the waterfront, which would assure the railroad's monopoly over the regional transportation network. Harrison Gray Otis, editor of the *Los Angeles Times* and the anti-SP coalition, by contrast, favored locating the port at San Pedro that would support the development of other railroad connections in competition to the SP (Erie 1992; Fogleson 1993; Magliari 1989; Morris 2015; Willard 1899). At the urging of California Senator Stephen White and with support from the influential Otis, in 1897 the Army Corps of Engineers selected the San Pedro site and began constructing an 11,500-foot breakwater at the entrance to the harbor and dredging the channel to accommodate larger vessels (Erie 1992).

By 1905, the Union Pacific Railroad, which was building south from its terminus in Salt Lake City into California, acquired an interest in the LAT and established a through route all the way to Chicago, ending the SP's monopoly on transcontinental access from the port (Strack 2017). In 1907, the LA City Council approved a Board of Harbor Commissioners which marked the founding of Port of Los Angeles (Queenan 1983). A year later, Congress authorized official harbor lines which cleared way for development of the Inner Harbor and guaranteed access to competing rail lines (Fogelson 1993).

## RAILWAY AND HARBOR BOND ELECTIONS

In the years following the turn of the century, the coalition that had backed the San Pedro port site was able to wrangle the political and popular support necessary to place several ultimately-successful harbor improvement measures on the ballot. In 1906, as part of the City of Los Angeles' larger strategy to control the San Pedro Harbor, voters approved the 16-mile "Shoestring Annexation" linking Los Angeles to the cities of San Pedro and Wilmington (Erie 1992, 535). This annexation is labeled in the map below.

**Figure 2. City of Los Angeles Annexations**



Source: L.P. Abel, *Map of Territory Annexed to the City of Los Angeles*. In 1909, voters approved the consolidation of San Pedro and Wilmington into the City of Los Angeles. To entice the two cities to accept the arrangement, Los Angeles promised to spend \$10 million over ten years to give each city a new fire station, police station, public library, fish market, and up-to-date school system. Also, a municipally owned ferry would provide service to Terminal Island for a 2-cent fare. And, the City would also supply fresh water, which had always been limited in the marshy area. Part of the proposed harbor improvements would consist of two fills, the Huntington Fill and Miners Fill, to create wharfs south of the existing docks. In 1910 the city

passed a \$3 million bond issue to construct improvements at the port, including the extension of Pier A, new wharves, roads and improvements to existing berths. An oil dock was constructed near the turning basin to handle tankers including onsite storage facilities (Queenan 1983).

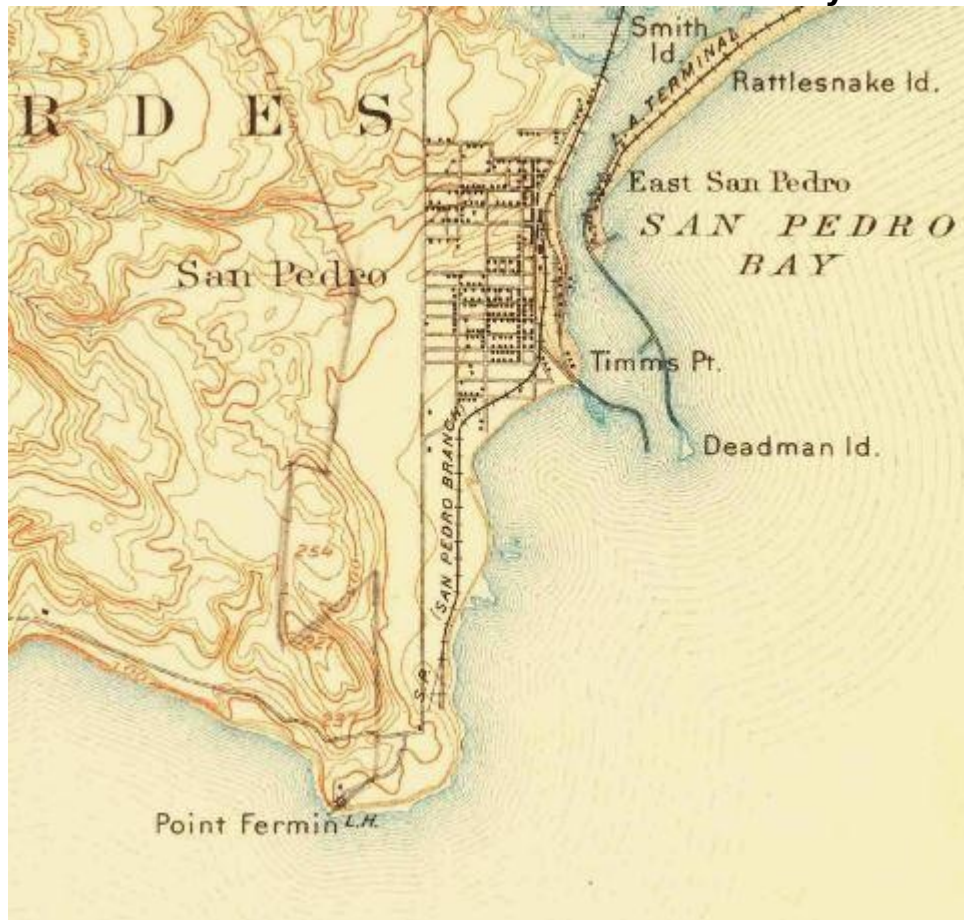
The state's Los Angeles Tidelands Act of 1911 transferred all the waterfront property in trust to the City which gave it effective control over the harbor, and it forced the SP to replace its trestle across the West Basin with a drawbridge to provide port access for ocean-going vessels, though in a move to prevent other railroads from gaining access to the Outer Harbor, the Southern Pacific built a new slip diagonally into the west bank of the channel near Timms Point (now Fisherman's Slip at Ports O' Call) leaving only 50 feet of passable land along the bluffs. In 1912, the old 500-foot entrance to the main waterway was widened to 800 feet and the channel dredged to a depth of 30 feet. That year the port handled over one million barrels of oil, and became the largest lumber importing port, handling over \$720 million board feet destined for houses and mine construction (Queenan 1983).

The next rail-related bond election occurred in April 1913, in which voters decided whether to dedicate \$1 million toward construction of a municipally-owned freight-oriented railway connecting Los Angeles to San Pedro. Seven other bond issues were included on this ballot, including \$2.5 million to fund further improvements at San Pedro Harbor; \$6.5 million to fund a public electric utility; three separate issues totaling \$5.5 million to fund aqueduct improvements; \$1 million for a new city hall site; and \$600,000 toward a new normal school site. The municipal rail bond issue failed, garnering less than 40 percent of the vote. Only the harbor bond issue (receiving 88% of the vote) and the smallest of the aqueduct bond issues (\$1.5 million, with 70% of the vote) surpassed the requisite two-thirds requirement for passage (*Los Angeles Herald* 1913b).

The harbor's signature Angel's Gate Lighthouse was completed in 1913 at the end of the breakwater and the first municipal pier was constructed in 1914 along with the municipal fish market. The Port became increasingly important to both the regional and national economies.

By 1914 there were 5,545 feet of municipal wharves and 24,845 feet of commercial docks. The opening of the Panama Canal that year vastly increased the port's markets. Warehouse No. 1 (now a national historic landmark) was completed at Pier A on the Huntington Fill to serve deep water vessels and marked a transition from handling mostly shallow-draft lumber schooners to heavier cargo (Queenan 1983). In 1915, the main channel was again dredged and the jetty to Deadman's Island was widened and eventually expanded. By 1916 the Chamber of Commerce reported that the port handled just over 2 million tons of cargo with a total value of \$76.5 million (Matson 1922).

**Figure 3: Deadman Island's Location in San Pedro Bay**



*Source: U.S. Geological Survey Historical Topographic Map Collection*

The first World War brought an increase in shipbuilding but curtailed other port operations as shipping, especially lumber, was moved from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast. Permanent harbor defense installations were built at Fort MacArthur as municipal facilities were turned over to the Navy for training centers and a submarine base. In the years after the war, the port handled two and a half million tons of cargo per month, mostly lumber. International trade increased; principal exports were petroleum and cotton (local and from Texas), as well as citrus products (Matson 1922).

With the completion of Fish Harbor in 1919 East San Pedro became home to Yugoslavian, Italian, Portuguese, Scandinavian, and native Mexican fishermen. In addition, a vibrant Japanese fishing community thrived near the port until the onset of World War II when its residents were forcibly removed to internment camps and all residential formerly Japanese-American areas were dismantled for military use. Today the site of this former Japanese fishing community is marked by a monument to the forcibly removed residents (San Pedro, CA 2018). Further bond measures for development at San Pedro Harbor were approved in May 1919 (\$4.5 million,

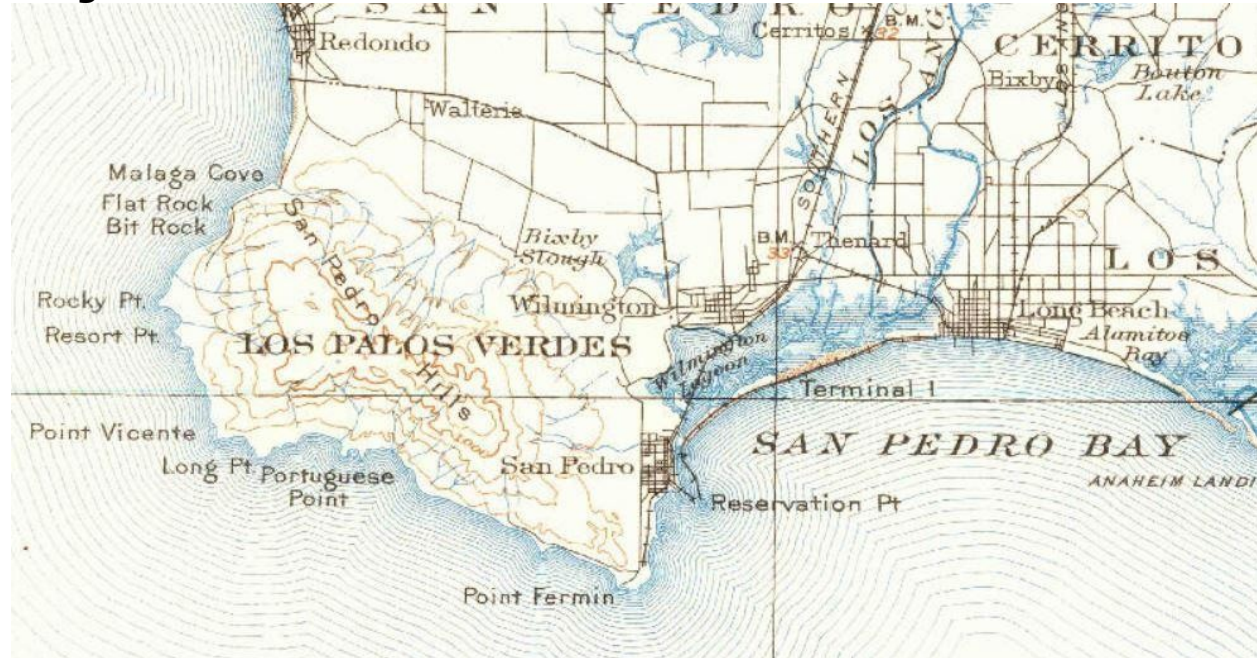


with 71.1% approval); June 1921 (\$4.8 million, with 68.1% approval); and June 1923 (\$15 million, with 80.5% approval). Voters also considered 21 city charter amendments granting the city's harbor department increased powers between 1909 and 1932, all but eight of which passed. Along with ship building, a large fishing and canning industry also developed as Japanese fishermen from Santa Monica relocated to East San Pedro when the Southern Pacific's Long Wharf was demolished.

Locally, Pasadena voters in April 1919 voted by a "decisive" margin to reject a proposed \$3 million bond issue that would fund a municipal railway connecting Pasadena to Los Angeles proper (*Los Angeles Herald* 1919).

In 1920, the Port of Los Angeles passed San Francisco as the busiest port in the state as it added \$100 million to the local economy. Exports included cotton and fruit, much of it supplied by the California Fruit Growers Exchange (later known as the Sunkist Company). In 1922, the Santa Fe ran a line to the port from the oil refineries at El Segundo through Torrance, the same year voters in Los Angeles approved a plan to construct a Union Station downtown to accommodate all three major railroads. In 1925, the breakwater was extended (to 4.5 miles) and the main channel widened to 1,000 feet. In 1926, the Water Street Wharf warehouse was built near the site of Banning's Landing. Deadman's Island was demolished in 1929 and the debris used as landfill at Reservation Point and to expand Terminal Island. Borax from Mojave Desert mines became a major export. The entire harbor was dredged to 35 feet and the Cerritos Channel cut across Terminal Island to provide access to the Inner Harbor for the adjacent Port of Long Beach. The discovery of oil in the region (especially at nearby Signal Hill) increased port activity as crude was funneled to the port and put aboard waiting ships to be sent through the Panama Canal to eastern refineries.

**Figure 4: Relationship of Terminal Island to San Pedro Harbor and Long Beach**



*Source: U.S. Geological Survey Historical Topographic Maps Collection*

By 1932, the port at San Pedro was the largest on the Pacific Coast and the third largest nationally, primarily as a result of these voter-approved capital investments (Erie 1992). On the eve of the Second World War the population of Los Angeles County had reached over 2.8 million, due in large part to public investment in the port and other transportation related facilities. By the mid-1950s, the Port of Los Angeles handled 10 percent of the nation's shipping, a total of \$3 ½ million. Of the \$29 billion in bonds authorized by voters over \$24 billion had been retired (Menveg 1957). By 1960, the population of the county had topped 6 million and the role of direct democracy in transportation finance had been well established in the region.

## ONGOING CONFLICTS OVER PUBLIC TRANSIT

Southern Pacific's economic domination of the region was made possible through a bipartisan political machine that included both Republican and Democratic leaders as well as prominent figures in "the city's private utilities, street railways, public works contractors, liquor dealers, and vice and gambling interests" in coalition with small-scale local real estate interests (Erie 1992, 527). This alliance was opposed, however, by other local business and large-scale real estate interests who resented the railroad's shipping rates and scheduling (Olin 1968; Starr 1985).

For years, the City of Los Angeles had tried to force the major rail carriers to build a consolidated terminal in the historic Plaza area to eliminate

congestion caused by the trains and streetcars that frequently backed up along city streets. As early as 1915 the Board of Public Utility Commissioners had called for elevated tracks or subway lines downtown, noting the large number of crashes involving automobiles and streetcars.

Downtown boosters favored the Plaza site to stabilize declining real estate values in the area and anchor one end of a wide mall connecting to the city's new Civic Center. The major railroads, Southern Pacific, Santa Fe, and Union Pacific all opposed the Union Station plan since it would require them to compete face-to-face with one another for business. They proposed instead to connect the Southern Pacific's existing Central Station, which also served the Union Pacific, to the Pacific Electric Station and a new Santa Fe station along the river with several miles of elevated rail tracks through the downtown to serve both trains and streetcars. Proponents claimed the \$25 million (equivalent to \$610 million in \$2017) plan would remove 1,200 trains a day from city streets, and eliminate 18,000 at-grade crossings a day in the downtown area (Bradley 1979; Crump 1970; Fogleson 1993).

Opponents of the railroad proposal claimed the companies were just trying to thwart the will of the public and argued that transit improvements would merely encourage downtown centralization. The solution to congestion, they maintained, lay in supporting a policy of dispersing business and residences which offered a better opportunity for improving the quality of life in the region (Fogleson 1993). The conflict between downtown centered interests and those representing outlying areas prefigured later debates over funding the region's modern transit system.

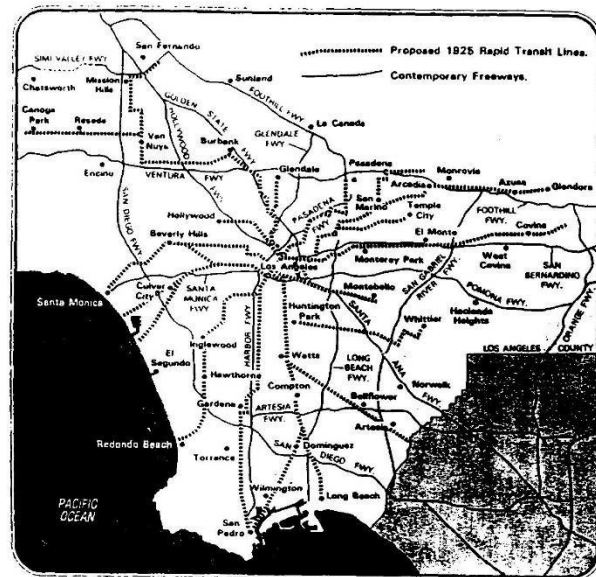
The *Los Angeles Times* favored the Union Station plan and attacked the railroads' undue influence in city politics. William Randolph Hearst's rival *Examiner* backed the railroad proposal as the best way to relieve congestion, as did many downtown civic and business interests, though one business organization, the City Club, opposed the railroads' plan on the grounds that transit improvements would further concentrate development in the already congested downtown area. Suburban business interests generally favored the railroad proposal for its potential to stimulate local growth, however, many local homeowner associations were opposed to paying assessments to fund construction of elevated lines that could reduce property values (Bottles 1987; Crump 1970).

Local politicians, caught between the two warring camps, choose to place separate non-binding resolutions on the ballot. One proposition called for building a central terminal at some unspecified location, essentially favoring the railroad plan. The second proposition specified construction of a Union Station at its current Plaza site.

The previous year saw publication of the 1925 *Report and Recommendations on a Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan for the City of Los Angeles*, prepared by the firm of Kelker, DeLeuw and Company, which was supported largely by central city business interests and centered on the construction of subways *and* extensive elevated rail lines covering over 100 miles in order to separate streetcar and automobile traffic entering the downtown. The project's price tag was big: an estimated \$133 million (equivalent to \$1.87 billion in \$2017). Beyond the proposal's enormous construction price tag, given the relatively low-density character of the city in the 1920s, fare increases and public subsidies would be needed to supplement farebox revenues in order to operate the new rail service.

Approval of the rapid transit plan by the City Council was needed before the railroad plan for elevated tracks could be approved. Even among those favoring public investment in new rail transit service, support for the plan was not unanimous; some rail supporters opposed the Kelker, DeLeuw because it was a radial rail proposal as favoring downtown companies and land interests, which ran counter to modern planning ideas favoring urban deconcentration (Bottles 1987; Foster 1981; Wachs 1996).

**Figure 5. 1925 Rapid Transit Plan**



Proposed 1925 Rapid Transit Lines.

Unfortunately for transit advocates, the railroads' proposal with its elevated tracks on private rights of way was easily conflated in the public mind with the far more extensive system of elevated railways in the Kelker-DeLeuw plan. Critics charged the railroad plan was just the first step toward putting the noisy, unsightly, and generally unpopular structures throughout the city. Its supporters claimed it was the only practical way to eliminate traffic congestion in the downtown.

As a result, support for public transit improvements suffered from the longstanding public antipathy toward the railroads and backing the Union Station proposal was seen as a way to block the elevated rails (Crump 1970). In a way, opposition to public transit became a part of a broader political strategy to resist economic and social control by downtown interests and to

promote local autonomy. In the 1926 election, voters overwhelmingly rejected the railroads' plan and narrowly endorsed the Union Station proposals (Crump 1970). The Union Station proposal lost by 61 percent of the vote<sup>5</sup> and the rail plaza site passed by a narrow margin, barely a majority<sup>6</sup> (Crump 1970; Bottles 1987, 156; Wachs 1984, 308). Because the Union Station ballot measure had passed without a clear mandate, the city council decided against presenting the transit plan report to voters for approval (Wachs 1984, 308). With public support for the Union Station widely perceived as a defeat for public transit, the city pushed ahead with building the Union Station and the Kelker-deLeuw plan was quietly shelved. There are still those who contend that Los Angeles missed a golden opportunity to create the backbone of an effective transit system that would have reduced the need for automobiles and perhaps the need to spend many billions on freeways (Crump 1970; Fogleson 1993; Wachs 1996).<sup>7</sup> Whether or not that is the case, it is clear that competing visions for the future of Los Angeles, and arguments over whether to fund transportation systems to serve these visions, have been litigated from the late 1800s to the present day.

### **Figure 6. Rail Rapid Transit Now!**

The downtown coalition sponsored two additional rail transit proposals that failed to be adopted after long debates. One, in 1939, expanded upon previous proposals by calling for a radial freeway system with street medians dedicated to rapid transit (Adler 1986, 324; Taylor 2000, 198-199). Nine years later, the concept was picked up by the Rapid Transit Action Group (RTAG), a private organization of local business, civic, and political leaders, which renewed the call for a rapid transit system running in roadway medians in their 1948 report *Rail Rapid Transit—Now!*. This report is recognized as visionary today—it proposed a bus rapid transit system decades before the opening of Brazil's *Rede Integrada de Transporte* ("Integrated Transportation Network"), which is generally recognized as the first operational bus rapid transit system (Weinstock, et al. 2011, 5). However, the report's radical \$310 million proposal, which included establishing a regional transportation authority with the power to issue bonds and levy taxes to finance a regional transit system, engendered strong opposition from suburban business interests as too downtown centered (Richmond 2005, 157-160). The Los Angeles City Council declined to endorse the plan and it was unable to gain the support of enough state legislators to have the issue placed on the November 1948 ballot, though the RTAG plan did underscore the need for widespread regional representation in any future transit proposals, which continues to be a theme in current debates over transportation planning in Los Angeles (Adler 1986).<sup>8</sup> The proposal did, however, contain a number of proposed routes that would

5 The vote was No-115,493, Yes-72,714 (Crump 1970).

6 The vote was Yes-94,404, No-90,464 (Crump 1970).

7 For a more pro-automobile assessment, see Bottles (1987).

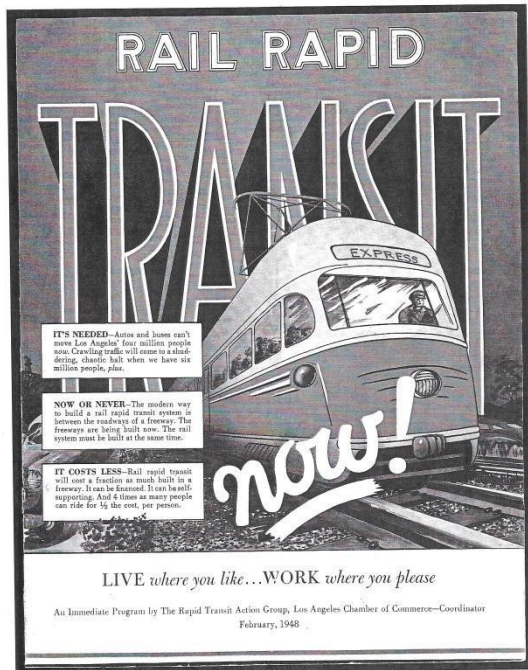


PLATE 2 | Rail Rapid Transit, February 1948. Print on paper, 25.4 x 20.3 cm (10 x 8 in.). Los Angeles, Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library and Archive.

resurface years later in the 1960s and 1980s, as regional planners again considered building a rail rapid transit network.<sup>9</sup>

A 1950 study by the California Legislature of a regional monorail system spurred the passage of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority Act in 1951 (Richmond 2005, 160). The bill established the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (LAMTA) and charged it with planning a monorail connecting the San Fernando Valley to Long Beach over the Los Angeles River (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). The LAMTA conducted an initial feasibility study, but the Authority, which lacked finances (it operated exclusively out of farebox revenues) and had limited

autonomy (it was essentially controlled by the governor), proved unable to bring the system to fruition (Office of Technology Assessment 1976; Taylor 1975).

8 The RTAG proposal was restructured for submission in the 1949 election to include municipal representatives on the governing board and limit the participation by the City of Los Angeles. It was also revised to provide that all costs would be paid from transit fares, with property taxes used only as a last resort to appease businesses and homeowners. But, the Los Angeles City Council eventually voted against asking the state Legislature to place the measure on the ballot.

9 These included lines (1) west along Santa Monica Boulevard; (2) northwest from downtown through the Hollywood Subway to Hollywood Boulevard, and through the Cahuenga Pass (Hollywood Freeway) to Burbank, then west along Chandler Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley; (3) south along Harbor Boulevard to Long Beach and San Pedro; (4) east out Huntington Drive and Ramona Boulevard to Pasadena, Sierra Vista, and El Monte; and (5) southeast along Santa Ana Boulevard.

**Figure 7. Map of 1960 Proposed Monorail System**



*Source: MTA Research Center (2017).*

Six years later, California Governor Goodwin Knight signed legislation re-establishing the LAMTA with greatly increased powers over operations of and planning for all forms of mass transit, not least of which was the ability to issue revenue bonds to finance the purchase of private transit carriers (Taylor 1975). The Authority's first revenue bonds were issued in 1958. Some \$40 million worth were sold to finance the purchase of Los Angeles Transit Lines and Metropolitan Coach Lines (including its subsidiary Asbury Rapid Transit System) (LAMTA 1958, 8-9). In 1960, the agency conducted another feasibility study, that resulted in a proposal for a 75-mile-long rapid transit system, comprising 4 corridors that would extend from downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica, El Monte, Long Beach and Reseda as shown in Figure 1 (Taylor 1975). A follow-up plan published the next year proposed a "backbone" route from Beverly Hills to El Monte (running as a subway along the Wilshire Corridor west of Downtown) (Hamer 1976). Businesses along Wilshire Boulevard opposed the monorail proposal for fear that even an ultra-modern elevated train would blight the corridor (MTA Digital Resources Librarian 2011). These increasingly concrete rail transit plans were in many respects the initiation of the modern era of public transit in Los Angeles County. The agency, however, lacked a dedicated revenue source necessary to put any of its ideas into action.

After the LAMTA was reorganized to become a transit operator, the County Board of Supervisors became increasingly critical of its practice of discontinuing existing rail lines. In the face of lagging patronage and long past due track, station, catenary, and vehicle maintenance and upgrades, inter-urban and streetcar lines in Los Angeles were gradually abandoned in favor of cheaper-to-operate bus service between the late 1940s and early 1960s. With these lines and services increasingly under public control, County Supervisors grew frustrated with the declining service offered by the Authority and with the lack of local accountability of its Board of Directors appointed by the governor. Supervisor Kenneth Hahn even suggested drawing up legislation to make the Board an elected body. Although this proposal never came to fruition, the issue of local accountability remained a political sore spot, and local political interests did later succeed in capturing much greater control of the agency's eventual successor, the Southern California Rapid Transit District.

## THE RISE OF THE AUTOMOBILE AND CONTINUED POPULATION GROWTH

The population growth that inspired debate over the future of Los Angeles' public transit system also led to expanded automobile infrastructure during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1907, local governments' ability to directly fund road construction and improvement was greatly increased when the California Legislature passed the Good Roads Act, which enabled counties to hold bond elections for road improvement projects approved by a Highway Commission. Los Angeles County appointed a three-person Highway Commission soon thereafter (Los Angeles County Department of Public Works n.d). Los Angeles County's first "Good Roads" ballot measure for \$3,500,000 was approved by voters in 1908. This made Los Angeles the second county in the state to pass such bond measures. The 1908 measure funded 307 miles of then state-of-the-art oiled roads (Blow 1920). In June 1910, voters in South Pasadena approved the construction of a concrete span across the Arroyo Seco River by a vote of 587 to 33; this was South Pasadena's first-ever bond election (Arroyo-Seco Foundation n.d.). Less successful was a countywide October 1915 vote on a total of \$2,850,000 in bonds toward 21 county highways. None of these bond issues was approved by the voters.

Similarly, unsuccessful was a June 1916 countywide election, during which Los Angeles County residents voted on several bond measures including \$300,000 toward construction of the Second Street Tunnel. By an overwhelming margin in an election that featured only 25 percent voter turnout, neither the Second Street Tunnel measure nor the other proposed bond measures passed (including \$1.8 million in municipal sewage improvements, \$8 million for municipal telephone service, fire alarms, and



police telegraph) (*Los Angeles Herald* 1917b). The existence and location of the Second Street Tunnel had been a subject of public debate since at least 1911. The tunnel was opposed by at least some of the business owners in the proposed tunnel assessment district (*Los Angeles Herald* 1917a) and supported by members of the Second Street Tunnel Association (*Los Angeles Herald* 1917c), the Glendale Board of Trustees (*Los Angeles Herald* 1911), and the Municipal League (*Los Angeles Herald* 1916). However, immediately after the failure of the Second Street Tunnel bond issue, owners of businesses surrounding the route of the proposed tunnel banded together and pledged the needed funds to complete construction (*Los Angeles Herald* 1917c).

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, Los Angeles' population increased and so did automobile usage. In July 1924, Los Angeles County voters responded by approving a measure to implement the 1924 *Major Traffic Street Plan of Los Angeles*. Written by a team including Frederick Law Olmsted, this document proposed several major new thoroughfares and the expansion of existing roadways. Of the plan's proposed roadways, only the proposed Arroyo Seco Parkway and "One Hundredth Street" (now Century Boulevard) were eventually constructed (Shannon 2013). Voters also approved a \$5 million expenditure for implementation of the plan in the same election. The proposed Arroyo Seco Parkway was championed by the Pasadena Realty Board, the Arroyo Seco Parkway Association, and the Pasadena Chamber of Commerce (Wachs 1984, 307). Ultimately, the California Legislature passed the Arroyo Seco Freeway Bill. Construction of the roadway was to be paid for by gasoline tax revenues, which was made possible by including the parkway within the state highway system. In 1937 Pasadena voters handily defeated a proposed extension of the city's parkway northward to Devil's Gate Dam by two-to-one (Gruen and Lee 1999).

Because of limited financial resources during the Great Depression as well as shifting planning perspectives on the purpose of freeways, many roadways proposed in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were not completed or even initiated until the 1940s and 1950s. Earlier, planners such as Olmsted had proposed "parkways" designed to enhance the urban environment. By the 1940s, the term "parkway" was used interchangeably with "freeway" as planners focused more on the traffic enhancing aspects of expanded high-speed roadways at the expense of their aesthetics. Construction on the Arroyo Seco Parkway itself began in 1938 and was completed in 1953. As a result, its final form more strongly resembled mid-century freeway design than the landscaping- and native-plant adorned parkway proposed in Olmsted's initial plan (Gruen and Lee 1999).

## AIR TRANSPORTATION

Air travel was also an important determinant of growth in the Los Angeles region during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, air infrastructure trailed that of other transportation modes due its later evolution as a reliable and commercially viable means of travel. The first regularly-scheduled commercial and passenger flights were initiated with the launch of the St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line in 1914 (Provenzo 1979). Interest in a publicly-owned Los Angeles airport grew in the 1920s, and in 1927 a concentrated push to establish an airport on the 2000-acre Bennett Rancho began. This effort was headed by powerful judicial, real estate, and oil industry figures. That year, the City of Los Angeles leased 640 acres of the Rancho for use as an airport then known as Mines Field (Los Angeles World Airports 2018). Six million dollars in airport improvement bonds were submitted to the Los Angeles voters in May of that year, but did not receive the requisite two-thirds majority (*Madera Tribune* 1928). Thirty years later, in June 1956, voters again considered public funding of the airport. This time, voters approved a \$60 million bond issue by a margin of 6-to-1 (*San Bernardino Sun* 1956). Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), with its iconic space-age theme building at the center, became a fitting symbol of a dynamic modern region that topped the 6 million mark in population by 1960.

## LESSONS FROM THE EARLY YEARS OF TRANSPORTATION BALLOT MEASURES

One hundred and fifty years have passed since the first transportation finance ballot measure was put before the voters of Los Angeles. Regarding the first century of such measures reviewed here, we see several factors influencing their success or failure. First, the rapid pace of population and economic growth in the Los Angeles region, the specific transportation mode being funded, national economic and political trends, local growth machine politics, and whether the election involved a single issue versus bundled sets of bond proposals. We consider each in turn below.

### **Population growth and economic development**

The sustained large-scale population growth seen in Los Angeles County over the 20<sup>th</sup> century put enormous pressure on the existing transportation system and led to a widespread perception that its expansion was needed. Los Angeles' early transportation-related bond measures are inextricable from the considerable population growth the area saw in the late 19th nineteenth and early 20th twentieth centuries. As shown in Figure 1, Los Angeles County's population grew from around 11,000 in 1860 to over 100,000 by 1890. Population climbed dramatically to over 500,000 by 1910, over 2 million by 1930, and over 4 million by 1950. With increased population came greater need for infrastructure and more robust

transportation linkages to the regional, national, and international economies to support local development.

This continuing expansion of Southern California fueled a growth culture actively championed by the local “growth machine”—nested interest groups“ with common stakes in development [who] use the institutional fabric, including the political and cultural apparatus, to intensify land use and make money” (Molotch 1993, 31). As Molotch explains, actors within the growth machine contend with each other in pursuit of both private and public interest. As Los Angeles grew, struggles between actors in the growth machine helped dictate which bond elections were set before voters.

For example, early rail-related measures were successful largely due to rail transportation’s status as the most heavily utilized mode at the time and the subsequent influence exerted by the powerful Southern Pacific and its allies. In the following decades, though, rail proved inadequate to serve the growing freight and passenger transportation needs, particularly for intra-metropolitan travel in this rapidly-expanding, relatively low-density region. Ports to facilitate goods movement also proved popular with voters early in the twentieth century. They approved a series of harbor-related measures between 1910 and 1923. At the same time, increased population combined with the proliferation of automobiles encouraged voters to support expansion of the area’s nascent freeway network. Continually expanding demand for freight and passenger transportation would later manifest as public support for airport funding by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Overall, the success of early transportation ballot measures appears to be related to the extent to which the different modes involved were perceived at the time to serve the shifting needs of a rapidly growing region. Similar public debates over the future and continued growth of Los Angeles continues today, though with considerably more ambivalence in many quarters over the desirability of future growth. While the spatial and financial scope of these debates has changed, the basic problem at hand—public dissatisfaction with an increasingly overwhelmed transportation system perceived to be inadequate—remains. The ballot measures discussed later in this report all fit squarely in this narrative.

### **Transportation mode**

The transportation mode featured in a given bond election has proven important because voter preference for transportation spending is complex, differs by mode, and may not neatly correspond with actual travel behavior (Baldassare 1991; Jaensirisak, Wardman, and Day 2005; Manville and Cummins 2014). Mode-specific beliefs about the benefits of funding may also relate to the potential for different modes to generate, not only travel benefits, but revenues as well.

Over the study period, ballot measures related to the development of harbors (including necessary land annexations) in the Los Angeles area were the most consistently successful, particularly between 1910 and 1932. By the end of this period, the Port of Los Angeles ranked among the most important in the nation. In contrast, early ballot measures related to freeway building and road expansion in this region which today is famous for both were less successful, with both measures considered during World War I failing to pass.

Measures related to rail travel had mixed success. Voters approved rail-related measures in the earliest parts of Los Angeles' history (pre-1900) and post-WWI. As with roadway-related measures, two rail-related measures in the 1910s failed to pass, possibly due to a national economic downturn. While no public transit-related measures made it onto the ballot during the two decades after World War II, supporters of rail transit were able to pressure the California Legislature into creating the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority in the 1950s, and this entity was eventually granted the authority to issue revenue bonds. Thus, a public agency tasked with overseeing the Los Angeles County rail transit system and empowered to go to the voters for bond financing was successfully created, although no rail transit bonds would be issued in the years after the war.

There were three airport- and bus-related ballot measures before 1960 identified for this project. This was considerably smaller than the number of ballot measures related to harbors, rail, and roadways over this same time period (22). Air transportation was relatively new in the 1920s, and voters proved reluctant to dedicate public funds to this novel enterprise. Thirty years later, likely due to the increased popularity of air travel and an increase in the number of airport-related public capital investment programs more generally, voters reversed course and dedicated \$60 million (\$540 million in \$2017) to improvement of the airport. We identified only one bus service-related ballot measure as of 1960. This was a small \$12,000 (\$293,000 in \$2017) bond measure in 1915 to fund a jitney bus service line to connect Watts to LA; this measure was rejected, with 542 residents voting no and 246 voting yes (*Los Angeles Herald* 1915b).

## **Growth politics**

Because early Los Angeles saw such rapid population and economic growth it gradually gained more national political influence even as local political culture determined the initiation and success of transportation-related ballot measures. Local growth machine politics of the era reflected larger trends in population growth but also played a significant role in the public conversation surrounding how best to accommodate new and anticipated growth.

Railroad expansion in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century fueled population growth and increased land values. The political success of Southern Pacific-friendly ballot measures can be attributed to the company's considerable competitive advantage in the Southern California region during that time period (Parker 1937, 117), its powerful coalition with local political and real estate interests, and its direct employment of large numbers of workers (Olin 1968, 2). Most notable perhaps was the public vote to turn the San Pedro and Los Angeles Railroad over to the Southern Pacific in 1872 in order to draw the railroad to the region.

Eventually, local business interests emerged as a counter force to the railroad's alliance with real estate interests. While the Southern Pacific/real estate coalition envisioned the Los Angeles region as a tourist-centered "Riviera of the West," the local business alliance aimed instead to develop the area into a business-oriented "Chicago of the West" (Erie 1992, 530). It was the struggle for power between these two coalitions—and their competing visions for the future of the region—that resulted in the several successful harbor ballot measures in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the *Times*/anti-Southern Pacific coalition ultimately emerging victorious.

Similar, if less clearly delineated, political considerations influenced the measures that would be presented to the public to determine the future of Los Angeles' core transportation infrastructure. The 1924 *Major Street Traffic Plan for Los Angeles* called for extensive road building and road expansions and received considerable support from local media, planning, automobile, and business interests. This plan and \$5 million (\$72 million in \$2017) in implementation funds were submitted and passed by local voters (Wachs 1984, 307).

A contrasting vision of Los Angeles' future was proposed in the 1925 *Report and Recommendations on a Comprehensive Rapid Transit Plan for the City of Los Angeles*, which did not prove popular enough to be submitted to the voters. Also influencing this decision were homeowner's distaste for elevated rail and voters' perception of corruption within the rail lobby (Wachs 1984, 309). Like the earlier harbor battle, the struggle over Los Angeles' transportation future via the ballot box was largely determined by political coalitions' responses to anticipated growth. This patterns of elites presenting competing transportation visions to voters in ballot-box funding proposals continues today as well.

### **National political and economic trends**

Local manifestations of national economic and political trends likely also affected voter behavior. Research has shown that the health of the local economy has a huge influence on voter behavior (Anderson and Hechts 2012; Dassonneville, Claes, and Lewis-Beck 2016; Duch and Stevenson 2010; Healy and Lenz 2014). At the same time, national trends in

transportation finance, such as the rise of federal grants after the New Deal, influence the number and type of ballot measures put before voters (Erie 1992, 522).

The way that bond elections are presented to voters also influences outcome. Voters in direct democratic processes such as local bond elections tend to exhibit fiscally conservative preferences (Dyck 2010). Thus, voters may be more likely to approve single bonds than they are to approve two or more bonds presented as a “package” in a single election. Voters may also be more likely to approve projects that generate their own revenue over those to be retired by general revenues.

One factor that does not appear to have affected the success of bond-related ballot measures in Los Angeles to any considerable degree is the amount of the bond issue at stake. While the initial size of proposed bonds was sometimes reduced prior to the measures being submitted to the public (*Los Angeles Herald* 1913a; *Los Angeles Herald* 1921a; *Los Angeles Herald* 1921b), the size of the associated bond issue *per se* does not appear to have played a significant role in determining which measures passed and which did not. For example, in the multi-issue April 1913 bond election \$1 million toward development of a municipal railway failed to pass while \$2.5 million toward development of San Pedro Harbor was approved. Similarly, voters approved \$15 million in harbor improvements in April 1923 but did not approve \$6 million toward airport bonds five years later. In these cases, among others, other factors beyond the amount of debt appears to have influenced success or failure.

The majority (23 out of 24) of early bond and related transportation ballot measures in Los Angeles identified for the project were voted on between the passage of the Good Roads Act in 1908 and the and the end of the New Deal in 1937. There were 10 long-term general transportation bonds issued during this period, which is unsurprising and perhaps even expected given the rapid expansion of the county. This was a key period of Los Angeles’ history that saw significant population increase (and with it political contention over the direction of growth) as well as rapid improvement to and proliferation of new transportation technologies.

With increased numbers of automobiles came increased revenues from diesel and gasoline taxes and other user fees and, in turn, increased federal and state spending on roads (Garrett, Brown, and Wachs 2016; Goldman and Wachs 2003, 19). As a result, post-New Deal municipal financing de-emphasized general obligation bonds as a means of financing roadway improvements (Erie 1992).

The collection of roadway user fees by the State of California began in 1913 with enactment of the Motor Vehicle Act, which required the payment of

annual vehicle registration fees. This was soon followed by passage of the Vehicle Act of 1915 that authorized the collection of weight-based registration fees on commercial vehicles. California continued to expand its use of user fees in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including most significantly the adoption of motor fuel taxes and commercial carrier business taxes via the Motor Vehicle Fuel License Tax Act of 1923 and the adoption of the Diesel Fuel Tax in 1937. The motor fuel tax would be increased several times over the coming decades and would finance (along with federal fuel tax revenues described below) in the first three decades after the second world war a massive expansion of freeways in Los Angeles (Brown, Garrett, and Wachs 2016, 63).

California was an early leader in freeway funding, particularly in metropolitan areas (Taylor 1995). The Collier-Burns Highway Act of 1947 set California on a course of freeway development in LA and across the state well in advance of the funding of the federal Interstate Highway program with the passage of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 (Morris, et al. 2016). The 1956 Act funded the ambitious Interstate Highway program, which had been adopted largely without funding in 1944 (Taylor 1995); it featured generous (ultimately as much as 90%) federal funding matches for freeway projects (Boarnet 2014). These dramatic increases in funding for metropolitan freeway development from state and later federal sources likely explain the significant drop-off in the number of transportation-related ballot measures (most of which were long-term general obligation bonds) in the three decades after the Great Depression.

Of the seven transportation-related ballot measures between 1860 to 1960 that did not pass, five occurred during decidedly uncertain economic times: four were voted on just after the Panic and Recession of 1910 to 1914 and amidst the World War I recession of 1918 and 1919, and a fifth during the Great Depression in 1937. The regional and national economic climate of the time likely contributed to their failure to achieve sufficient margins to be enacted. A September 20, 1915 issue of the *Los Angeles Herald* mentions that the \$2,5 million election for road improvement bonds was “the first bond issue asked by the [Los Angeles city] council since financial conditions in the United States became acute as a result of the war in Europe” (*Los Angeles Herald* 1915a). Similarly, the failed 1937 ballot measure in Pasadena to expand (and implicitly to fund) the proposed Arroyo Seco Parkway to Devil’s Gate was voted on during the Great Depression. While seven data points do not lead to robust conclusions, the timing of these failures is surely suggestive.

## Single-issue vs packaged bond issues

Of the 25 transportation-related ballot measures identified over the study period, six were voted on alongside other ballot measures. Of these “packaged” measures on a given ballot, only three passed. An April 1913 bond election that included seven different bond propositions included one failed transportation-related measure (\$1 million for rail) and one successful transportation-related measure (\$2.5 million for harbor development). Of the five other (non-transportation) bond measures on the ballot, four failed. The other proposition passed in this bond election funded \$1.5 million toward the Owens River City/Franklin Canyon Trunk Line Aqueduct. Two years later, in April 1915, a three-bond measure election in Pasadena (including one measure for \$12,000 toward a bus service to Los Angeles) resulted in the failure of all three measures. Similarly, all measures in a June 1916 bond package election, including \$300,000 toward the construction of the Second Street Tunnel, also failed to pass. A Long Beach-specific election in September of that year approved \$300,000 toward improvement of Long Beach Harbor but two other measures lost. Finally, a June 1921 bond package election resulted in \$4.8 million toward San Pedro Harbor improvements. The only other bond measure to carry included \$500,000 toward a new public library (*Los Angeles Herald* 1921b; *Los Angeles Herald* 1921c).

The presence of multiple bond measures on the same ballot appears to lessen the chances for passage of a given measure. Twenty-five transportation-related ballot measures were identified over the study period, of which seven (28%) failed to pass while half of identified packaged transportation bonds were defeated. By comparison, 31 non-transportation-related ballot measures were identified over this same period. Of these, 21 (71%) did not pass. Twenty-one of the non-transportation ballot measures were part of bond packages, 18 (86%) failed.

While the comparison between transportation-related and non-transportation-related ballot measures is imperfect because each packaged bond election included more non-transportation-related than transportation-related measures, these data indicate that transportation-related ballot measures overall were more successful than non-transportation-related measures over this period. While solo measures tended to pass at higher rates than packaged measures overall (perhaps due to public reticence for large public expenditures), packaged transportation measures passed at higher rates than non-packaged, non-transportation-related measures over this period. These patterns point to public preference for funding transportation-related projects over non-transportation projects with general obligation bonds. This apparent voter preference for transportation projects may relate to their visibility and visceral connections to daily life. Road and rail projects are obvious to all, as are the problems of slow travel and congestion they aim to address. Manville and Cummins (2014) note that non-transit users are willing to publicly fund transit because they expect transit



to reduce congestion. And, at least some voters may also perceive transportation as an essential urban service worthy of public funding. By contrast, new water and sewage systems may be desperately needed, but these needs, as well as those for new libraries, may be more abstract to voters.

## CONCLUSION

Many observers have marveled at the Los Angeles “innovation” of funding transportation through ballot measures since 1980. This chapter has shown that while transportation ballot measures may have seemed novel compared with recent history, they were to a greater extent a return to an earlier tradition. In the earlier years reviewed in this chapter, a rather large proportion of infrastructure in LA was at least to some extent built through local direct democracy. We identified 25 transportation-related ballot measures in Los Angeles County and its municipalities during the period from 1860 to 1960. Analysis of these measures reveals several recurring patterns and themes.

First, the success of bond measures presented to the voting public is (perhaps weakly) related to the transportation mode being considered. Undoubtedly, voter preference for certain modes, most notably aversion to elevated rail in the 1920s, directly affected voting. However, support for different modes historically has been tied more directly to the needs of a growing region and the machinations of different players in the Los Angeles growth machine. More specifically, demand for higher-capacity transportation infrastructure appears to have spurred development of expanded infrastructure, but the form this infrastructure took on seems to have been influenced by competing political interests in the real estate, railroad, and business communities.

Second, voter behavior appears to have been influenced, if not determined, by larger economic trends. Voters influenced by “growth machine” politics may see transportation projects as tools for economic development, which may in turn increase their willingness to approve measures funding and initiating such projects. In periods of significant economic recession in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, voters were less willing (but not totally unwilling) to pass ballot measures, especially bond measures. Moreover, gasoline taxes, registration fees, and sales taxes associated with car use increased as car use increased. This lucrative source of revenues rendered general obligation bond issues less necessary and may have caused auto users to be less willing to fund transportation facilities through other tax revenues as well.

Third, voters demonstrated a preference for single-issue bond elections rather than packaged bond elections with slates of multiple bond measures.

This likely reflects a general tendency toward fiscal conservatism in public funding of infrastructure projects.

Finally, transportation-related ballot measures were approved at higher rates than non-transportation-related ballot measures over this first century of ballot box planning in Los Angeles. Voters may have been more willing to pass transportation measures than non-transportation measures because transportation problems were more immediate to the average voter and the facilities and transportation improvements to be funded were more visible.

# CHAPTER III. RAPID TRANSIT TAX MEASURES, 1960-1980

The history of transportation tax measures in Los Angeles County reveals a trajectory shaped by competing visions of LA's transportation future as well as pragmatic political expediency. Over the years, successive transportation agencies have settled on the sales tax for ballot funding initiatives because it is perhaps the *least unpopular* source of funding. The pursuit of a local funding measure was shaped as well by changing prerogatives of federal, state and regional governments, with the earliest pre-Great-Depression measures going it alone with little state or federal assistance, followed by four decades of measures aimed at luring federal and state funding to the region into the 1970s, followed by local sales tax measures substituting for declining federal and state funding sources. Over the years, transportation tax measures have become more successful at the ballot box by becoming more multi-modal, going from an exclusive focus on rail transit to the incorporation of rail, bus, bicycle & pedestrian (termed "active transportation"), and road projects. This has enabled measures to win both central cities and inner suburbs, on which the success of countywide measures often depend. Measures have become more specific in their delineation of project characteristics and timetables, while at the same time becoming less coherent in their overall vision.

While the story of Los Angeles is one of almost continuous growth and change, between the 1960s (where this chapter begins) and the present day (where this report ends) the metropolitan area grew into one of the 20 largest and arguably the most culturally diverse on the planet. The ongoing growth and diversification of Los Angeles has likely influenced how people voted for the nine different LA County sales tax initiatives placed on ballots between 1968 and 2016. Between 1970 and 2015, the population of Los Angeles County increased by 43 percent. The land area hardly changed, resulting in a similar increase in population density as well. The share of the foreign-born population rose from 11.2 percent to 34.7 percent, a 210 percent increase. The share of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino increased from 18 to 48 percent. The number of families living below the poverty line increased by 75 percent. Average property tax rates decreased by 86.7 percent with the help of Proposition 13 while average sales tax rates increased by 49.3%. Vehicle ownership rates increased as well. The share of zero-vehicle households decreased by 11 percent while

the share of households with two or more vehicles available increased by 31 percent. Commute mode share has not changed significantly. Commuting by private automobile decreased modestly from 86 to 83 percent, while commuting by transit increased from 6 to 7 percent. (U.S. Census 1970; American Community Survey 2015). From 1982 to 2014, the average annual hours of delay per commuter increased from 50 to 80, a good indication of worsening traffic congestion (Texas Transportation Institute 2015). The County's electorate also became increasingly Democratic. In the 1968 presidential election, 48 percent of electors voted Republican and 46 percent voted Democratic. In 2016, the percentages were 22 percent Republican and 72 percent Democratic (Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk 2016a).

So the discussion of ballot measures beginning here in 1960s should be read in the context of an electorate that was smaller, less dense, whiter, more native-born, less poor, and more politically conservative than that of Los Angeles in the 2010s.

## 1968 PROPOSITION A

By 1964 the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (LAMTA) had made little headway on its mandate to develop rapid transit in Los Angeles. This lack of progress spurred the Legislature to create a new, more powerful regional transportation agency, the Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD) (Hebert 1964). The RTD's founding legislation not only charged it with developing a rail rapid transit system (Richmond 2005), but also endowed it with the power of *eminent domain*, the capacity to issue general obligation bonds, and the authority to levy property taxes to fund public transportation, subject to approval by at least 60 percent of county voters (Southern California Rapid Transit District 1968a). According to a report by the Office of Technology Assessment (1976), local and county officials liked the idea of reforming the LAMTA because it lacked local representation (and thus impeded local control). The RTD legislation apparently mitigated these concerns by allowing the County Board of Supervisors, the City of Los Angeles and members of a 78-city City Selection Committee to select the RTD's board members (OTA 1976).<sup>10</sup> It also authorized the District to prepare preliminary and planning engineering studies for the rapid transit system (SCRTD 1968a).

The RTD commissioned a study in 1965 by the firm of Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall (DMJM) to analyze different corridors for rail development (DMJM 1965). The DMJM report acknowledged that population and

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<sup>10</sup> Five of the members were appointed by the County Board of Supervisors, two by the mayor of Los Angeles, and four by the Los Angeles County City Selection Committee which appointed one representative from each of four existing or proposed transit corridors. California Public Utilities Code § 30201.

employment were growing much faster in outlying areas of the county than in the downtown core, aided in no small part by a rapidly expanding metropolitan freeway network. Nevertheless, the report's authors asserted that a healthy regional economy required a dense, economically strong central business district (CBD), and argued that the key to such a thriving CBD was a transportation network that could link downtown with suburban workers. As the construction of the regional network of freeways neared completion downtown interests argued that high-capacity rail rapid transit would be both cause and effect—massive employment growth was expected to occur but could only be realized by an effective transit system. The alternative, according to DMJM, would be unacceptable levels of additional highway construction through established communities (Hamer 1976).

The DMJM report echoed the findings of the Los Angeles Department of City Planning's recent *Centropolis '80* report, published in 1963, which had claimed that anticipated strong future growth of traffic into downtown Los Angeles necessitated rail transit (Hamer 1976). Both studies illustrated how support for rail transit came primarily from downtown Los Angeles business and civic groups that saw it as a tool for revitalizing business and boosting property values (Richmond 2005).

State legislation in July 1966 released \$3.9 million (\$29.6 million in \$2017) of state tidelands oil revenue to the RTD for planning and engineering purposes allowed the organization to begin preliminary studies for a comprehensive rapid transit system (Hebert 1966a). These funds allowed the District to prepare a planning timetable that included a November 1968 target for a ballot measure to secure long-term funding. The district hired Kaiser Engineers and DMJM to undertake preliminary planning and engineering studies, and Coverdale and Colpitts to conduct projections of population and patronage based on the corridors defined in the 1960 LAMTA proposal, as well as a 19-mile route southwest from downtown to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) (SCRTD 1968a).

Using decidedly optimistic population projections from the Los Angeles Regional Transportation Study (LARTS), the report projected that 73 percent of peak period bus patrons would be diverted to the rail system along with 19 percent of automobile drivers. In all, the report concluded that 22 percent of peak period users would be induced to take transit with the proposed system (Hamer 1976).<sup>11</sup> These projection were extraordinarily ambitious:

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<sup>11</sup> Hamer (1976) provides a trenchant critique of the methodology used in the LARTS estimates. According to Hamer, the system was planned according to zone-level population and employment projections that Coverdale and Colpitts took from the 1967 LARTS (that projected trends for the year 1980). In Hamer's view the LART's use of municipal land-use maps (that reflect aspirational, rather than actual growth) to project population and reliance on flawed base figures to project CBD employment (which Coverdale and Colpitts sometimes inflated to reflect projects and policies proposed by the government and private sector) was

such high levels of transit use are sustained only in a few highly concentrated urban areas such as New York and San Francisco. Nevertheless, the need to generate high ridership projections was seen as crucial to winning voter backing for expensive rail projects, and became increasingly important to regional planners in Los Angeles as a way to meet federal air quality standards that were emerging and were codified in the Federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1970. Based on these optimistic figures the RTD was prepared to go forward with a rail plan, largely eschewing less costly transit options such as improved bus service.

Over the next 18 months the agency worked with the Legislature to devise a funding program for the proposed transit system. Early legislation by Assembly members John Foran (Dem-San Francisco) and Frank Lanterman (Rep-La Canada Flintridge), proposed to fund the District's transit program through fees on vehicle-related expenditures. Foran's bill would have increased the state's vehicle licensing fees from 2 to 2.5 percent and Lanterman's bill would have imposed a 1.25 percent state sales tax on gasoline (Gillam 1967). Revenues the state collected in each county would be eligible to fund rapid transit improvements within that county. The two bills died in the state Senate in August of 1967 at the direction of Senator Randolph Collier, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee and one of the leading proponents of the state's highway system. Representing a district that covered the rural interior of Northern California, Collier—with support from other rural senators and motorists' organizations including the Automobile Clubs—opposed the imposition of vehicle fees on motorists throughout the state to fund (predominantly) urban transit systems (Turner 1983). Although the RTD had legislative authority to impose a property tax, the agency acknowledged early on that this source was politically unpopular (Hebert 1966a).

The RTD released its Preliminary Planning Report in October 1967. The report proposed a 62-mile system costing a staggering \$1.57 billion (\$11.5 billion in \$2017), with connecting bus service (Hebert 1967). The first phase of the system consisted of four rail lines running from Downtown Los Angeles (1) northwest to Balboa Avenue in the San Fernando Valley, (2) east to the City of El Monte in the San Gabriel Valley, (3) south to Long Beach (through South Los Angeles), and (4) west along Wilshire Boulevard to Fairfax Avenue (SCRTD 1968a). The San Fernando Valley and Long Beach lines were to run

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flawed. Regardless of their reliability, the projections led Coverdale and Colpitts to recommend a system centered on Downtown Los Angeles.

on elevated structures or “skyways” along Van Nuys Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley and in the median of Pacific Boulevard through Huntington Park (SCR TD Board of Directors 1968; SCR TD 1968a). Residents of Huntington Park and neighborhoods adjacent to Van Nuys Boulevard objected to both proposed elevated lines. Finally, the report proposed that the District fund the system with a property tax, which it had the authority to impose.

At the ensuing public hearings, many municipal representatives, business organization and citizens’ groups expressed support for rapid transit, but demanded expansion of service to their localities. Such demands cast in sharp relief a frequent contrast in public reactions to urban freeway versus rail transit proposals. For urban freeways, the benefits of new roads can accrue to anyone with a car, even those who don’t live adjacent to the proposed facility; but the costs—in terms of added traffic, noise, and air pollution—are greatest for those who live near the new road. So the tendency is to favor more distant road proposals, and oppose those nearby. But for rail transit, the benefits are less universal, and are greatest for those with easy access to the stations (particularly via foot), while those further away are less likely to directly benefit from the new investment. So the tendency is to oppose more distant proposals, while favoring those nearby.<sup>12</sup> For instance, the City of Los Angeles—reflecting what appears to have been “universal criticism” expressed at community meetings and in conversations with stakeholders (SCR TD Board of Directors 1968)—proposed an extension of the Wilshire Boulevard line 5.5 miles west to the San Diego (I-405) Freeway in order to serve the Westwood and Century City business districts (SCR TD 1968a). Citizens’ groups in the San Fernando Valley similarly demanded an extension of the San Fernando Valley line two miles further west to Tampa Avenue. Outlying municipalities like Alhambra wanted a role in determining feeder bus routes. And at a January public hearing, a representative from the League of California Cities criticized the plan for not including service improvements to communities not served by transit corridors. The League also recommended expanding the line to serve the airport (SCR TD Board of Directors 1968).

Not all public feedback, however demanded rail expansion. At the 15 January 1968 hearing, the Vice President of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce (a longtime supporter of transportation projects) criticized the plan’s exclusive focus on transit in exclusive rights-of-way. The Chamber recommended that the RTD examine the use of existing rights-of-way for the

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12 While affected residents are more likely to favor rail transit in their neighborhoods than urban freeways, local support for the former is by no means guaranteed. LA has hosted many cases of local opposition to new rail transit lines, particularly in higher income neighborhoods; Beverly Hills residents’ sustained opposition in the 2010s to tunneling the Wilshire Purple Line subway *under* their city is a recent notable example.

rail system, and that it also evaluate rail transit against other modes to determine the most cost-effective mode for each line. A representative of the League of Women Voters, while expressing strong support for the measure, noted that many of her organization's members distrusted the RTD's ability to run a transit system (given the relatively poor state of the bus network), and believed that modern technology could deliver a form of transit superior to rail. In addition, representatives from Huntington Park and Los Angeles criticized the Long Beach and San Fernando Valley skyway proposals. The representatives from both the League of Women Voters and Chamber of Commerce also noted the public's strong opposition to financing the proposal system with a property tax increase (SCRTD Board of Directors 1968).



**Figure 8. RTD Master Plan 5-Corridor System and Second-phase Lines (May 1968)**



Source: SCRTD 1968a.

The RTD's final plan, released in May 1968, partly reflected public input showing that the public wanted a more extensive first stage system. The introduction asserted that the "public recognize(s) the urgent need for transit," supported improved bus service, and opposed the property tax (SCRTD 1968a). Accordingly, as shown in Figure 8, the report proposed an 89-mile rail system (with 65 stations), running from downtown to the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys, along Wilshire Boulevard to Beverly Hills and West Los Angeles, to Long Beach, and included the addition of an "Airport-Southwest Corridor" providing service to LAX. It also called for a system of feeder bus lines to support the proposed rail system (see Figure 9).

The Wilshire Line, at roughly 15 miles in length, was the shortest line among the five proposed corridors, and the only one entirely underground. Running from Union Station south under Broadway and then west beneath Wilshire Boulevard to Century City it had seventeen proposed stations and was to have been completed by 1976, at a cost of about \$40 million per mile (about one-tenth of the per mile cost of line currently under construction in the 2010s).

The plan, responding to requests from the cities of Huntington Park and Los Angeles, modified the alignment of the Long Beach line north of 103<sup>rd</sup> Street so that it would run along Central Avenue instead of Pacific Boulevard.<sup>13</sup> The plan also relocated the San Fernando Valley line to a right-of-way a mile east of Van Nuys Boulevard, so it would not have to run on skyways. The report claimed to have “expanded on” the preliminary proposal’s bus component by providing over 300 miles of local and express connecting bus service, though it did not evaluate bus alternatives to the rail system (SCRTD 1968a).<sup>14</sup> The estimated cost of the entire planned system was an even more fantastical \$2.5 billion (\$17.8 billion in 2017 dollars).

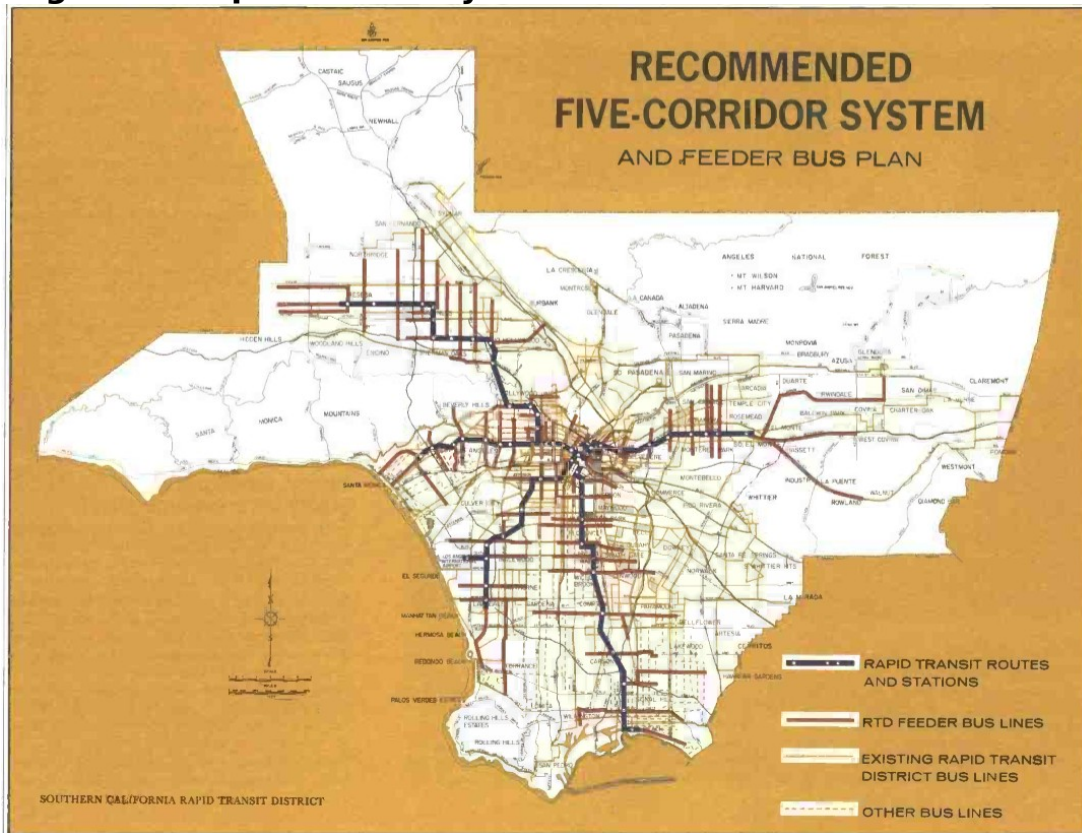
Noting the “universally substantial public opposition” to a property tax, the report stated that the system could be entirely financed by a half-cent general sales tax, although it left the door open for other non-property tax financing options that could cover the system’s costs (SCRTD 1968a). In the fall of 1967, Assemblyman Lanterman (Rep - La Canada Flintridge) had drafted a bill to fund local public transportation by extending the state’s 4 percent sales tax to gasoline (Hebert 1968a). However, the bill (which died the first time it appeared for a vote and encountered opposition from the automobile and oil lobbies) failed to raise sufficient revenue to fund the RTD’s 62-mile rapid transit system without being combined with an increase in property tax. By March of 1968, Lanterman had introduced a new bill, with the RTD’s support, that increased the sales tax by one half cent statewide to fund rapid transit (Hebert 1968b).

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<sup>13</sup> The City of Los Angeles wanted the line to serve South Los Angeles.

<sup>14</sup> During the second phase of planning, Curtin and Johnson Associates evaluated and rejected four all-bus alternatives on the basis that they would provide minimal cost savings, with capital costs only 10 percent lower than those for rail, a differential reduced by operating costs (Hamer 1968). According to Hamer, the analysis erroneously assumed that the buses would travel on dedicated facilities with full-service stations (just like the rail system), ignoring the potential for operational improvements such as metered freeways and bus lanes that would be significantly more reasonable.

**Figure 9. Rapid Transit System with Feeder Bus Service**



Source: SCRTD 1968a, p. 4.

At subsequent hearings in July, citizens' groups in the San Fernando Valley and eastern San Gabriel Valley demanded a loop line along Devonshire and an extension from Pomona to the Ontario Airport, which was incorporated into Phase II of the system in the report (SCRTD 1968c). Such responsiveness to local constituencies' concerns for geographic inclusion would affect the planning of transportation sales tax programs in the county for decades to come.

At the beginning of August, the state legislature passed a bill authorizing the Rapid Transit District to impose a half-cent sales tax, subject (as with the RTD's property tax authority) to a vote by 60 percent of the county

population, which Governor Reagan signed into law shortly thereafter (*Los Angeles Times* 1968a).

The sales tax measure, Proposition A, drew support from the downtown business establishment (as represented by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce) and over 20 inner-ring suburbs and their interests such as the Long Beach and Beverly Hills Chambers of Commerce, as well as from the region's main labor unions, such as the Joint Federation of Teamsters. The proposition also received the endorsement of the County Board of Supervisors, Mayor Sam Yorty of Los Angeles, 20 city councils,<sup>15</sup> and two former governors (Cities, Organizations and Chambers of Commerce in Support of Proposition A 1968). Finally, progressive organizations like the NAACP and the League of Women Voters supported the measure as well (Citizens Committee for Rapid Transit 1968).

Reflecting its backing by the region's business and political establishment, the campaign in favor of Proposition A managed to raise more than \$458,000 (\$3.2 million in \$2017), mainly from businesses in the central and downtown areas (Whitt 1982). Business and civic leaders convinced that the system was necessary for the future of the downtown formed a Citizens Committee for Rapid Transit to campaign on its behalf (Hebert 1968c, Whitt 1982). The Rapid Transit District conducted an "informational campaign" on the measure by hosting presentations and community meetings and passing out campaign brochures, while the Citizens Committee distributed material urging voters to support the measure (Christiansen 1968).

Responding to the public's perceived interest in technology as a transportation solution, campaign materials and publicity events promoting the measure highlighted the new rail rapid transit system's space age equipment. The RTD's *In-Transit* newsletter described the trains' state-of-the-art "computer-controlled" technology and claimed they would transport passengers at speeds as high as 75 miles per hour (SCRTD 1968d). The District showcased a "Rapid Transit Design Car" (modeled on a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) prototype) at public events throughout the region to demonstrate the futuristic elements of the system (*Monterey Park Californian* 1968).

An editorial supporting the measure also alluded to how transit alleviated the personal costs of automobile ownership for suburban drivers through savings

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15 These included: Sierra Madre (Resolution No. 2448. "A Resolution of the City Council of the City of Sierra Madre Supporting Proposition A"); Arcadia (Resolution No. 4056. "A Resolution of the City Council of the City Council of Arcadia Endorsing Proposition A on the November 5 General Election Ballot," October 16, 1968); Santa Fe Springs (Resolution No. 1556. "Resolution of the City Council of the City of Santa Fe Springs Supporting the Program of the Southern California Rapid Transit District and Endorsing Proposition 'A' For One Half-Cent Sales Tax."). Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Archives.

in gas and purchases of second vehicles (Gilstrap 1968a). A pamphlet issued by the District promised service to over 40 percent of employment locations and two-thirds of the housing in the county, a statistic targeted towards weekday commuters (SCRTD 1968b). Numerous editorials spoke of rapid transit's capacity to not only provide an alternative to congested roadways but to reduce congestion and motor vehicle-generated smog for drivers who would not use transit (Loebbecke 1968). For instance, an article in the *Herald Examiner* described how transit could alleviate the woes of a fictional commuter named Fred Dryver (Stump 1968). Warnings that projected future population growth would strain roadways without the development of an alternative mode (Liebhart 1968) sought to appeal to burgeoning concern with the sustainability of regional population growth.

Although the focus on suburban workday commuters seems to have predominated, a booklet released as part of the RTD's informational campaign titled "Everybody Benefits" simultaneously addressed the needs of transit-dependent groups like children and seniors (SCRTD n.d.). The Rapid Transit District responded to the demands of African-American civil rights groups by publicly promising fair hiring and affirmative action (*Hollywood Citizen* 1968). Editorials in support of the measure also appealed to a broader constituency by touting the benefits of rapid transit for the economy. For instance, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner*, RTD President Don McMillan cited a Stanford Research Institute study claiming that the system would reduce structural unemployment (increasing output by \$39 million) and raise productivity (increasing output by \$15 million) by enhancing regional mobility (*Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* 1968). Overall, the campaign sought to convince multiple constituencies in the county that a rapid transit system would serve their interests.

The campaign opposing the measure, organized under the banner of "Taxpayers against Transit Measure A," was spearheaded by fiscally-conservative state Assembly member Pete Schabarum (KNBC-TV News 1968). The campaign lacked the institutional and financial backing of proponents, receiving only five private donations (from 2 individuals, 1 anonymous donor, and 2 businesses) that amounted to \$23,000 (equivalent to \$160,000 in 2017 dollars). However, the campaign received indirect assistance from the Southern California Automobile Association, which hired a public relations firm to manage the campaign (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). Cities such as Santa Monica and Chambers of Commerce in the San Fernando Valley opposed the measure for failing to include lines to their areas (Fanucchi 1968; Richmond 2005) as well as the Pasadena Star-News (*Independent Star-News* 1968). Although the *Los Angeles Times* expressed a generally supportive stance towards public transit, its coverage of the measure highlighted critical views (Office of Technology Assessment 1976) and the paper came out against the measure a few days before the

election on the grounds it was too expensive and would serve too few residents (McMillan 1968).

In a familiar retort, opponents claimed this was all just a scheme to prop up a declining CBD. Opposition campaign literature and editorials highlighted the measure's purportedly high cost to the taxpayer—one ad in the *Los Angeles Times* described the measure as the “largest bond measure in state history” (Taxpayers Against Transit Measure A 1968b)—appealing to the growing anti-tax movement in California. Arguments against the measure juxtaposed these costs with such drawbacks as the (supposedly) negligible impacts of the rapid transit system on regional congestion. For instance, one campaign pamphlet estimated that the system would remove only two percent of peak-hour trips (Taxpayers Against Transit Measure A 1968a). Other articles, mirroring arguments expressed in public hearings, criticized the system's lack of service to particular areas (e.g. Southeast or San Fernando Valley) (Godfrey 1968). More directly countering the RTD's promotion of rapid transit as a transportation solution, a press release authored by Schabarum openly contested the compatibility of fixed rapid transit with Los Angeles's decentralized form, and argued that a regional bus system or freeway improvements would better enhance auto commuters' mobility (Schabarum 1968). As with the campaign supporting the measure, the opposition focused on the rapid transit system's impact on the auto commuter, either downplaying or denying the benefits of such a system.

On election day, the measure failed to garner a majority of the votes cast, and fell a full 16 percentage points short of the required passage threshold of 60 percent; only 44 percent voted in favor and 56 percent against (Wilshire Subway 1968). The measure carried a majority in unincorporated areas in South and Central Los Angeles and in several municipalities on the Westside (e.g. Beverly Hills) and inner San Gabriel Valley (Monterey Park), but narrowly lost in the City of Los Angeles. Most municipalities in the South Bay, San Gabriel Valley, and Southeast County voted against it. Some editorials, including the Rapid Transit District's press release, attributed the measure's failure to general anti-tax sentiments among the electorate resulting from economic stagnation (Gilstrap 1968a). A recession earlier that year had hit the aerospace industry hard, which was a major component of the local economy (Office of Technology Assessment 1976).

More generally, with the federal deficit rising, criticism of government spending became a focal point of the 1976 presidential campaign (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). A *Los Angeles Times* article cited the

concurrent failure of the other two bond measures on the same county ballot as evidence of voters' general "resistance" to any spending measure (*Los Angeles Times* 1968b). Later analysis of the election by Stipak (1973) shows that voting on Proposition A had a positive correlation with voting for a local bond measure for juvenile detention facilities and a strong negative correlation with voting for Proposition 9, a statewide measure to cap property taxes, indicating that concerns about taxation and government spending influenced the vote. However, three of the state funding measures on the ballot succeeded, and the two other county measures that failed (which both required 2/3 approval) each enjoyed majority support. Finally, the Proposition 9 property tax cap lost by an even larger margin than Proposition A (Gilstrap 1968b).

Two *Los Angeles Times* editorials blamed the measure itself, rather than the political context, for its failure, asserting that voters were not convinced of the benefits of a rail-focused transit system centered on downtown Los Angeles (*Los Angeles Times* 1968b, McMillan 1968). Indeed, Stipak's post-election analysis, which examined the influence of race, median income, and proximity to a transit line by census tract, revealed that pro votes were most strongly correlated with a tract's proximity to a proposed transit line (although the correlation tapers off with a distance of more than a more few miles). Although a July 1968 survey conducted among a random sample of likely voters showed that the majority of respondents supported rapid transit (and that over 58 percent supported the sales tax measure), a quarter of those surveyed stated that they disliked how the proposed transit system did not extend far enough into outlying areas (the most frequent response to the question of what participants disliked about the RTD's plan) (Opinion Research of California 1968). On the other hand, civic leaders in the San Fernando Valley (such as Chamber of Commerce head Kenneth Dellameter) claimed that the District's "rail fixation" alienated suburban communities that rely more heavily on bus transit (Burleigh 1968). Thus, voters in suburban areas like the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys may have voted against the measure because it failed to provide transit infrastructure or services that would serve their neighborhoods.

Both Stipak's analysis and a post-election survey by the Dorothy D. Corey Research firm noted that the relationship between census tracts' vote on Proposition A and median income displayed a "u-shaped" pattern, with low-

support among persons or census tracts with moderate income levels and high support among persons or tracts with median incomes in the upper- and lower-most brackets. Similarly, both studies noted strong support for the measure in tracts that were home to a high proportion of African-Americans but weaker support in areas housing more Hispanic- and Asian-Americans. Stipak explained support in low-income areas as indicative of the “personal benefits” transit offers low-income individuals and that in high-income areas as indicative of “public-regarding culture” among educated people. Stipak likewise theorized that more favorable attitudes among African-Americans (compared to whites) towards government spending could account for their support. The correlation between support for the measure and income and demographic factors, however, may be explained partly by the location of the plan’s transit corridors around downtown and (to a lesser extent) the Wilshire Corridor, areas with high concentrations of both low-income (predominantly minority) and high-income residents. The perceived positive effects of the measure on downtown businesses might have also favorably disposed high earners (Whitt 1982), while the RTD’s fair hiring promises may have appealed to African-Americans. Regardless, concerns among the electorate about the measure’s geographic allocation of benefits (mirroring those raised in the planning process) and increased government spending might have deprived Proposition A of the required votes needed to pass.

## 1974 PROPOSITION A

The RTD leadership, perhaps optimistically, did not interpret the outcome of the November 1968 election as a vote against rapid transit, and in the weeks following the election pledged to continue work on developing a system. Nevertheless, for the next two years, the RTD narrowed its focus to bus operations (Hebert 1971a, 1971b). In 1970, the state Assembly passed a bill allowing the RTD to levy a temporary (6-month) sales tax increase to generate funds to purchase new buses and supplement farebox revenue (Goff 1969). The agency also began work on a \$51 million (\$322 million in \$2017) program financed in part by state and federal highway funds to construct a high-speed busway in the median of the San Bernardino Freeway from El Monte to Downtown. By the following year, the RTD could boast that it had increased the length of its bus routes from 1,800 to more than 2,600 miles by acquiring local service providers, adding new lines and extending



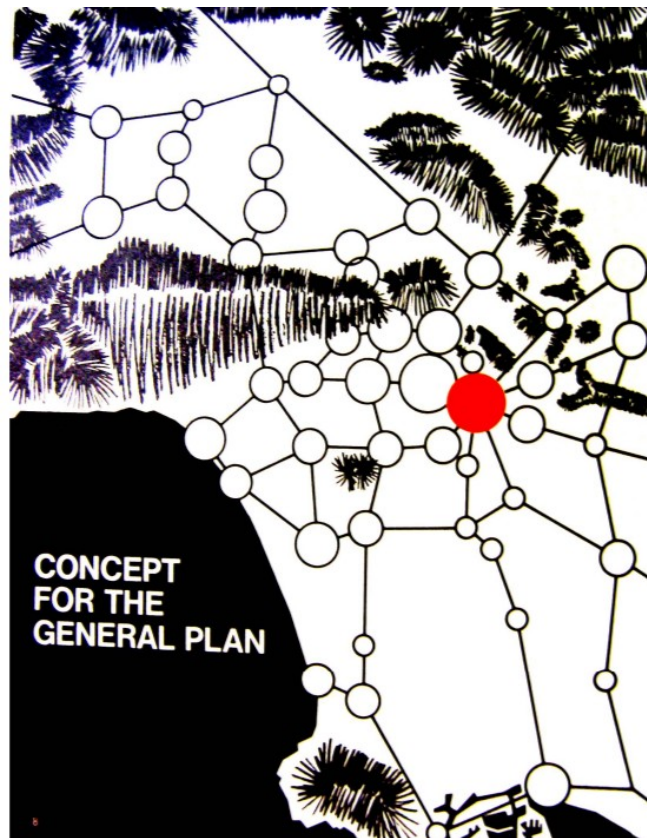
others. Agency officials were aware, however, that additional financial assistance would be necessary to avoid future fare increases that would particularly affect the one in six county households that lacked an automobile and depended on transit (Gilstrap 1971a).

Meanwhile there were other calls to improve local bus service for workers and others traveling outside the downtown core. County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn proposed a plan to double the size of the bus fleet from 1,500 to 3,000; establish a grid of bus service on major arterials, such as Western, Manchester and Vermont Avenues, and Century Boulevard; create a single 25-cent fare zone within a 35-mile radius of the downtown; and reduce the cost of a monthly bus pass from \$12 to \$5. He also suggested that major employers purchase bus passes for employees rather than providing free or subsidized parking (Hahn 1969, 1971).<sup>16</sup> The District, however, objected that the \$32 million cost of the program would leave it without funds needed for bus maintenance or to develop a rail program (Gilstrap 1971b).

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<sup>16</sup> Supervisor Hahn decried the fact that the RTD had spent only \$1 million of its \$27.7 million budget to improve and expand service (Hahn 1971).

During this period of time, the momentum for rapid transit planning and development shifted, in part, to the City of Los Angeles. The city's 1970 Concept Plan sought to tame sprawl by concentrating development around nodes of pre-existing development or "Centers" distributed throughout the city. The plan's circulation element proposed a 100-mile heavy rail rapid transit system connecting the Centers (Hebert 1971a, Los Angeles Department of City Planning 1970).<sup>17</sup> Although the plan's text did not delineate the alignments in detail, the accompanying map showed transit lines blanketing the Los Angeles basin and San Fernando Valley, connecting the Downtown (red dot in Figure 10) to other "Centers" within the "Regional Core" (Wilshire, Miracle Mile, Hollywood and Beverly Hills) and throughout Los Angeles and adjacent cities like Santa Monica, Long Beach and Pasadena. A burgeoning real estate market along the Wilshire Corridor also increased support for rapid transit from central city businesses and developers (Whitt 1982).



**Figure 10. Concept Plan Proposed Rapid Transit System**

By pushing some of the expected future development to outlying Centers, the plan sought to relieve development pressure in downtown LA (the Regional Core), while supporting outlying business and commercial interests and hopefully spreading traffic more evenly. Concentrating local retail and office development in these Centers, as shown imaginatively in Figure 11, would also make it possible to maintain the city's characteristic low density residential development outside the Centers. Regional rail was a key element of the development strategy; while automobile travel would continue to dominate, over time increasing traffic congestion was expected to divert more and more travelers onto the regional transit system. Over the years, significant commercial development has in fact taken place according to the

<sup>17</sup> While similar in character to the hub-and-spoke model reflected in most of the earlier transit plans, the Concept Plan's network of interconnected nodes provided many additional crosstown connections between the various Centers, reflecting a more regional approach.

outlines of the Concept Plan, though by no means have all the Centers developed as envisioned.<sup>18</sup>

Many of the rapid transit proposals that emerged over the years since the Concept Plan was put forward have reflected its basic assumptions: first, that most growth would be concentrated, if not solely within the CBD, at least in the Regional Core, and second, that many outlying areas would also experience substantial growth and would benefit from being linked by transit. While not tied directly to this planning effort, the RTD's next attempt to develop rail transit clearly advanced the first goal, while others were actively working to achieve the second.

In 1969, the Committee for Central City Planning (representing Downtown corporate interests) commissioned a study, *Central City Los Angeles 1972/1990*, released at the beginning of 1972, that (like the *Centropolis '80* report from the 1960s) proposed a regional rail transit system and a people mover downtown to accommodate high levels of projected growth in commuting (Hamer 1976; Office of Technology Assessment 1976),

At the regional level, in February 1971 the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), a regional advisory planning body on land use, open space, housing and other non-transportation issues for six Southern California counties and, at that time, over 80 cities (Angel 1965),<sup>19</sup> merged with the Transportation Association of Southern California (TASC), a regional transportation planning body established in 1962 to fulfill the Federal Highway Act's requirement for a "comprehensive planning process" in order to receive regional transportation grants (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). This made SCAG responsible for regional transportation planning and programming of a significant share of federal transportation funds. As the federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Southern California, SCAG prepared the federally-required Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). The RTP provided criteria to evaluate transportation proposals, including the extent to which they supported existing Centers, relieved capacity deficiencies, and promoted balanced regional travel by encouraging intra-corridor trips and reducing travel between subregions.

In Sacramento, efforts to create new revenue sources for urban transit projects also bore fruit. Following court-mandated reapportionment of the state's legislative districts in 1965, the balance of power in the Legislature gradually shifted towards progressives from urban areas (the so-called "young Turks"), who were opposed to the highway-oriented policies of

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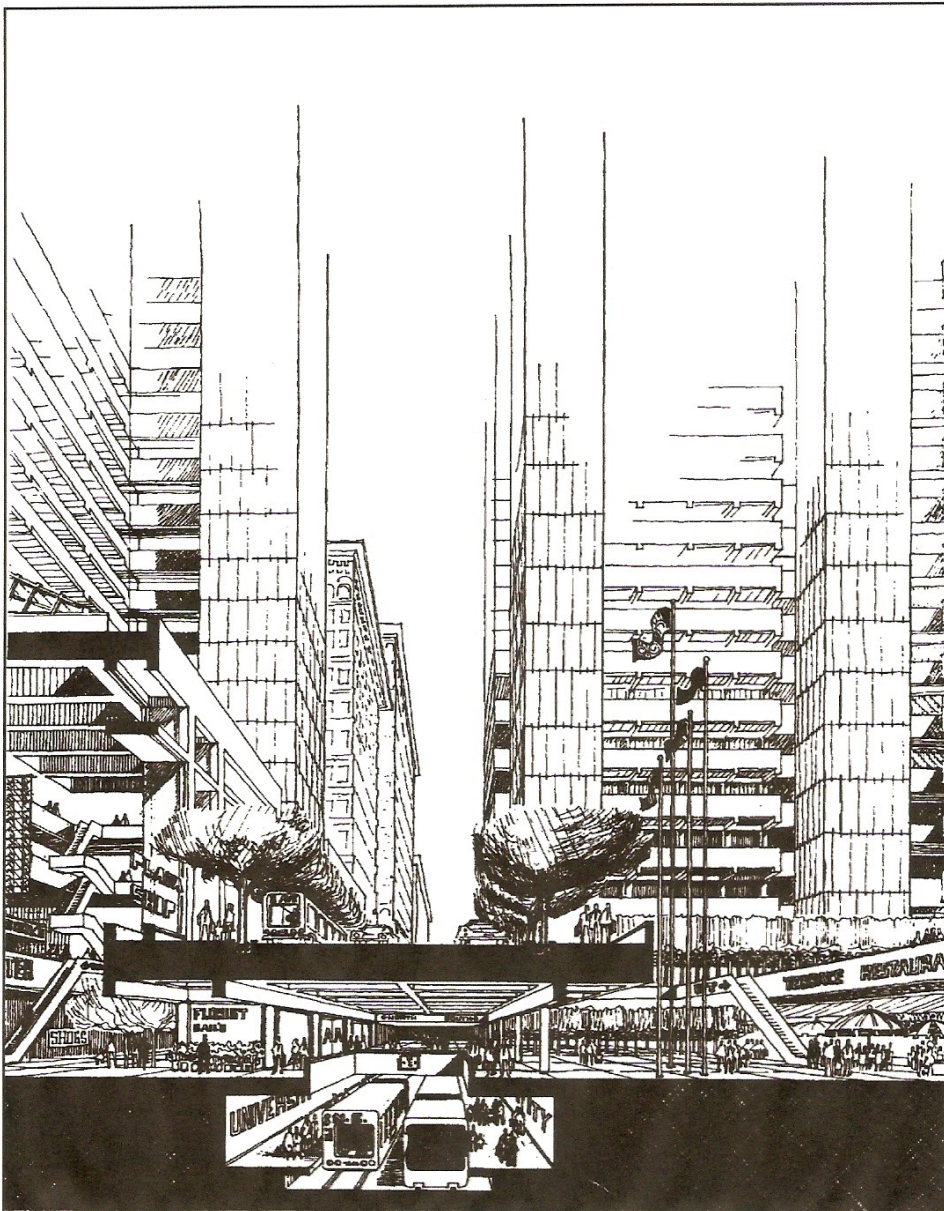
<sup>18</sup>One legacy of the Concept Los Angeles Plan remains in the city's 35 community planning areas, each with its own designated center. The city's 35 adopted community plans, one for each area, collectively constitute the Los Angeles General Plan.

<sup>19</sup> SCAG now has 191 member cities.

Randolph Collier's Senate Transportation Committee and amenable to additional transit funding (Fairbanks 1970a). In 1970, state Assembly members John Foran and Milton Marks and state Senator James Mills each proposed statewide ballot measures to amend the state constitution to allow counties and cities to use a certain proportion of their apportionment of state gas tax funds (20% in the case of Marks' bill and 25% for Mills' bill) for public transit and air quality (then called "smog") research. All three measures would have required approval by a 2/3 majority of the state legislature and ratification by a majority of voters in the state. The latter two measures would go into effect in counties where a majority of voters approved the expanded gas tax usage in local elections (Gillam 1970a, 1970b). Foran's bill died in Collier's committee (Gillam 1970c) and Mills' bill was initially defeated in the Assembly (Gillam 1970d) but was later revived and passed (Endicott 1970).

Elections in November 1970, however, produced a Democratic legislative majority. Subsequent deal-making between urban liberal Democratic legislators and members of the more rural Democratic "old guard" led to the appointment of Senator Mills to the powerful Rules Committee in January 1971 (Fairbanks 1970b; Fairbanks and Gillam 1971). Six months later, Mills shepherded into law Senate Bill 325, the Transportation Development Act (TDA) (Stats. 1971, c. 1400, p. 2753), which funded transportation by extending the state sales tax to gasoline and increasing local sales taxes. Specifically, the TDA lowered the state sales tax from 4 to 3.75 percent, extended the state sales tax to gasoline purchases and authorized counties to increase their sales tax by .25%. The revenue derived from a portion of the state sales tax extension and local sales tax increases would be allocated for transportation purposes, with revenues from the former funneled into a State Transportation Fund (controlled by the Legislature) and those from the latter distributed to public transportation agencies (at both the county municipal levels) within the county where the monies were collected (Murphy [1972]). In counties with more than 200,000 persons the local sales tax component could exclusively fund public transportation (*Los Angeles Times* 1971). In deference to more rural counties with sparse transit service, the TDA also stipulated that counties with under 200,000 population could spend TDA funds on streets and roads if County officials could demonstrate that they had met all public transit needs that "were reasonable to meet" (Taylor 1991).

**Figure 11. Typical Rail Station Envisioned in the Centers Plan**



*Source: Los Angeles Department of City Planning. Concept Los Angeles: The Concept for the Los Angeles General Plan, 1970.*

Finally, at the federal level, Congressional passage of the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1970 (84 Stat. 3154) authorized the Urban Mass

Transportation Administration (UMTA) to disburse matching grants to state and local transportation agencies to finance expenses related to the acquisition, construction, reconstruction or improvement of equipment and facilities for transit projects. The act allocated \$3.1 billion in grants through 1975, creating a substantial new source of funding for regional transit investment. In the same year, responding to growing public concern with the environment, Congress passed the Clean Air Act Amendments (84 Stat. 1676), which authorized the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), recently established by President Nixon, to enact and enforce National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for each state in order to regulate emission of hazardous air pollutants (Environmental Protection Agency 2017).

The funding guarantees of the TDA (Senate Bill 325) led the Rapid Transit District to revive its fixed guideway system plans (albeit with a reduced scale). In December 1971, the District released plans for a line in South Central Los Angeles, from Downtown to the planned Century Freeway, to be entirely funded by the revenue from the new sales tax revenues allocated to LA County and the City of Los Angeles (SCAG 1975b). The plan immediately encountered criticism from Los Angeles city politicians and officials concerned with the location of the route—whose support was necessary to secure city funding for the line. City Planning Director Calvin Hamilton, in particular, argued strongly that the South Central corridor merited less consideration for an initial transit line than the Wilshire Corridor (Hebert 1971b).

Within the next two months, a study by the City of Los Angeles's Technical Advisory Committee on Rapid Transit (headed by Planning Director Hamilton) concluded that the transit system should start with the Wilshire subway project (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). In March 1972, the City Council passed a measure that proposed a new study that would examine fixed guideway lines in the South Central, Wilshire, and San Fernando Valley corridors, with the last corridor added to secure votes from councilmembers in that part of the city (SCRTD 1974b). Around the same time, the District was negotiating with UMTA for funding. Following a meeting in April with the UMTA's Intermodal Planning Group, the members of which insisted that the RTD coordinate its plan with SCAG's regional planning efforts, the RTD

expanded its study to incorporate most major transportation corridors in the county (Office of Technology Assessment 1976).

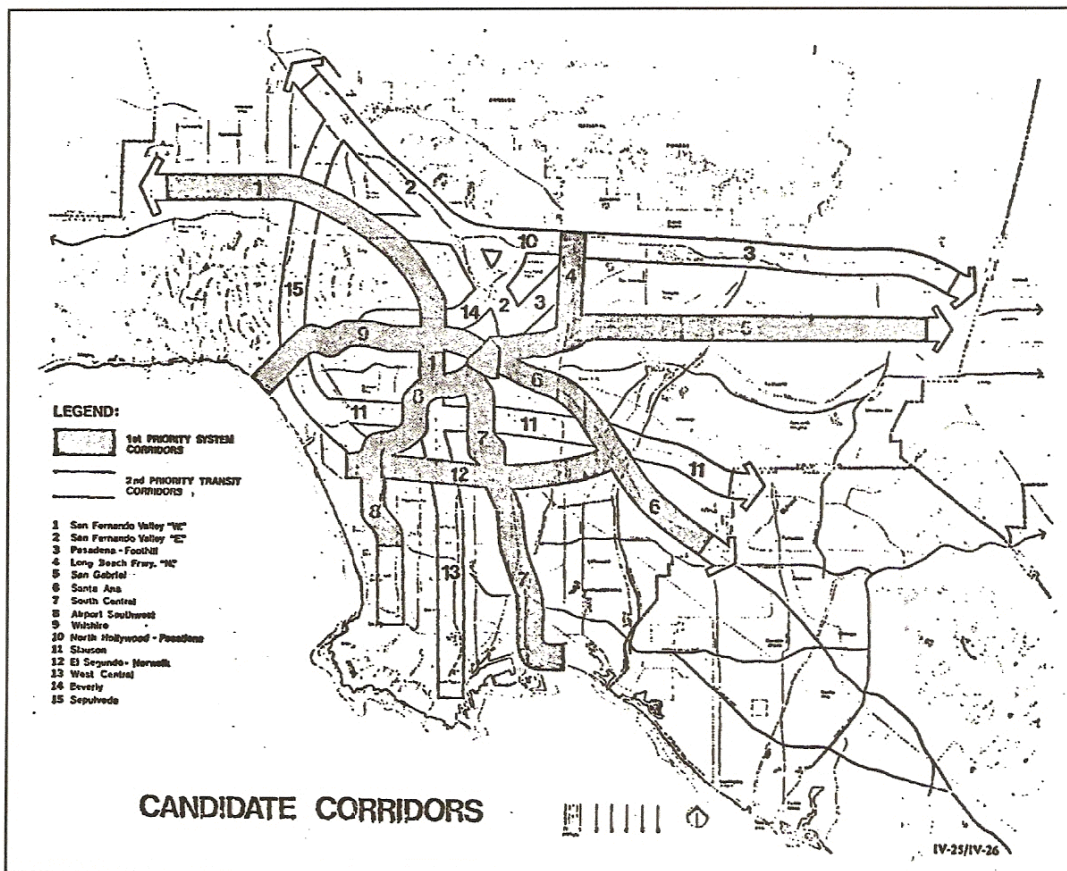
With an \$800,000 grant from UMTA in October 1972, the District hired a diverse team of six planning and engineering consultants to prepare the regional study under the guidance of a Technical Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from the city, county, SCAG, Caltrans, and the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) (SCRTD 1974b). Three of the six firms (DMJM, Voorhees and McHarg) had worked on the *Central City Los Angeles 1972/1990* plan for the Committee for Central City Planning (Hamer 1976).

The study evaluated 15 potential corridors for a possible mass rapid transit system, with the intention to present a proposal to the voters in 1974. The “1<sup>st</sup> Priority” system (shown as shaded lines in Figure 12) consisted of the San Fernando Valley West Corridor, the Wilshire Corridor, the Southwest-Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) Corridor, the South Central-Long Beach Corridor, the Santa Ana Corridor, the San Gabriel Valley Corridor, and the El Segundo-Norwalk and North Long Beach Corridor busways.<sup>20</sup> This system was a predominately radial configuration, similar to earlier transit proposals. The “2<sup>nd</sup> Priority” system (unshaded lines) contained additional cross-town connections, such as along Sepulveda and Slauson Boulevards.

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<sup>20</sup> The last two corridors were included to take advantage of planned freeway construction but were designed as busways because of the low ridership estimates.

**Figure 12. Candidate Corridors**



Source: Southern California Rapid Transit District, *Mass Rapid Transit Study*, 1973.

Challenging the popular notion of Los Angeles as a place of “unfocused sprawl,” and clearly reflecting the City Planning Department’s new Centers Concept, the report concluded that despite the dispersion of travel destinations in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, in the main development and travel was directed to the Regional Core, including the CBD and the Wilshire Corridor from downtown westward through Beverly Hills. The highly concentrated nature of these activity centers, with no nearby freeways, it argued, prevented the population in these areas from being adequately



served by buses. Thus, a rail system would provide local benefits by reducing congestion.

Despite calls from local politicians for a focus on rail development, in February of 1973 the RTD had proposed a \$5 million program for new and expanded bus lines. The program would add 1,700 miles of service and also reduce the existing 230 different fare zones by two-thirds. Passage of the Transportation Development Act, and the revenues it generated, allowed the RTD to avert fare increases and service cuts, but the added revenues were nowhere near sufficient to build a rapid transit system (SCRTD 1973). In contrast to TDA funds, which could support operations and maintenance, federal transit subsidies strongly favored transit capital expenditures, ranging from bus purchases to new rail transit projects. But competition for federal funds for rail transit were fierce among cities (Gray and Hoel 1992) and success was by no means assured.

The consultants' report, completed in July 1973, recommended a 250-mile regional Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system, with an initial 116 miles in six designated corridors to be completed in the first phase of implementation, supplemented by 1100 feeder buses, and 24 miles of exclusive busways within the I-105 and I-710 freeways (SCRTD Board of Directors 1973a). This was known as the Phase II system. The starter system was estimated to cost \$3.4 billion (\$18.9 billion in 2017 dollars) and carry over one million rail passengers and an additional 800,000 bus riders by 1990. The full system could eventually be expanded to provide regional service to Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino, and Riverside counties. The RTD engineers promised that 50 to 70 percent of the population would be five to ten minutes away from the system trunk-lines, waiting times would be five minutes or less during peak periods, and travel speeds as high as 80 mph could be achieved in a safe and comfortable manner. Also, the system would provide connections to or nearby activity centers for jobs, education, recreation, medical care, and cultural interests and would provide broadened opportunities for young and old (Kaiser Engineers 1973).<sup>21</sup>

Although differing slightly in proposed alignments, the program's regional scale was not dissimilar from the system proposed six years earlier. However, unlike the 1968 plan, the consultants recommended an additional program of immediate bus improvements, including bus lanes and signal synchronization. The inclusion of these alternatives stemmed from UMTA's demand that the study consider cost-effective alternatives to rapid transit in order to receive grants for preliminary engineering. The full system had a cost estimate of \$6.6 billion (\$37 billion in 2017 dollars) including interest payments on bonds. The consultants projected that the federal government would provide two-thirds of the funding for the system (through grants made under the Urban Mass Transportation Act) and they suggested a 3/4 per cent

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<sup>21</sup> According to Hamer (1976), patronage was inflated by station access figures that exaggerated the ease of automobile travel to stations.

sales tax to supply the local funding component. The consultants justified use of the sales tax (rather than gasoline taxes or a property tax) on the grounds that it would cover the bulk of the local funding requirement, noting that it recently had been adopted as a funding source for contemporary transit projects in Atlanta, Denver and San Francisco (BART) (SCR TD Board of Directors 1973a).

The Phase II plan drew criticism from both the local and federal levels. Although formally endorsing the proposal, Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley questioned the program's lack of community-focused transit services (like paratransit, jitneys and shuttles), that could be implemented in the short-term to help address the EPA's air quality standards (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). Mayor Bradley's remarks were echoed in later public hearings, at which citizens expressed a desire for the incorporation of local circulation systems (SCR TD Board of Directors 1973c). By contrast, the county demanded that the study be expanded to include additional guideway corridors (SCAG 1975b). As in 1968, representatives of suburban cities—including Glendale, Burbank, and Norwalk—criticized the proposed rail alignments for excluding their jurisdictions (*Los Angeles Times* 1973a; Smith 1973). One RTD official lamented its inability to communicate a larger vision in the face of parochial interests, noting "[c]ommunity autonomy throughout the area rather than region cohesion prevails (Hamer 1976, 202)." This widespread attitude, the official claimed, was because municipal

leaders “didn’t want to pay for something we don’t see direct/immediate benefits from.” Considerable opposition also existed to the use of conventional rail technology as opposed to more futuristic systems.

Finally, UMTA sought to table the plan for not seriously considering the all-bus alternative (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). In August, UMTA proposed that the work plan for the next phase of the project include full evaluation of alternative modes in each corridor and that the RTD coordinate its work with SCAG.<sup>22</sup> Two months later, the RTD and SCAG jointly submitted a revised contract for the third phase of the plan that adhered to the UMTA’s request for more multi-modal analysis (Hamer 1976).

During the completion of the Phase III plan, stricter air quality controls and rising gasoline prices heightened the perceived urgency of improving public transit. In October 1973, the EPA released its Transportation Control Plan for Los Angeles, which required a 93 percent reduction in the Los Angeles Basin’s hydrocarbon emissions in order to bring the region into conformity with Clean Air Act standards (Hebert 1973). To achieve this target, the plan proposed (among other policies) priority treatment for buses and carpools and the establishment of a voluntary bus carpool matching system. In the same month, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an embargo on gasoline exports to the United States (in retaliation

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<sup>22</sup> SCAG agreed at an April 1973 meeting with UMTA and the RTD to prepare (by the end of November) a report summarizing the “critical” transportation issues facing the region, so as to allow assessment of RTD plan’s conformity with regional planning goals. SCAG’s more refined long-range regional transportation plan was not scheduled for completion until 1975. (Office of Technology Assessment 1976).

for the United States' support for Israel in the Yom Kippur war), drastically reducing the nation's supply of gasoline (Lallanilla 2014). The ensuing spike in gas prices prompted President Nixon to introduce price controls on oil and gas in November; these controls fostered fuel shortages that lasted until OPEC lifted its embargo in March (Jacobs 2016).

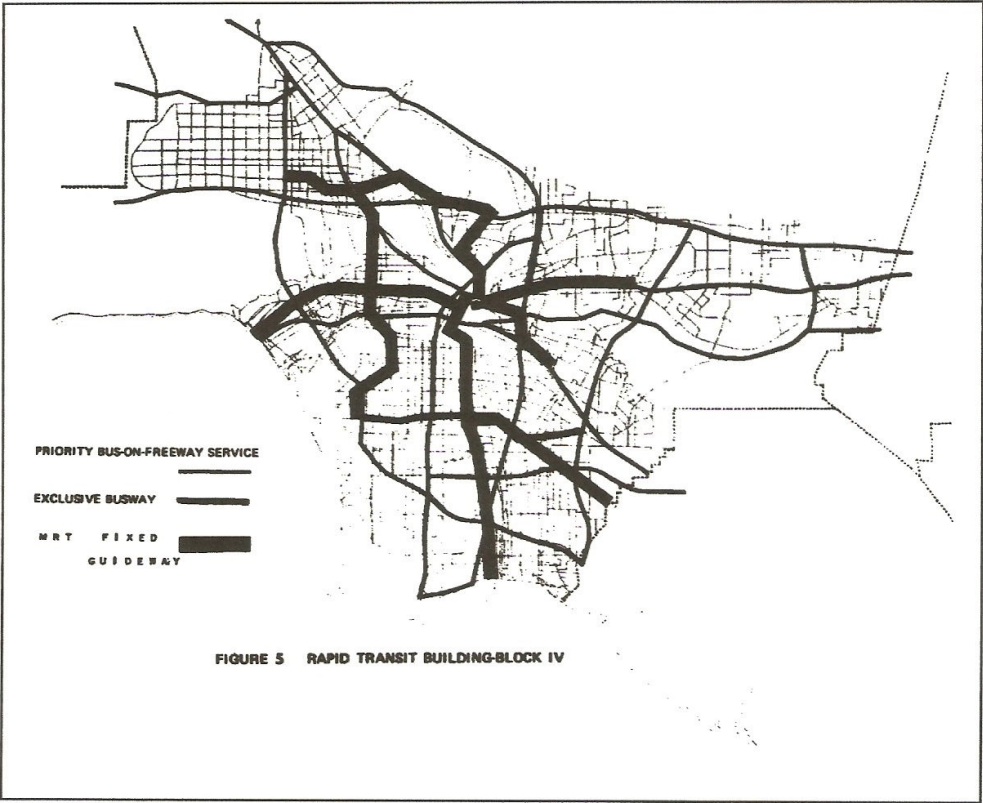
The RTD planners pursued two tracks to upgrade public transit: (1) bus system improvements and (2) rail transit construction. In December 1973, the agency proposed a three-year Near-Term Program to improve local bus service until the Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) system could be built. The program would expand local bus service by adding 100 new buses by 1977, improve freeway and highway capacity, construct new park-and-ride facilities, and introduce bus priority measures on some freeways and arterial streets. The RTD planned to expand the bus fleet by 1000 buses, while grid systems would be developed in the Eastern San Gabriel Valley, South Central, San Fernando Valley and South East areas, covering over half the population in the district. Priority service would be established along the Wilshire Corridor and additional demand-response bus service would be provided to a number of communities. A total of 27 park-and-ride lots would also be established (SCR TD 1974a). The total estimated cost of the improved bus service proposal was \$200 million (\$1.067 billion in 2017 dollars).

Beyond these near-term projects, the intermediate-term plans called for expanding the bus fleet to 1400 buses, developing transitways on freeways, and completing major links in the freeway system. The RTD developed a continuing bus system expansion program to add 100 new buses plus 150 replacement buses each year for nine years. In addition to bus expansion,

the RTD developed a program of major surface and freeway bus improvements on major arterials and freeways designed to create a regional bus network. Together with the near-term program, the project would nearly double the fleet size by the year 1981. The estimated cost of the Intermediate Program was \$300 million (\$1.6 billion in 2017 dollars).

The Phase III consultants' report, released in March 1974, demonstrated a more cautious approach to transit planning, in line with the expectations of UMTA. For the rail system, the report laid out four alternative cumulative build-out levels designated "building blocks," ranging from 33-miles to 116-miles in length and costing from \$2.5 billion to \$6.9 billion (\$12.9 billion\_ to \$35.6 billion in 2017 dollars) (Building Block Matrix 1974). Each was tailored to reflect different levels of available federal funding and inflation (SCRTD Board of Directors 1974a). The most expansive, Building Block IV, shown in Figure 13, included a line to Glendale/Burbank and a realignment of the Santa Ana line that municipal leaders had demanded. Although the consultants continued to argue that a 250-mile regional rapid transit system was necessary in the long-run, they acknowledged that funding priorities would require prioritization of corridors.

**Figure 13. Building Block IV**



*Source: Los Angeles County Road Department (1974).*

The new program also expanded on the initial bus component, promising to add 1,000 new buses in the first three years, preferential bus lanes on freeways and arterials (as the EPA had proposed), and improve bus headways and service on local routes (SCRTD Board of Directors 1974a, Ex. 3). The plan proposed to immediately purchase an additional 300 buses to improve service and that a portion of funding requested from the County would be used to subsidize a 25-cent flat bus fare.<sup>23</sup> The fare subsidy proposal built on the Board of Supervisors' commitment, earlier in the month, to subsidize 25-cent flat fares on bus routes run by the RTD and seven municipal operators from April through June 1974 (Hebert 1974a),<sup>24</sup> which in turn followed on a successful reduced Sunday fare program the RTD had implemented in January (*Los Angeles Times* 1974a). Finally, the plan proposed three commuter rail lines, along the future Ventura County and Orange Metrolink Corridors and Foothill Gold Line corridor, corresponding to proposals put forth by County Supervisor Baxter Ward (*Los Angeles Times* 1973b) and evaluated in a SCAG study conducted in January (Lubas 1974).

The new plan proposed using sales taxes as a primary local funding source. The previous October, Assembly Bill (AB) 1727) authored by California Assembly member Joe Gonsalves granted the RTD authority to impose a 1-cent sales tax increase by majority vote ½ cent allocated for capital costs

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23Under the proposal the 30-cent fare would begin on July 1, 1974 and a 25-cent fare would be introduced on January 1, 1975 when an additional 275 buses on order would become available.

24 As part of the arrangement, the RTD agreed to eliminate over 300 fare zones and institute a \$0.25 base fare for a three-month trial period from April 1 to June 30, 1974. The County agreed to provide a \$9 million subsidy to fund the program. The fare reduction resulted in an increase of over 100,000 bus riders per day, while the percentage of "non-captive" riders choosing to ride buses increased from 43 percent to 63 percent. County of Los Angeles, Final Report: An Evaluation of Three-Month Trial 25¢ Flat Fare in Los Angeles county, July 26, 1974. The Road Commissioner concluded that the increase was only 86,000 (or an 18% increase) at a subsidy of 68 cents per rider, which he considered "disappointing" since it amounted to less the 1/2 percent of the 21 million daily passenger trips in the County.

and a ½ cent allocated evenly between operations and maintenance costs and bus fare reduction (SCR TD 1973b; Murphy [1973]).

The Phase III report received approval from UMTA but upset suburban municipalities, which worried that the District would adopt one of the more modest building blocks (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). For instance, in late April, the Torrance City Council issued a resolution opposing the RTD program for excluding a line to the South Bay from the most expansive “building block” proposal (Rempel 1974). At the April 30 Board Meeting, RTD head Thomas G. Neusom worryingly noted that voters would only support a ballot measure that brought transit to their area “immediately” (SCR TD 1974b). In May 1974, Voorhees and Company (still part of the RTD’s consulting team) issued a report for the RTD that cost justified a 60-mile guideway system but downplayed the immediate need to construct a longer guideway system (Office of Technology Assessment, 1976).<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, the consulting team’s comparative analysis over the previous two months of a countywide freeway express bus network and 60- and 140-mile rail systems found that the bus network performed comparably on metrics of patronage, emissions and operating costs. Apparently, Voorhees’ recommendations produced chagrin from other consultants, who forced data into the report showing that buses pollute more (Hamer 1976).<sup>26</sup>

The limited 60-mile system was called into question by members of the consulting team from Kaiser Engineers, who proposed an even more expansive 145-mile guideway system. The RTD Board favored the longer system and arranged for the consultants to explain their plan at a public presentation before the UMTA that month (Office of Technology Assessment 1976).

The consulting team’s revised Phase III report, released in June 1974, reflected Kaiser Engineers’ proposals (though it did not specify an exact mode). In place of the March report’s “building blocks,” the new report proposed a 140-mile MRT system, as shown in Figure 14, with an estimated capital cost of \$8.3 billion (\$41.7 billion in 2017 dollars). The system map

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25 Revised RTD patronage estimates for the larger Phase III system were lower than for the proposed Phase II system. The district’s consultants were forced to admit that a high-capacity rail system was not necessarily needed and that more “intermediate” solutions might be adequate.

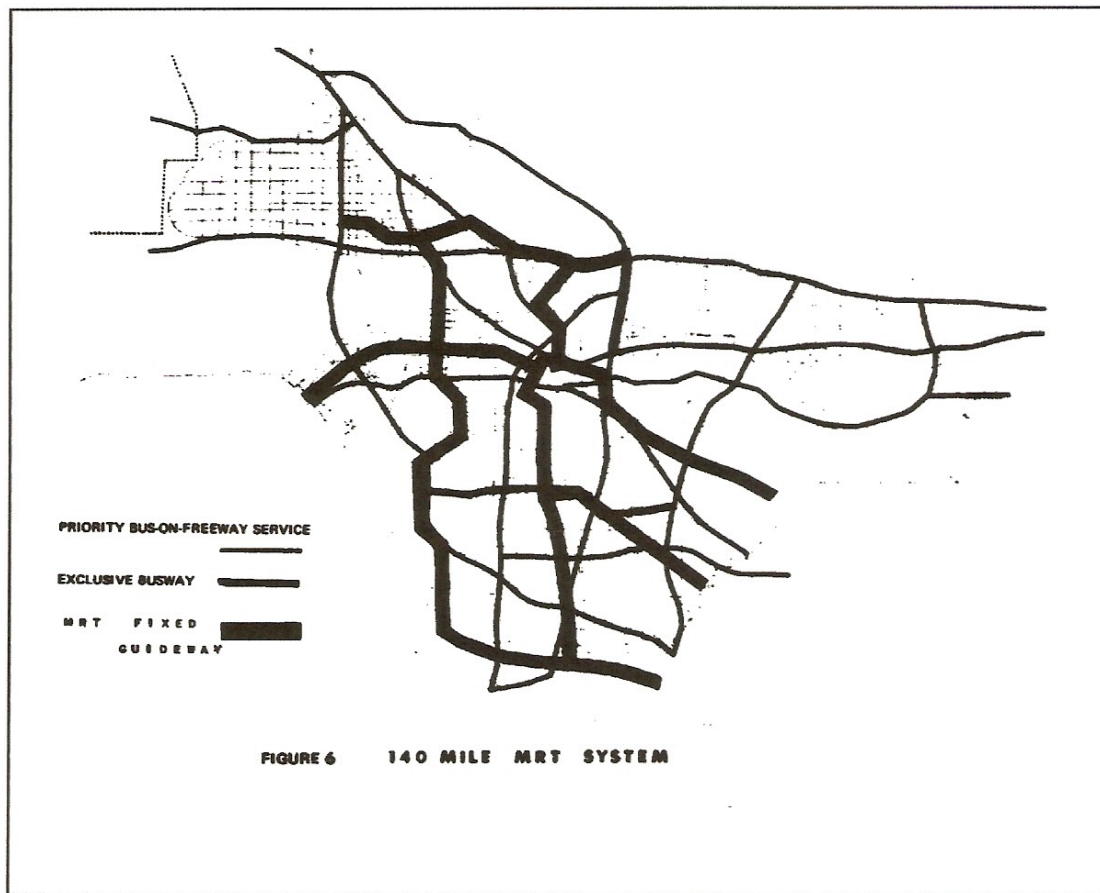
26 Hamer claims that Voorhees’ May report used unnecessarily high capital cost estimates (e.g. for ramp metering and station infrastructure) and lowered patronage figures with assumed speed constraints; these factors led the report to recommend the 60-mile rail system.



only indicated broad corridors where rail could be located, giving the impression that nearly everyone in the region would be close to a rail line.

The plan included a line through the South Bay, from LAX to Long Beach (as desired by Torrance). Despite the increased trackage, an RTD official claimed that the project could be completed in 15 years (Hebert 1974b). The plan included the RTD's proposed \$200 million in near-term bus improvements and \$300 million in intermediate-term bus improvements (Los Angeles County Road Department 1974). The near-term improvements included dial-a-ride and park-and-ride programs and a "grid network" that would provide regular service along corridors in four suburban areas, and would collectively add 1,000 buses to the RTD's fleet. The intermediate term improvements included bus-priority treatments on arterials and freeways and the implementation of bus-priority lanes on freeways, along with the addition of 400 new buses to the RTD fleet. The revised plan greatly expanded on the rail transit component, despite retaining the bus improvements proposed by the March report, albeit with a lower proportion of funding allocated to these improvements than to rail.

**Figure 14: Mass Rapid Transit System (1974)**



*Source: County of Los Angeles Road Department (1974).*

The revised program also conflicted with the agenda of Mayor Bradley, who had come to support a recommendation by the City of Los Angeles planning staff for a 70-mile guideway system and an expanded bus improvement program (introducing 1,800 buses over 11 years), which would deliver greater benefit to central Los Angeles (SCAG 1975b; Hebert 1974b). Bradley's Citizens' Advisory Committee on Transit (CACORT) viewed plan as a "breach of faith," since they had put a great deal of work into evaluating the building block proposal (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). In addition, the RTD plan ran into opposition from the County Road Commissioner, I. L. Morhar, who suggested the County first test the

feasibility of an all-bus alternative along the Wilshire and South Central corridors before embarking on a massive rail construction program. He urged the County to concentrate on supporting the near-term and intermediate-term transportation improvement proposals advanced by the RTD, which could be financed by existing state and federal funding sources without relying on the one-cent sales tax authorized by AB 1727, and defer any decision on rail until the all the bus system upgrades had been completed (Morhar 1974).

Commissioner Morhar suggested combining the near term and intermediate term program into a 3- to 5-year bus expansion program costing \$437 million over the first three years in capital improvements and \$616 million in maintenance and operation costs (Los Angeles County Road Department 1974). He recommended the Board of Supervisors adopt a scaled back version of the District's MRT proposal, relying on exclusive busways and priority bus-on-freeway service in place of fixed rail. His "Balanced Transportation Plan" consisted of three elements:

Near-term (1-3 years) program of immediate improvement in transit service and improvements to highway system including express bus services on freeways, park-and-ride facilities, priority treatment for buses on streets and freeways, intensive carpool matching services, and improvements in existing freeways and highways capacity

Intermediate-term (1-5 years) program of continuing expansion of transit service and highway improvements including expansion of the bus system, development of new busways on the freeways, and expanding the existing freeway and highway systems by completing missing links in planned systems

Long-range plan to identify and develop regional mass transit system when need is demonstrated and only where bus rapid transit could not meet service demands

(Los Angeles County Road Department 1974). Under this approach, the rail system would be constructed through the original building block approach as needed and when funding was available, but without a tax increase.

Finally, the plan also conflicted with the policies of SCAG's Regional Transportation Plan (which had been updated the previous April), that

focused on improving local community transit services and discouraged decisions on long-haul, heavy-rail rapid transit (Office of Technology Assessment 1976; Gregory 1974). SCAG's review of the RTD's June report noted that no significant improvements in air quality, energy conservation or transit use were shown and only went so far as to approve the corridors (rather than the use of rail technology (Hamer 1976). The plan was first discussed at an RTD Board session only a few days before its release and one (unidentified) city official accused the plan of being uninformed by technical analysis (Hebert 1974b).

Nevertheless, despite the opposition allied against it, the RTD Board formally adopted the plan in August 1974 (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). The adopted plan provided a 12 to 15-year timeline for completing the guideway system and estimated costs between \$8 and \$10 billion. The new *Plan for Balanced Transportation* approved by the County contained two key elements:

Immediate major expansion of the existing bus fleet, including additional lines and the expansion of existing lines to supplement and act as feeder service to the ultimate guideway network.

Construction program for a county-wide mass rapid transit system on fixed guideways (SCRTD 1975).

The Board of Supervisors agreed to continue the experimental 25¢ flat fare program beyond the three-month trial period (*Los Angeles Times* 1974b; Zeman 1974). The RTD agreed to develop a number of east-west crosstown lines and to establish two bus grid systems in the South Central Area<sup>27</sup> and the San Fernando Valley in exchange for which the County would subsidize losses from the reduced fare program and the bus expansion program from its federal revenue sharing funds (SCRTD 1974c). In total, the County allocated \$32.5 million to cover the RTD's operating deficit of \$6.8 million for FY 1974-75, fund the 25¢ fare, and inaugurate the bus improvement program.

At the beginning of September, by a 9-0 vote the board approved an ordinance authorizing a ballot measure imposing a 1-cent sales tax using the authority granted by AB 1727 (Los Angeles County Ordinance No. 0-74-3).

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<sup>27</sup>The boundaries of the South Central grid project were Olympic Boulevard, Crenshaw, Rosecrans Avenue and Alameda Street.

One half cent of the tax would support capital financing (through either pay-as-you-go or bond funding) for capital facilities (presumably the guideway system and freeway bus lanes), as well as for maintenance and operation of the guideway system. The other half-cent would subsidize 25-cent bus fares (through the 1980-81 fiscal year), the elimination of transfer and zone charges (also through 1980-1981), service improvements (presumably adding buses) and general operations and maintenance expenses. The measure did not contain a specific sunset provision (the tax was to continue until bonds and expenses were paid off) or an implementation timetable (Office of Technology Assessment 1976).

Despite the suburban appeal, the 1974 Proposition received support from a similar coalition to the 1968 measure, comprising central city business interests, organized labor and (ultimately) the mayor of Los Angeles. Mayor Bradley chaired the official campaign organization, Citizens for Better Transportation, and ARCO Petroleum Company President Thornton Bradshaw chaired the group's executive committee (Richmond 2005). The *Los Angeles Times* reversed its position from 1968, endorsing the measure as a remedy for the region's smog and gasoline reliance and praising the measure for funding near-term bus improvements, which could provide the readiest solution to the crisis (*Los Angeles Times* 1974c). Suburban cities however, displayed more division on the measure. Understating the significance of geography for its support, the Pasadena City Council and Chamber of Commerce, which had both supported the 1968 measure, came to oppose the new measure after expressing disappointment about being excluded from the initial set of corridors (Snyder 1973; Mann 1973). Mayors of cities in the eastern San Gabriel Valley, including Pomona, La Puente and San Dimas, who formed a coalition that spearheaded the campaign opposing Proposition A, attacked the measure's lack of service to the area and its expense (the Mayor of Pomona deemed the measure "inflationary") (Hebert 1974e). The potential negative effects of the sales tax on San Gabriel Valley merchants' competitive advantage with those in San Bernardino County also helps explain opposition in the region. On the Westside, not only Santa Monica but Beverly Hills opposed the measure (Richmond 2005).

As in 1968, literature and articles supporting and opposing the measure focused on the costs and benefits of the rapid transit guideway component despite the plan's multi-modal provisions. Campaign literature supporting the measure continued to emphasize its impact on reducing congestion, which had become a particularly pertinent concern in the wake of the EPA's smog reduction mandate (e.g. Citizens for Better Transportation 1974b).

Editorials (Bradshaw 1974) and campaign advertisements (United Taxpayers Inc. 1974) highlighted how transit could reduce gasoline consumption, speaking to voters' memories of the recent gas shortages. Finally, other materials alluded to transit as a salve for the mounting costs drivers faced in an era of inflation (Citizens for Better Transportation 1974a). Unlike in the previous campaign, arguments and campaign materials supporting the measure largely ignored the system's technological aspects, with some of the literature stating outright that "mode selection was not made (Hamer 1976)." An RTD official quoted in a 1976 report by the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment claimed that the RTD's vagueness on the measure's concrete details was meant to retain support from disparate constituencies (Office of Technology Assessment 1976). Hamer (1976) explains the lack of technological and route specificity as a reaction to the public input (following Phase II) favoring futuristic systems and opposing a measure that would not deliver immediate benefits to voters' municipalities.

The RTD tried to present the proposed system as one that would benefit the poor, minorities, the elderly, and the young. To demonstrate that the project would increase access to job opportunities, as well as other activities, the agency superimposed the routes on a map showing the location of transit-dependent populations to illustrate that the new system would serve areas most in need. Such efforts were made in spite of their own consultant's conclusion that the proposed lines would not necessarily take poor residents where they most needed or wanted to go.

Campaign literature and editorials opposing the new Proposition A tended to criticize the rapid transit system's cost to the taxpayers (United Taxpayers Inc. 1974) and to question its purported benefits in terms of reduced congestion and smog (Hebert 1974e). Despite the more expansive scale of the network proposed by the 1974 measure, politicians in the eastern San Gabriel Valley like Pomona Mayor Ray LaPire claimed that the measure benefitted downtown Los Angeles at the expense of outlying areas (Hebert 1974e), an accusation that carried over into campaign advertisements (United Taxpayers Inc. 1974). Academic critics, like UCLA Economics Professor George Hilton (1974) and Urban Planning Professor Peter Marcuse (1974) continued to question a rail system's compatibility with Los Angeles' urban form, with Marcuse also voicing concerns about the tax measure's effect on the poor. Reflecting on the proposal shortly after the election, Marcuse argued that "the ridership benefits of the system would have gone, by and large, to the white, middle and upper class, to white collar employees and executives and professionals commuting to work downtown from

suburban residences” (Marcuse 1974, 18). He also noted that the sales tax was a regressive mechanism for financing the system that would more heavily impact the poor. Noting that most of the poor living in Watts and South Central did not, by and large, travel to the CBD for employment, Grigsby and Andrews (1974) concluded:

It is true that some employment opportunities will become available to South Central residents with the CBD as a result of MRT. But given that the majority of these individuals currently work within South Central Los Angeles and their skill levels do not match well with the skill needs of the CBD, positive employment impacts for them are likely to be minimal (quoted in Marcuse 1974, 17).

In response to criticism of the system’s geographic alignment, articles (and campaign literature) in support of Proposition A warned that mounting construction costs resulting from inflation likely made the measure the last opportunity for Los Angeles to build rail transit; the last chance “in our lifetimes” Mayor Bradley declared (Hebert 1974d). Although this measure may not have met voters’ heterogeneous expectations for route alignment or tax burden, such statements implied they should still support it if they wanted rapid transit at all.

There were other concerns raised about the proposal at the time. Officials with SCAG recommended focusing on improving shorter distance trips with an intermediate capacity system, rather than encouraging sprawl by facilitating long distance commuter trips on high-speed, high-capacity rail lines (SCAG 1974). Even the Los Angeles City Planning Commission had its doubts about how the rail system would affect land uses within the city, although Mayor Bradley was officially in support of the project. The Mayor had campaigned on improving local transit, and saw the sales tax as the first step toward building a better system -- though he personally favored more community-oriented bus programs. Bradley convinced SCAG officials to endorse the tax proposal, though not the system itself, with the proviso that SCAG would not approve any projects for federal funding until various conditions were met. He also had state legislation enacted that in effect gave him a veto power over RTD construction within the City of Los Angeles. The Mayor would eventually become a supporter of what would be the first leg of a Los Angeles-Hollywood-San Fernando Valley subway project along Wilshire Boulevard from downtown, but he and his successors would have to fight repeatedly to protect this wildly expensive underground subway project from

losing out to relatively cheaper and more spatially expansive rail projects serving areas outside the downtown and the city.

A series of four polls conducted between March and October 1974 by the Corey Research Firm indicated favorable prospects for the measure's passage (Dorothy D. Corey Research 1974a, 1974b, 1974c, 1974d). The transit sales tax measure received support from over 60 percent of those surveyed in the two polls (conducted in September and October) taken closest to the election. Polls in March and July, which differentiated between a sales tax measure (Prop A) funding rapid transit and one funding "maintenance and operations" showed the former measure receiving 64 percent support in March and 61 percent support in July. The rapid transit measure appeared to have substantially greater support than the maintenance and operations measure (Prop B), which received just 57 percent support in the March Poll and 46 percent support in the July poll. Over 73 percent of respondents to the March poll chose improving bus service and building a rapid transit system as their desired means of improving transportation in the county. In the July poll, when asked, a large majority expressed support for the final Phase III plan the RTD adopted. The March, September, and October polls showed support for the measure across five county sub-regions (Central, San Gabriel Valley, San Fernando Valley, South Bay and Whittier-Norwalk), although the first two polls showed higher support in the Central than in outlying sub-regions. The September and October polls showed support higher among blacks than whites (but lower among Mexican-Americans than among whites). The first three polls showed the highest levels of support for the measure among members of the lowest two income categories (under \$10,000 a year and \$10,000-15,000 a year). Although an October survey by the Corey research firm indicated that the proposition would win around 60 percent of the vote.

On election day, Proposition A lost by a 6-point margin (46.3% to 53.7%). Ultimately, 54 percent of LA city residents, and majorities of residents in the adjoining unincorporated areas in Central and South Los Angeles, voted in favor of the measure, but Proposition A fared more poorly among suburbanites (the constituency driving the opposition campaign) (Office of Technology Assessment 1976; Gilstrap 1974). Just as in 1968, RTD officials (and many editorials) blamed the loss on opposition to increased taxes during a period of monetary inflation and economic stagnation, rather than on opposition to public transit (Gilstrap 1974; Hebert 1974f; *Los Angeles Times* 1974d; SCAG 1975b). One RTD official surmised that the election's timing, only five months after voters approved Proposition 5 (a measure that permitted expenditure of gas taxes on planning, research, and construction of transit guideways)<sup>28</sup> may have made them wary of supporting another transportation funding measure so soon (Gilstrap 1974). Indeed, opinion

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28 Stats. 1973, reso. c. 145, S.C.A. 15, filed Sept. 13, 1973 (repealing and amending Art. XXVI). Approved by voters June 4, 1974.



polling prior to the election showed that costs were a concern for a plurality of opponents of the measure (Dorothy D. Corey Research 1974d). The election's low voter turnout (only 62% of registered voters) could have made for an overrepresentation of middle-class and suburban voters less likely to support a sales tax measure in the electorate (Gilstrap 1974); however, 89 percent of the electorate voted in 1968 and that year's measure had lost by an even larger margin.

A strike by bus drivers in October 1974 may have reduced support for the proposition among the transit-dependent, urban poor. The Corey Research firm conducted a series of pre-election surveys that revealed a decline in support for the measure between September and October both among low income respondents who lived in Central Los Angeles and those who used transit, groups that previously registered the highest levels of support for the measure. However, when the survey asked respondents about the transit strike's effect on their vote, the proportion of those who said it made them less likely to vote for the proposition was the same as the proportion who said it made them more likely to support it (Dorothy D. Corey Research 1974c, 1974d).

The Corey Firm's October poll showed that a plurality of residents having incomes above \$15,000, residents who never or occasionally used transit and white residents (as well as residents of the San Gabriel Valley and Whittier/Norwalk) blamed both sides for the strike, as opposed to the unions (who received the largest share of blame from frequent transit riders and low-income respondents) or management. The strike could have turned some non-riders against the measure by generating a poor overall image of the RTD (Taylor 2017) indicated by an inability to attribute greater responsibility to either side. Finally, Corey's October survey showed that the wordy and abstruse language of the ballot may have negatively influenced voters (bringing the margin of victory from around 15% for the hypothetical short-form version down to just over 1%) (Dorothy D. Corey Research 1974c, 1974d). Nevertheless, the RTD could claim some progress as the MRT system was incorporated into the federally-mandated Regional Transportation Plan as the 145-mile guideway portion of the full proposed 240-mile rapid transit system (see Figure 15).

In contrast to the aftermath of 1968 ballot box failure, RTD officials decided after being turned down by voters in 1974 to pursue a scaled-down rail guideway system, using the gasoline tax funding made available by Proposition 5 in order to secure federal UMTA grants, rather than revise and resubmit a third regional rail transit measure to voters (Hebert 1974f). The RTD also formally decided to construct the entire plan in stages using this alternate funding strategy (Hamer 1976).<sup>29</sup> The "Starter Line" proposal, as it

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<sup>29</sup>Using conventional rail technology, the cost of the system was estimated at \$4.7 billion in 1974 dollars. The difference between the 201-mile Phase III proposal and the 240-mile

would come to be known, consumed regional transit planning efforts over the next two years, and is discussed further below.

Unfortunately, the newest RTD plan was still mainly focused on improving travel in a few corridors, most connecting to downtown. County politicians were, however, starting to envision a far larger regional transit system, on the scale of its freeway system, that would tie together the area's far-flung communities. The RTD plans were soon at risk of being swallowed up in this grander regional scheme. At the time, though, there were still no committed funds to implement either plan.

Meanwhile, the perceived failure of the RTD to win approval to finance a rail rapid transit system encouraged a series of proposals in the state Legislature to reduce or redistribute the agency's power. Only a week after the defeat of Proposition A, Assemblyman Bill Greene introduced a bill to reduce the RTD board from 11 members to 5 and place the agency under the control of the County Board of Supervisors. Senator David Roberti proposed to re-delegate its authority to another agency. Greene cited the agency's poor management and inability to get a "major program going" as justification for the legislation while Roberti expressed his concern that the board "has already shown that it is unable to deal with the Los Angeles area's transportation needs" (Hebert 1974g). Although neither bill became law, Senators James Mills and Allan Robbins followed suit in February 1975 with proposals for either an elected or appointed Transit Development Board, with 9 representatives, to replace the RTD (Gillam 1975). Neither bill made its way into law either, though the former passed the Senate before meeting its demise (Gillam and Hebert 1975).

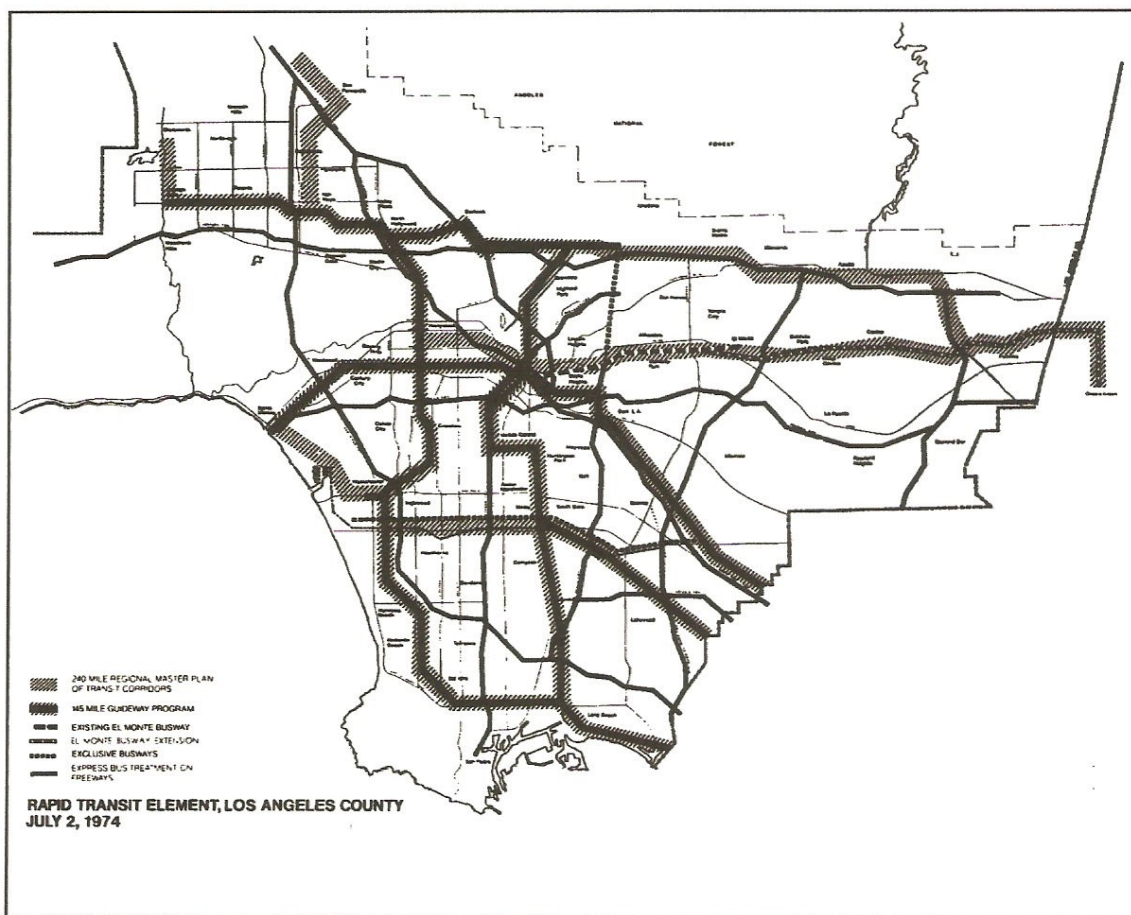
By July 1975, Assemblyman Walter Ingalls had introduced Assembly Bill (AB) 1246, which proposed the creation of an 11-person Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (composed of the entire County Board of Supervisors, the mayor of Los Angeles and five people appointed by the mayor of Los Angeles, Long Beach and other cities in the county) to take over the RTD's responsibilities for planning and funding transit (SCRTD Board of Directors 1975). The bill initially encountered opposition from both the RTD and SCAG, which each saw the proposed new commission as infringing on its responsibilities. However, at a March 3, 1976 special meeting RTD board members tabled a motion opposing the measure after individual members expressed an openness to amendments to the bill to suit the organization's interest (SCRTD Board of Directors 1976b). About one week later, Ingalls himself spoke before the board, and appeared to assuage

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proposal appears to result from double counting overlapping line route miles.

concerns by reiterating that the bill would preserve the RTD's control over transit operations and designate the RTD as the operator of the regional guideway (SCRTD Board of Directors 1976c). AB 1246 encountered a roadblock, however, in May of 1976, when the Senate Finance Committee voted against it (Gillam 1976b).

**Figure 15. Los Angeles County Regional Transportation Plan, Rapid Transit Element (1974)**



Source: *Los Angeles County Regional Transportation Plan, 1974.*

## 1976 PROPOSITIONS R AND T

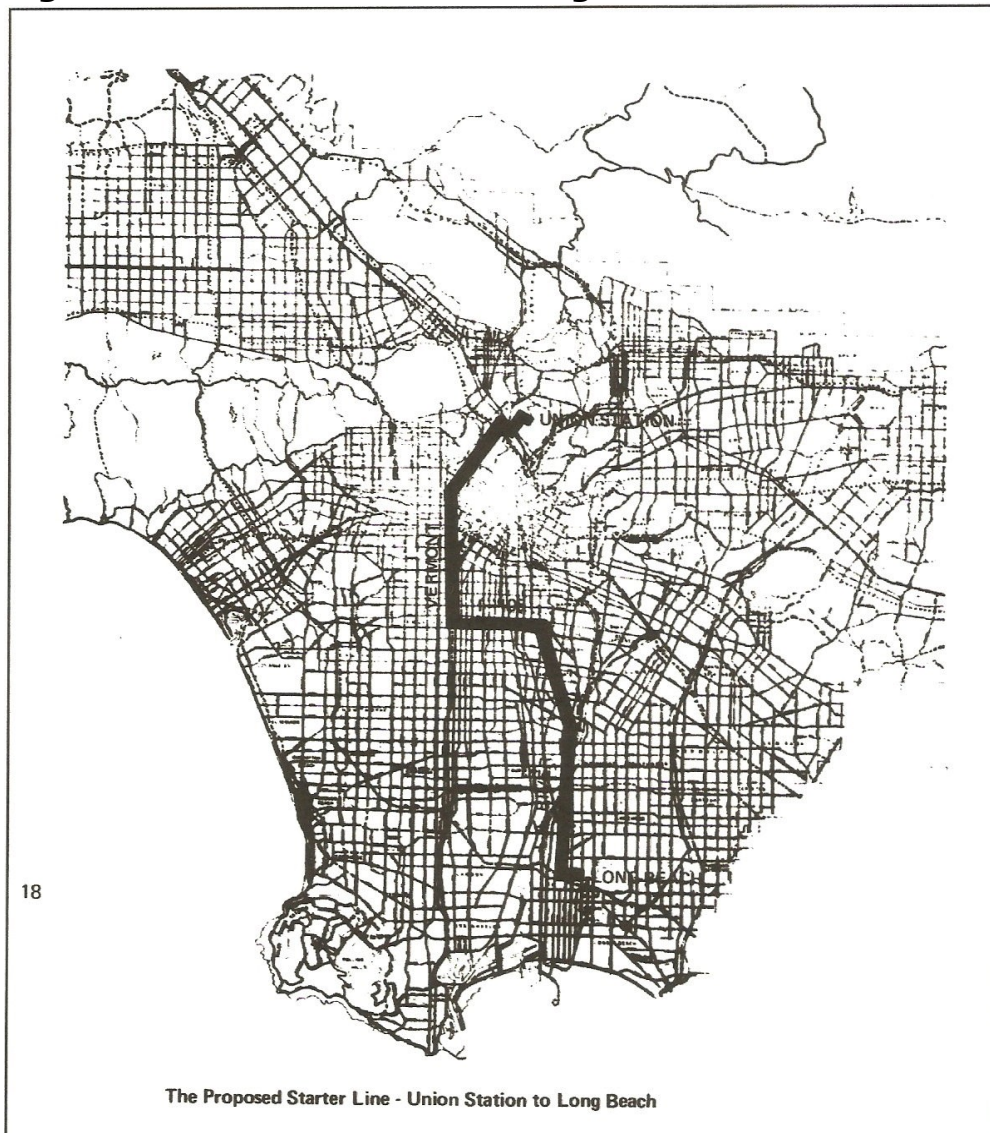
Developing a Starter Line did not prove to be easy. In March 1975, the RTD formed a Rapid Transit Advisory Committee (RTAC), tasked with deciding which corridor alignments should be considered (SCAG 1975a). Frustrated by slow progress on planning the rail line that had received initial federal

support, U.S. Secretary of Transportation William Coleman threatened during a May 1975 visit to Los Angeles to withhold federal transportation funding for the Starter Line unless the agency produced a plan within 90 days prompted action (SCAG 1975b).

By the beginning of September 1975, the RTAC had completed an alternatives analysis that narrowed the list of corridors from 11 segments down to two: one that ran from downtown Long Beach to downtown Los Angeles, turned west (as a subway) along Wilshire and then tunneled under the Santa Monica Mountains to North Hollywood (the San Fernando-Long Beach Corridor); and a second that (mirroring Bradley and Ward's proposal) ran from Long Beach to Burbank passing through Los Angeles along the LA River and then turned west to follow Chandler to Canoga Park (SCAG 1975a). Even with the field narrowed to two candidate routes, there was still contention over which alignment the RTD should choose. County Supervisor Baxter Ward (whose District included Burbank and the San Fernando Valley) and the Mayors of Burbank and Long Beach favored the first alignment, while Mayor Bradley, along with the Los Angeles City Planning Department, came to favor the latter (Richmond 2005).

Following two transit summits convened by the new state transportation secretary William Burns in October and November 1975 (that brought together Ward, Bradley and officials from Long Beach, Burbank and Los Angeles), the parties finally agreed to start construction on the segment from Downtown Long Beach to Los Angeles (see Figure 16), while postponing a decision on the northern alignment (Mansell 1975). Although a consensus had ostensibly been achieved, tension remained over whether to construct the Wilshire Subway (for the northern alignment) as well as over whether to implement the SCAG plan's bus service proposals (Richmond 2005). To "break the stalemate" over the final alignments, Ward proposed a new sales tax measure in November 1975, implementing a regional rail system that included both Ward's line (Burbank-Glendale) and the Wilshire line the city favored (Hebert 1975).

**Figure 16. Union Station to Long Beach Starter Line**



*Source: Los Angeles County, Board of Supervisors. The Sunset Coast Line: Route of the New Red Cars, 1976.*

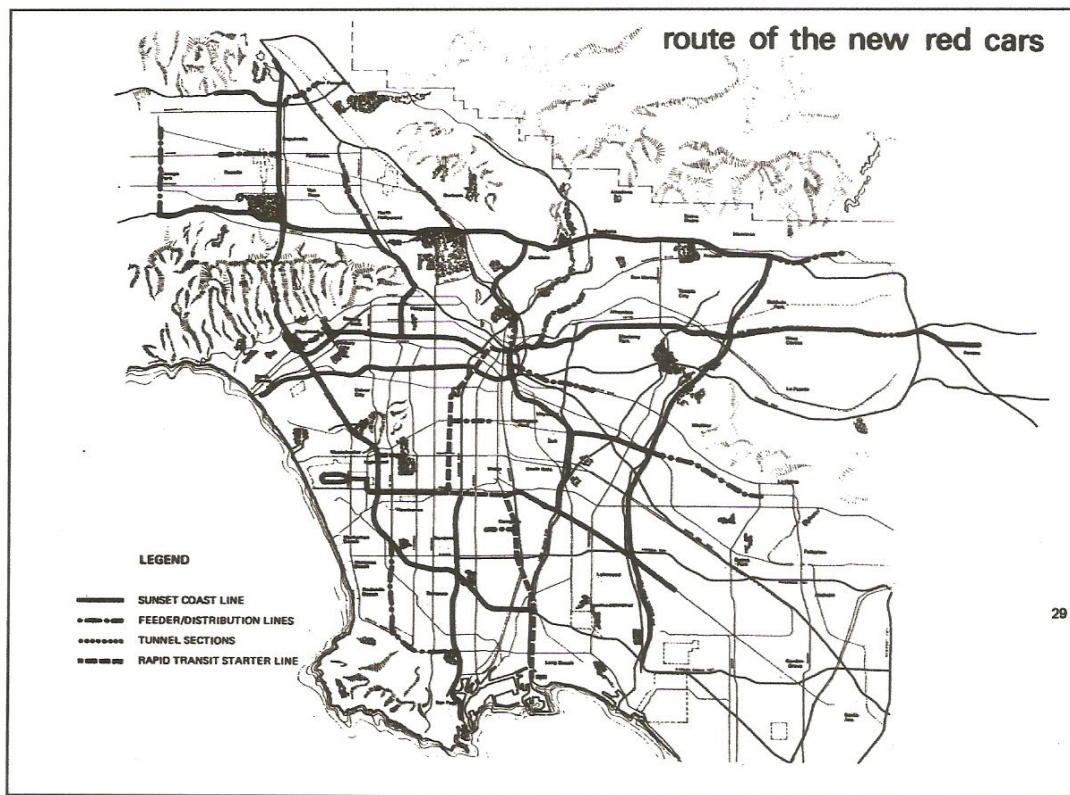
In January 1976, Ward released a booklet outlining the details of his proposed measure, which he creatively labeled the “Sunset Coast Line.” The proposed rail system, shown in Figure 15, far exceeded the scale of those put forward by previous plans, rivaling the subways in New York (228 miles) and London (249 miles) in length (Duddu 2013). It included 281 miles of rail lines—230 miles of heavy rail “main lines” (along 11 corridors) and 51 miles

of light rail and monorail “feeder” lines—that would mostly run along freeway medians and flood control channels. Ward’s plan estimated the cost of the system at \$7.5 billion (\$33.3 billion in 2017 dollars)—a figure that made no provision for connecting bus service and proposed funding exclusively through local bonds (supported by a new sales tax), since Ward deemed federal funding to be unreliable.

In the words of Paul Taylor (who worked as a planner for RTD at the time) the vast network, drafted by Ward and his staff, amounted to little more than “lines on a map” that did not proceed from serious technical analyses (Taylor 2017). However, plan’s inclusion of several suburb-to-suburb lines (along the US-101/I-210 and I-605 freeways, for instance), and its insistence that the City of Los Angeles pay the extra costs to locate the Wilshire line underground appear to have spoken to the genuine frustration of suburban politicians (like Ward) who believed that previous plans’ encapsulated favoritism towards the Central City (Ward 1976a).

The booklet listed over 40 cities through which the line would pass, touting how the plan would serve outlying communities “that traditionally have been eliminated from consideration” for rail transit -- implying that such exclusion was an injustice, rather than an informed decision based on the low cost-effectiveness of rail transit operating in low-density, auto-friendly suburban settings. Ward’s introduction also alluded to concerns about accountability, arguing that his plan’s detailed description of route alignments would enable citizens to monitor the county’s progress in constructing the system. While specifying route alignments for the heavy rail and light rail feeder lanes, Ward’s plan stated that monorail alignments (proposed for neighborhoods like Downtown Los Angeles, Westwood, and Northridge—see Figure 16) would be decided upon by local communities (Ward 1976a).

**Figure 17. Sunset Coast Line Proposal, January 1976**



*Source: Los Angeles County, Board of Supervisors. The Sunset Coast Line: Route of the New Red Cars, 1976.*

Within three months of Ward's initial proposal, questions over the financial and technical feasibility of his plan began to emerge. At an RTD Board Meeting at the end of February, Donald R. Hodgman, the RTD's bond counsel from the firm of O'Melveny and Myers, warned that the plan's commitment of taxpayer bonds to a specific infrastructure project without carefully demonstrating the bonds' capacity to fund the entire project made it vulnerable to litigation, citing as an example injunctions against road projects in northern California where the bonds had proven inadequate. At the same meeting, RTD president Byron Cook questioned Ward on the monorail concept, noting that each monorail system would require its own service yard (SCRTD Board of Directors 1976a). RTD board member Donald Gibbs wanted a commitment for a certain level of funding to construct the system, in case operational revenues depleted available monies before the full system's completion.

In March, an RTD consulting team led by DeLeuw, Cather and Associates presented an evaluation of the system, which described the Sunset Coast Line as “practical” (Hebert 1976b), but criticized the plan’s rosy cost estimate (which amounted to only \$1 billion more than the much less ambitious system put before the voters in 1974) , as well as its short construction timetable and exclusive focus on rail (which ignored the fact that some corridors might be more suited for bus service) (DeLeuw, Cather and Associates 1976; Hebert 1976b).<sup>30</sup> A report by the City of Los Angeles’s Technical Committee on Transportation echoed criticisms of the measure’s cost, particularly the potential for out-of-control growth of bonded debt (Hebert 1976a). Los Angeles City Planning Director Calvin Hamilton (1976) joined in these criticisms, and took particular issue with the lack of funding for the Wilshire Subway, a priority for the city. Mayor Bradley’s transportation advisor, Norman Emerson, urged his boss to oppose the plan (Emerson 1976). Concurrently, a critical analysis by the State Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO) held up the passage of a bill proposed by Assembly member Frank Vivenca that would have provided the Rapid Transit District with new taxing authority to impose Ward’s proposed 1-cent sales tax increase in order to fund the system (Hebert 1976c).

Responding to such criticism, Ward revised his plan in mid-March (Los Angeles County Chief Administration Officer 1976). He reduced the system’s length modestly to 232 miles (by taking away the Santa Monica Line, for instance) and provided three funding alternatives, involving either bonding (and construction over a 24-year period), pay-as-you go financing using the proceeds of his proposed sales tax (and construction over a 29-year period) or combinations of current proceeds and bonding against future sales tax revenues. Since the LAO had stymied Vivenca’s new sales tax authorization bill, Ward ultimately decided to use the authority for two half-cent sales tax measures granted by Assembly Bill 1727 (Hebert 1976c). Despite the revisions, subsequent analysis by the County’s Chief Administrative Officer continued to criticize Ward’s plan for its lack of detail on costs, ridership, and design, and also for not funding bus service (Los Angeles County Chief Administration Officer 1976).

Bradley’s hesitancy (influenced by adviser Emerson and Planning Director Hamilton) initially doomed the measure’s approval by the RTD board. The

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<sup>30</sup> DeLeuw, Cather and Associates evaluated engineering and construction costs, Gruen Associates managed planning and social research, Mobility Systems evaluated ROW and hardware acquisition, and the Stanford Research Institute (which evaluated system financing). (SCRTD Board of Directors 1976d, 1976e)



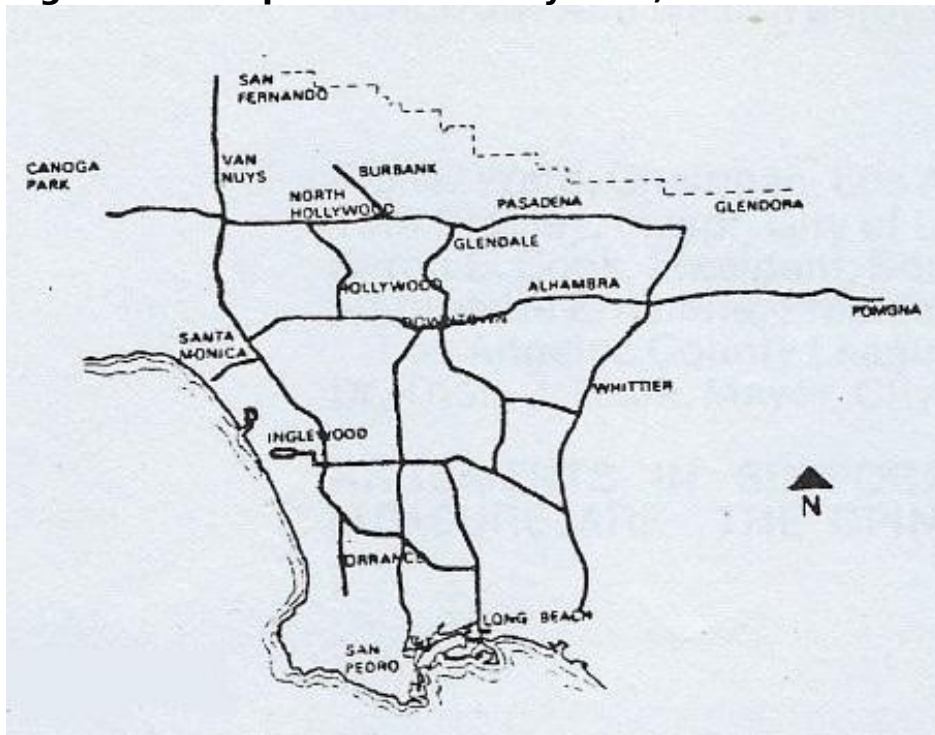
measure also encountered skepticism from RTD board members such as Torrance Councilmember George Brewster. However, Mayor Bradley changed his stance at the Board's March 24 meeting, when Ward agreed to include a Wilshire Subway component in the plan (SCRTD Board of Directors 1976d).

The first measure ("Proposition R") would fund construction of the regional rail system and the second ("Proposition T") would fund rail operations and maintenance. The text of the measures provided a greater level of technical detail than the initial plan, setting a standard for placing stations 2.5 miles apart (which is more typical of commuter rail service, than urban heavy and light rail service) and an establishing a junction to connect to a future line to Orange County. The ordinances prohibited revenue expenditure on subway construction except for on the Wilshire and La Brea corridors (i.e. the Wilshire-North Hollywood Starter Line segments), were justified by technological studies, and on the condition that such expenditures would not "substantially delay" work on the rest of the system. These provisions reflected a balance between a desire to placate Mayor Bradley and to appease skeptical suburban board members who feared that the expensive underground subway would divert too many resources from the rest of the proposed system. The ordinances promised local input on station alignment and transferred construction and procurement responsibilities from the RTD to the county. The ordinances also addressed the RTD legal counsel's concerns over committing to future funding by providing that programming and phasing of construction would proceed "on a pay-as-you go approach" (as opposed to bonding). As desired by Bradley, the ordinances allocated funds to match federal grants for the Wilshire Starter Line. Finally, and with apparently little sense of irony, the ordinances listed the Los Angeles International Airport, Long Beach, San Gabriel-Pomona Valley, San Fernando Valley, and Santa Monica-Union Station lines all as "first priorities" (SCRTD Board of Directors 1976e).

On April 7, the RTD board voted by an 8-1 majority to place the two half-cent sales tax measures for funding Ward's Sunset Coast Line (Ordinances No. 0-76-1 and 0-76-2) on the June 1976 primary ballot (with Torrance Councilman Brewster providing the lone no vote) (Hebert 1976d). Nevertheless, according to Taylor (2017), the RTD Board members (other than Ward) "laugh(ed) privately" at the hastily-assembled proposal and did not consider

it capable of passing. Although the ballot language for the measures did not discuss the system's alignment and construction in depth, it stipulated the overall length of the system (232 miles), the use of freeway rights-of-way, and the cities the new system would serve (Special District Primary Election Ballot, June 8, 1976). For the first time, the ballot included a map that diagrammed Ward's chosen alignments, shown in Figure 18.

**Figure 18. Proposed Transit System, Measure R**



*Source: Measure R Ballot*

Campaign literature supporting Propositions R and T reflected the novel approach Ward took in devising his measure. Mirroring his attempt to address suburbs' concerns with geographic allocation, campaign literature

spoke approvingly of the system's vast geographic scope, even listing all the municipalities to be served by the new system (Committee for Rapid Transit-R and T 1976a). Messaging, and even the ballot pamphlet, featured maps that highlighted the system's distribution across the county's suburbs, which Ward contrasted in one editorial to previous measures' focus on "limited corridors" (Committee for Rapid Transit-R and T n.d.). As in previous campaigns, supportive editorials and campaign literature enumerated the system's benefits to drivers citing, on one hand, the high cost of driving (suggesting that drivers could save money by switching to rapid transit) (Ward 1976b), and, on the other hand, the system's purported reduction of freeway traffic (suggesting that drivers would save time as others switched to transit). Campaign literature also trumpeted the system's high speeds (55 to 60 mph on average) and low headways, which proponents said would make the transit system faster than a private car (Committee for Rapid Transit-R and T 1976a). The campaign messaging directly addressed taxpayers' concerns about waste by touting the system's "pay-as-you-go" funding, which would supposedly preclude the need for interest payments (Committee for Rapid Transit--R and T. n.d.; 1976b). A final contrast to previous campaigns was the campaign literature's portrayal of the measure as a victim of competition with the "highway lobby," providing a big-business explanation for opposition to Ward's affirmatively rail-centered plan (Ward 1976b). Overall, the literature supporting Ward's measure displayed a renewed emphasis on rail technology (that had been present in 1968 but absent in 1974) and focused on selling the measure to suburbanites who had previously been skeptical of rail.

Literature opposing Propositions R and T critiqued the system's high costs and its vague, unrealistic financial plan. Ward's plan contained unsubstantiated and consistently optimistic projections that were easy targets for criticism. In the weeks leading up to the election, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a series of articles criticizing the measure's vague construction timetable (Hebert 1976e) and its lack of funding for requisite feeder bus service (Wachs 1976). Opponents cited the emerging problems with new

mass transit systems in San Francisco and Washington D.C. Academic and media criticism of the measure, for instance, pointed to those systems' cost overruns (Gordon and Eckert 1976) and to their limited effects on congestion and economic development (Rood 1976; Jones 1976). The exclusive focus of Ward's measure on rail left it vulnerable to the criticism, made by LA Times journalist Ray Hebert and since echoed by many others, that rail in Los Angeles was "not needed" due to the city's polycentric urban form (Hebert 1976f, A1).

Mayor Bradley helped campaign for the measure (despite his initial skepticism), as did labor groups like the County AFL/CIO, progressive organizations like the People's Lobby, and downtown-based business leaders like the Chairman of Occidental Petroleum continued to play a role in campaigning for the proposition (People's Lobby 1976; Committee for Rapid Transit-R and T 1976a). But probably as a result of the plan's flaws and the growing skepticism towards rail rapid transit in the region, and despite the explicit efforts of supporters to curry the support of outlying cities and suburban voters, the Sunset Coast Line ultimately had a narrower base of support than previous rapid transit measures.

Other groups, however, even those that had supported earlier transit proposals, did not back Ward's plan. The Los Angeles City Council opposed the measure, citing the plan's vagueness as a reason. The Property Tax Owners Association, a business advocacy group that had endorsed the 1968 and 1974 measures, opposed Ward's measure on similar grounds (Property Tax Owners' Association of California 1976). The *Los Angeles Times*, which less than two years earlier had written that regional transit improvements were urgently needed (*Los Angeles Times* 1974c), refused to endorse the

measures for their lack of an alternatives analysis. The Times also warned that experiences with rapid transit in Atlanta and Washington D.C. showed the unsuitability of rapid transit in suburban-oriented regions (*Los Angeles Times* 1976c). And despite the measure's suburban emphasis, mayors and city officials in Pomona, Burbank, and other outlying communities continued to oppose it (Rudell et al. 1976; Peirce 1976).

Public sentiment seemed to mirror the relative lack of endorsements for the measure. A poll of *Los Angeles Times* readers in the San Gabriel Valley conducted a week before the election showed that 55 percent of respondents opposed the measure, even though 53 percent supported some kind of fixed-rail system. Feedback from opposing respondents criticized the project as a "boondoggle," and a grandiose monument to Ward, that would be subject to mounting costs (Caruthers 1976).

Ultimately, Propositions R and T lost by larger margins than either of the previous two sales tax measures, garnering only 40 and 39 percent of voter support respectively (Keppel 1976). The measures failed to win a majority of voters in every city in the county except for Compton, and even lost in the City of Los Angeles by 75,000 votes. Interestingly, Propositions R and T won a majority of votes in unincorporated areas in the central part of the county and repeated earlier measures' success in low-income South Los Angeles (winning the neighborhood's two state assembly districts), despite their focus on suburban rail lines (Hebert 1976g, C1). A *Times* editorial attributed the loss to public skepticism towards the "over-extension of rail" (*Los Angeles Times* 1976a), a critique of the plan for serving too many communities rather than too few. Other commentators hypothesized that persistent concerns about the tax burden defeated the measure (David 1976), and noted that a measure to raise the property tax rate for school

districts on the same ballot also failed (although by a lower margin) (Keppel 1976).

Meanwhile, local and state officials continued their work on the Wilshire Starter Line project, having failed to interest federal officials in financing the 24-mile Long Beach route. In April, a renewed alternatives analysis by the RTD's Rapid Transit Department noted that an alignment along the Wilshire corridor had the highest potential for patronage and transit-oriented development (Taylor et al. 1976) and concluded that a first-stage Wilshire rail line, with future extensions to the Valley and Long Beach, combined with investments in improved bus service, would be the most cost-effective transit program. Within a few weeks of the election, state Senator Alan Robbins proposed placing a \$200 million bond measure for starter line construction, funded by state gas tax revenue, on the November ballot (Gillam 1976c). At the same time, the Rapid Transit District Board considered a three-year special sales tax measure in November for the same purpose (Hebert 1976h). Both measures, however, failed to win needed approvals (Hebert 1976h, E1; *Los Angeles Times* 1976b).

Two months after the failure of the Sunset Coast Line proposal at the ballot box, Assemblyman Ingalls' bill (A.B. 1246) creating a Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC), finally became law (Stats. 1976, ch. 1333, § 6035), after receiving near unanimous approval in both houses of the Legislature. The newly-created commission had responsibility for devising regional transit plans, allocating all state and federal funding earmarked for

transit in the county, and coordinating public transportation across the county. The commission also had more general transportation-related responsibility to program and fund highway improvements (Gilliam 1976d). Finally, Assembly Bill 1246 gave the new LACTC the authority to impose a one-cent sales tax for transportation purposes, subject to a majority vote of the people. When the commission formally convened for the first time in January 1977, there was hope that the new agency would be able to forge a political consensus in support of rail development (McCollough 1996). While these efforts were ultimately more successful than those previously undertaken, they too faced the problem of reconciling competing geopolitical concerns between downtown and suburban interests, and between transit dependents and choice commuters. As would become increasingly clear, it would also mean addressing new social conflicts brought on by the county's racial and ethnic divisions as well as the tension between achieving regional air quality goals through mass transit improvements and serving the needs of existing transit users.

The RTD had sponsored bond measures in 1968 and again in 1974 to finance rail construction, and had supported Baxter Ward's ambitious Sunset Coast Line proposal in 1976, only to be turned down by wary voters all three times (Fulton 1997, 138). By 1980, several factors coalesced to overcome voter resistance to tax increases for transportation in general, and public transit in particular. Spurred by the availability of federal funding for new transit

projects, regional politicians and planners went back to the drawing board in an attempt to forge a successful coalition to improve public transit in Los Angeles, and it is to these efforts we now turn.



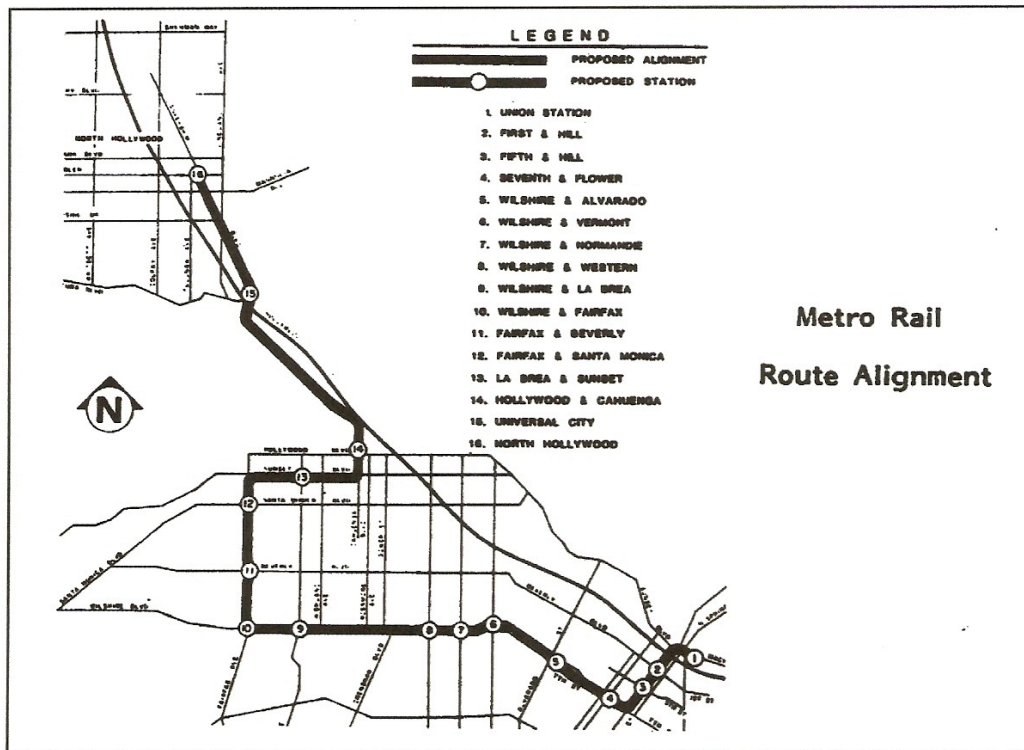
# CHAPTER IV. TRANSIT TAX MEASURES 1980-2000

For three years after its formation, the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) continued the Rapid Transit District's efforts to fund and construct a starter line. As shown in Figure 19, the proposed 16-station configuration, informally dubbed the "wounded knee" alignment because of its backward bending shape, ran under Broadway south from Union Station, and west along Wilshire Boulevard to Fairfax Avenue. From there the route turned north to Sunset Boulevard, east to Cahuenga Boulevard, and then northwestward under the Santa Monica mountains to North Hollywood. The project was supported by the City of Los Angeles, the downtown business community and business interests along Wilshire and Fairfax Boulevards, but generally opposed by local residents (*Los Angeles Times* 1984). The Hollywood section clearly responded to political pressure to serve the film and entertainment industry and to link the San Fernando Valley to downtown.

The Commission also expressed a continuing interest in a multi-modal "Transit Development Program," which Caltrans had promoted in conjunction

with the RTD, the City of Los Angeles, the County, and SCAG (Hebert 1976k), and which built off of the RTD's starter line alternatives analysis (Hebert 1976j). The plan consisted of Transportation Systems Management (TSM) measures to improve bus flow on streets, express bus service on freeways, a downtown people mover and a rail line from Wilshire Boulevard to North Hollywood (Senate Transportation Committee 1977; Assembly Committee on Transportation 1979).

**Figure 19. Wilshire Corridor Starter Line Project (1980)**

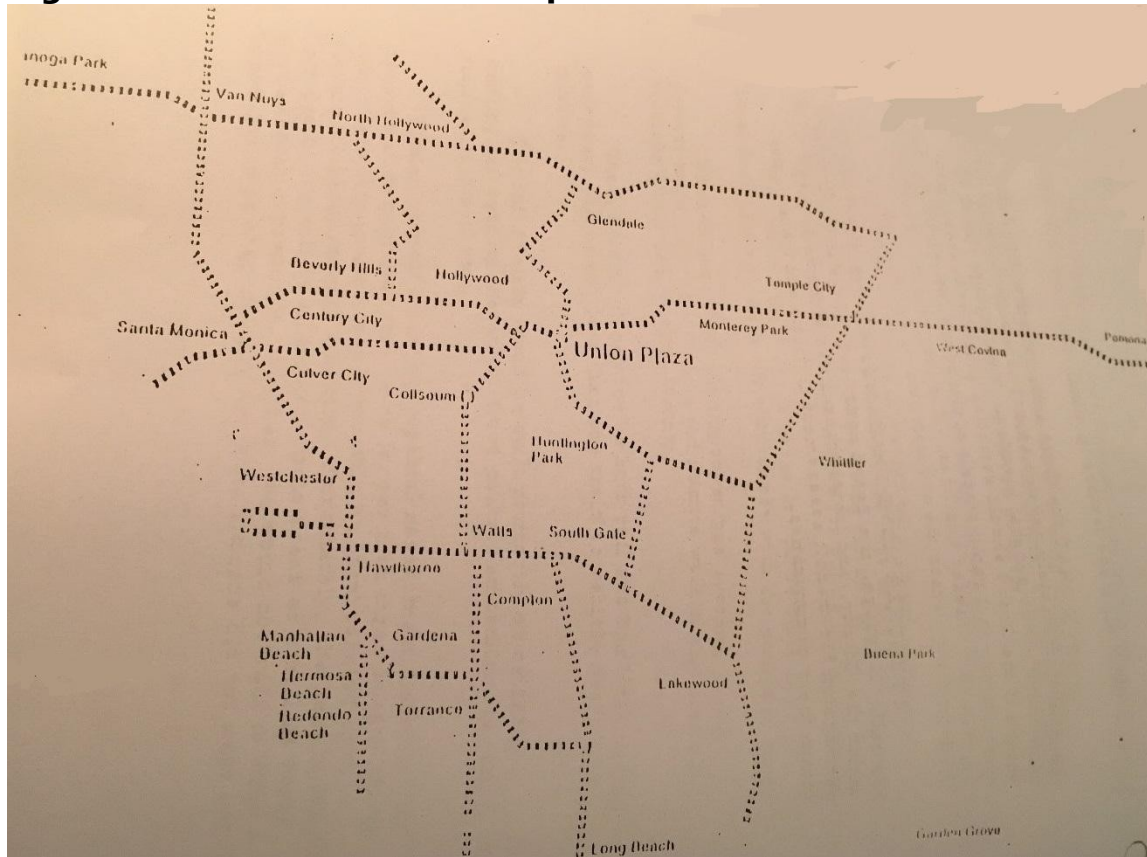


Source: SCRTD Draft Alternatives Analysis (1979).

The program's rail element continued to be a source of contention (LACTC Technical Advisory Committee 1977). In 1978, Supervisor Ward, whose *Sunset Coast Line* had been rejected by voters, offered a scaled-back proposal for a 60-mile rail system now called the *Sunset Limited*, to be financed by countywide property and business tax assessments. But after state voters passed Proposition 13 in June 1978, requiring a 2/3 voter approval of tax assessments by special districts, Ward elected not to place this plan on the November ballot, and submitted only an "advisory measure on transit" instead. With no actual money on the line, voters chose a rail line from LAX to Union Station over either a subway from Union Station along Wilshire Boulevard or an HOV guideway from LAX to the Convention Center (Greene 1985). A year later, shortly after the LACTC programmed \$100 million in funding for the Wilshire rail line (Hebert 1979a), Ward reintroduced a revised version of his full *Sunset Coast Line* proposal to the Commission. This version was a 225-mile-long rail system and feeder bus service (shown in Figure 22), and Ward recommended funding it through benefit assessment districts (Rosenhouse 1979). Mayor Bradley, a champion of the Wilshire rail line, vehemently objected to Ward's proposal, arguing that another failed ballot measure would jeopardize his request for federal funding (Boyarsky

1979). In analyzing Ward’s proposal other members of the Commission took aim at Ward’s assertion of a county “consensus” on the *Sunset Coast Line’s* desirability given its resounding loss at the polls three years before (Rosenhouse 1979). The Commission voted 9-1 against placing the issue on the November ballot, mainly due to opposition to the proposed financing plan (Russ 1979). It did, however, direct its staff to study possible additions to the Transit Development Program and potential financing alternatives.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 20. Sunset Limited Proposal**



Source: Premo 1979.

The LACTC’s \$100 million commitment for the subway fell far short of the estimated \$2.2 billion cost estimate for the Transportation Development Program made in late 1979 (Assembly Committee on Transportation 1979). A staff analysis of the project in August 1979 indicated that the Commission

<sup>31</sup> The board rejected the transit assessment district proposal on the grounds that it (1) would discourage business growth, (2) was regressive, (3) would burden labor intensive industries, (4) did not adequately relate assessments to benefits, and (5) due to the lack of any countywide consensus.

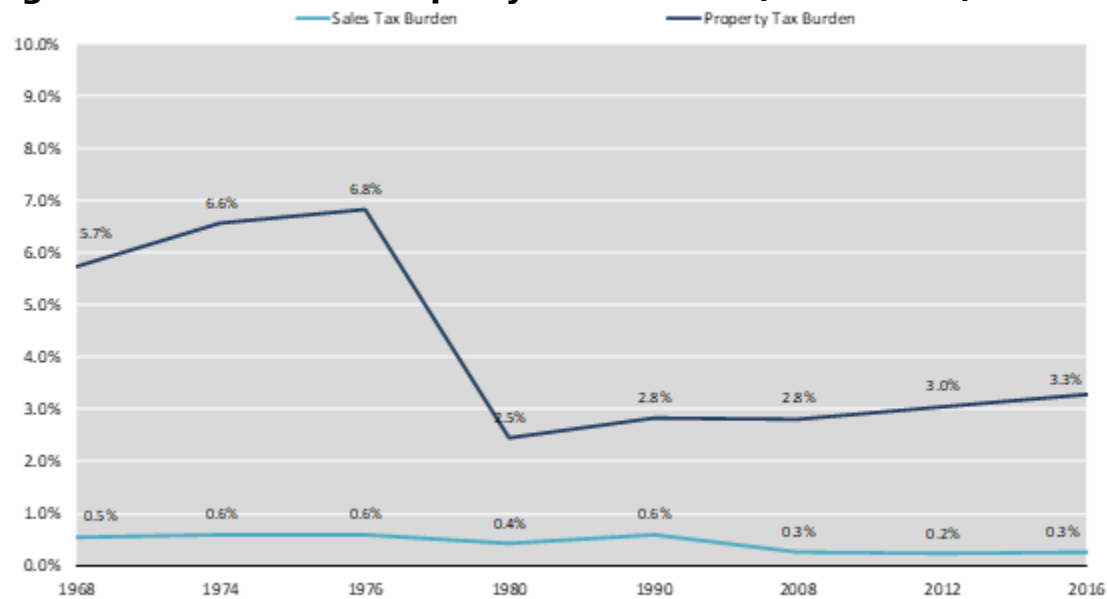
would have to depend on the federal government to fund 80 percent of the costs (or \$1.6 billion)—as Mayor Bradley had requested. Proposition 5, authored by state Senator Jim Mills of San Diego, permitted local voters to approve the use of state highway funds for transit purposes (Richmond 2005), provided that no more than 25% of funding allocated for transit support rapid transit guideway (i.e. rail transit) projects. In September 1979, the state legislature passed Assembly Bill (AB) 1429, which enabled the state transportation commission to allocate as much of the Proposition 5 funding to Los Angeles County as was necessary to secure federal matching funds to build a transit guideway project<sup>32</sup>. The bill stipulated that the County and local agencies allocate 5 percent of the funds required for the project. Nevertheless, the bill ensured that Proposition 5 funds could cover as much as 75% of the 20% local matching funds needed to complete the Wilshire Subway project (Premo 1979).

The 1978-1979 Iranian Revolution and subsequent Arab Oil Embargo spurred another shortage of gasoline that resulted in long lines at filling stations and a rise in fuel prices. The difficulty getting gasoline led to a surge in transit ridership. Daily RTD bus boardings rose from 630,000 in 1975 to 1,360,000 in May 1979, setting a record for the agency (Los Angeles County Grand Jury 1979). The significant growth between 1976 and 1980 of Los Angeles County's foreign-born and low-income populations, who rely heavily on transit, also likely contributed to increased ridership (Blumenberg and Evans 2010). This growth strained the bus system's capacity and heightened concern about the availability of alternatives to the automobile in the face of uncertain future energy supplies. Both factors prompted demands for an increase in existing bus service, as an immediate solution to adding transit capacity, and drew further attention to Los Angeles' scarcity of dedicated local funding for transportation compared to other metropolitan areas. One report estimated that taxpayers contributed annually only \$15 per capita to public transportation in Los Angeles, compared to \$50 to \$70 per capita in other major American metropolitan areas (Los Angeles County Grand Jury 1979).

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32 Assembly Bill No. 1429. Signed into law September 14, 1979. An Act to amend sections 199.6, 199.7, 199.8, 199.9 and 199.10 to the Streets and Highways Code and Section 132091 of the Public Utilities Code, relating to transportation and declaring the urgency thereof, to take effect immediately.

**Figure 21. Sales and Property Tax Burden (1968-2016)**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Decennial Censuses; ACS 5-Year Estimates; CA Board of Equalization

Proposition 13 posed additional problems for transportation finance since it led to large declines in property tax revenue, a traditional source for funding local infrastructure improvements (Chapman 1998). It capped property taxes in the state at one percent of assessed valuation, reduced property value assessments to 1976 levels, and limited increases in property reassessments to 2% a year (California Tax Data n.d.). Figure 21 shows the sales and property tax burden per household for the county (Census and ACS).<sup>33</sup> In the years following Proposition 13 the property tax burden declined significantly. By 1980, two years following Proposition 13, the average property tax rate had fallen to 4.6 percent, significantly impacting local government revenues.

Meanwhile, in July 1976, the SCRTD had raised fares to \$0.35 (Hebert 1976i) (\$1.52 in \$2018) after the county reduced its subsidy because of insufficient revenue sharing funds. Over the next three fiscal years, as the impact of Proposition 13 forced the county to eliminate its bus fare subsidy entirely the agency gradually increased the fare to 55 cents by late 1979 (\$1.78 in \$2018) (Hebert 1977, 1978, 1979b). In July 1980, the RTD further raised the standard base fare to 65 cents (\$1.90 in 2018 value) and imposed transfer charges of \$0.20 for regular riders and \$0.10 for elderly riders (Los Angeles Times 1980b). This fare hike—enacted after a two-month delay (Merina 1980b)—proved to be highly controversial, drawing opposition from Los

<sup>33</sup> The average tax burden per household was calculated by dividing the countywide total tax revenue by the number of households in the county (U.S. Census and ACS). The countywide total tax revenue is the sum of all jurisdictions' reported tax revenues plus unincorporated county's tax revenues (BOE).

Angeles City Councilmember Zev Yaroslavsky and Los Angeles County Supervisor Hahn, who had championed the 25-cent fare six years earlier (Merina 1980a) and prompting calls by riders to boycott the RTD's service (McMillan 1980) as well as vocal criticism from transit-dependent people at the RTD's June board meeting (Merina 1980c).

## 1980 PROPOSITION A

The LACTC had been given the authority by AB 1246 to levy a half-cent sales tax subject to a majority vote and, as early as 1977, the Commission's chairman, John Ferraro, considered a sales tax to be a possible funding approach for the Transit Development Program (Senate Transportation Committee 1977).

The following year, after being urged to do so by Supervisor Hahn, LACTC Executive Director Jerry Premo drafted a report proposing a "balanced" transit funding program like the one recently implemented by the Atlanta region's Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) (Premo 1978). The report noted that MARTA used proceeds from a 1971 voter approved half-cent sales tax measure to support both a long-range transit capital program (investing in 53 miles of rail facilities and 13 miles of busways) and a short-range capital improvement program that invested in modernizing facilities and expanding bus service. MARTA's sales tax, the report noted, provided a far stronger base of local support than Los Angeles had and allowed the agency to simultaneously support rail and operational investments to bus service and to leverage local funding for federal matching grants. Concurrently, Premo informally devised a plan for a new transit measure with MARTA's lawyer, Stell Huie (Premo 2017). In Premo's account, the pair drew out a regional rail network on cocktail napkins over dinner at a restaurant and designed a plan for subsidized bus fares and return of funding to local governments. The nascent proposal followed Huie's advice—drawing on his work at MARTA—that the system should give voters "something for the short term to help them *right away*," and provide a "vision for the long term" that could inspire them.

Although the requirement for a super-majority vote of the electorate in support of new sales taxes is today clearly established in law, this was not the case four decades ago. In early 1980, shortly after the LACTC committed funding to the Wilshire Subway, the Commission's Intergovernmental Relations Committee researched options for enacting a sales tax ballot measure by 1) simple majority vote by the electorate, 2) 2/3 super-majority approval by the electorate and 3) a combination of majority voter approval and super-majority approval by the California legislature (LACTC Board 1980a). At the March 26, 1980 Commission meeting, the task force recommended placing the measure before voters for approval by majority vote, opining that the traditional simple majority threshold was not

“indefensible,” even if it could be legally challenged (LACTC Board 1980b). Although the Commission at first considered including a petition for a concurrent statewide ballot measure requesting a reduction in voter approval for special taxes from 2/3 to 50 percent, the Legislature’s refusal to support such a measure prompted the Commission to submit the measure for voter approval by a simple majority. Despite urgent pressure to provide emergency funding for the RTD widespread dissatisfaction over the recent fare increase led the board in April 1980 to postpone its proposed fare increases. The Commission simply could not wait for the legislature to clarify the law (LACTC Board 1980c) and had to move toward a ballot measure.

When first unveiled at the March 26 meeting, the proposed measure allocated 50 percent funding for bus or rail guideways, 40 percent for bus operations (including expanded bus-on-freeway service, local bus service and improvements to equipment), and 10 percent for system management measures like traffic signal synchronization. This division covered all features of the Transportation Development Program, but favored the transit component, and provided for a regional guideway system rather than a single starter line. Even though a slightly larger share of funding went to the guideways, the substantial proportion of dedicated bus funding reflected concerns with the mounting revenue problems faced by the RTD. At a June 11 Commission meeting Executive Director Rick Richmond, who had succeeded Premo after he departed to head New Jersey Transit, presented the plan, to be implemented in two stages, with the 40 percent bus investments taking effect first and the rail planning and construction taking effect over a longer time horizon LACTC Board (LACTC Board 1980d). The fixed guideway component of the system was estimated to cost \$3 billion (excluding the Wilshire Subway which had separate funding<sup>34</sup>) and to take 20-25 years to complete. LACTC staff recommended that the system include a San Fernando Valley extension of the Wilshire Subway; lines along the Century, Harbor, Long Beach and Santa Ana freeways (the first of these having been approved as part of the compromise between South Bay politicians and community leaders in South Los Angeles for constructing the Century Freeway<sup>35</sup>); and a line to Pasadena. All of these were within the study corridor between the San Fernando Valley and Long Beach that had been chosen as the location for the original starter line. Staff concluded they could be implemented at relatively low cost and together these came to be known as the Guideway Plan, shown in Figure 20.

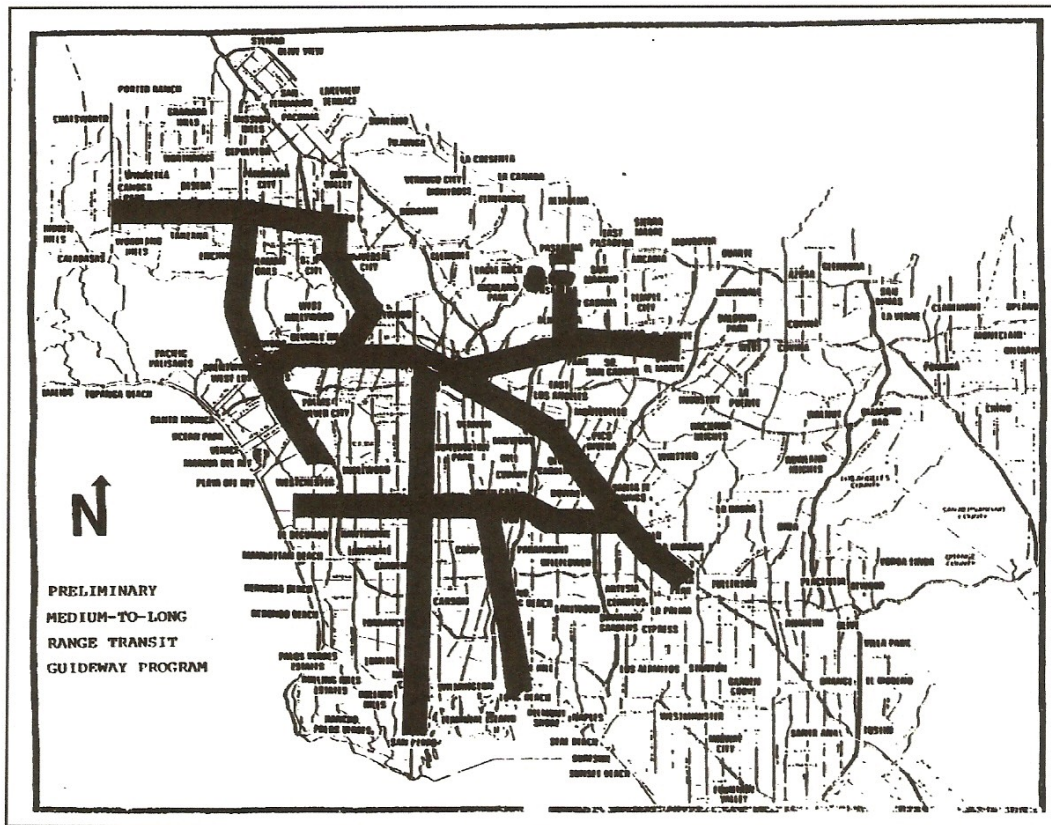
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34 Commitments for the 20 percent local match for the Wilshire Starter Line had already been obtained, though staff criticized the RTD’s lack of progress in its implementation.

35 This was part of a tentative legal settlement worked out between Caltrans and advocacy groups that would permit eminent domain of property for construction of the Century Freeway in exchange for the provision of affordable housing and a public transit line (Elkind 2014).



**Figure 22. LACTC Guideway Plan**



*Source: LACTC, Report on Transit System and Financing Alternatives for Los Angeles County, 1980.*

At public meetings in July 1980, staff solicited feedback on whether the Commission should fund local TSM improvements directly or through grants to municipalities (as Premo had discussed at his 1978 dinner) and found stronger support from local officials for the latter proposal. The idea of giving localities a greater role in implementation appears to have been supported by the League of California Cities, whose members had voted 17-15 to oppose the measure in its initial form (LACTC Board 1980e). Cities believed that the funds were best used at their discretion rather than by countywide board which could engage in horse trading that might reduce a city's share. Accordingly, at the August 6 board meeting the staff proposed that the Commission vote on a proposal that would reduce funding for buses from 40 to 25 percent and provide 25 percent funding to cities for local transit-related projects and street improvements. These "local return" commitments became one of the most popular components of earlier measures and so continued to play central roles in building support across the county for subsequent sales tax measures.

Initial public reaction to the proposed sales tax increase was less than enthusiastic. Finding a compromise that would appeal both to downtown boosters and suburban interests was proving to be as elusive as ever. Among its shortcomings, the proposal failed to identify specific bus service improvements. To build public support for the measure, at the board's August 20 meeting County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, a longtime supporter of improving local transit service whose largely minority Second District was located in the southwestern portion of Los Angeles County, proposed that the tax should not only allocate funding for bus operations but for specifically subsidizing 50 cent bus fares by the RTD for five years—effectively canceling the agency's recent fare hike—which he claimed would require only a third of the sales tax's revenue (allowing the remainder to go to the pre-agreed designations) (LACTC Board 1980e). Hahn argued that averting the controversial fare hike would be politically popular (Merl 1980).

Commissioners Wendell Cox and Pete Schabarum criticized any subsidy that assisted bus riders at the expense of suburbanites by delaying expenditures on the rail transit system, while Commissioners Edmond Russ and Pat Russell argued that a subsidy to the RTD (which had developed a reputation for labor unrest and inefficiency) would prove politically unpopular. Board members Russ, Barna Szabo (an alternate to Supervisor Yvonne Braithwaite Burke and (Norwalk Councilman) John Zimmerman also expressed concern at the August 20 meeting that a sales tax measure in November would fail, given that participants in the July public meetings appear to have expressed opposition to a new sales tax measure (and that the League of California Cities voted against the measure). Both Russ and Zimmerman proposed postponing the election until April to build support, as Russ noted that another defeat might deprive the LACTC of any chance for a winning measure. The Board ultimately approved Hahn's measure, but only by a 6-5 margin, following a last-minute switch in support by Mayor Bradley's alternate, Ray Remy (LACTC Board 1980e; Elkind 2014).<sup>36</sup> Bradley, skeptical of the measure's prospects for success (and focusing attention on the Wilshire Subway), had counseled Remy to vote "no" unless his were the deciding vote, as it turned out to be (Elkind 2014). Bradley did not want to be seen as responsible for the proposal's defeat if the vote by the rest of the Commission was close (Richmond 2005).

The measure as drafted allowed as much as 75 percent of the funds to subsidize 50-cent bus fares for three years, for any agency operating within RTD boundaries that had fares over 50 cents. Twenty-five percent of sales tax proceeds would be designated for local transportation improvements, and any remaining funds would support development of a rail transit system. This allocation reflected Hahn's prioritization of both the fare subsidy and

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<sup>36</sup> Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Administrative Code Chapter 3-05. An Ordinance Establishing A Retail Transactions And Use Tax in the County of Los Angeles For Public Transit Purposes.

local return funding as measures that would provide tangible benefits for diverse constituencies. Other board members, including Russ, shared this view. Hahn added the subsidy for non-RTD operators within the district after the measure had been approved. He did so to address criticism by Commissioner Pat Russell that the measure would come across as a subsidy for the RTD alone in a region that also hosted a dozen other municipal bus operators (LACTC Board 1980e). After the first three years of fare subsidy, 40 percent of funding would support discretionary transit expenditures,<sup>37</sup> 25 percent would be returned to municipalities to fund local transit projects (Local Return), and 35 percent would fund a rail rapid transit system.

The measure subjected local return funding to Commission review and encouraged its use for transit improvements, a measure added at the insistence of Commissioner Cox, who desired a guarantee of available funding for rail transit during the fare subsidy period. The measure stipulated that the rail transit system would serve, at a minimum, seven broadly defined corridors without providing specific alignments: San Fernando Valley, West Los Angeles, South Central Los Angeles/Long Beach, South Bay/Harbor, Century Freeway Corridor, Santa Ana Freeway Corridor and San Gabriel Valley. At the August 20 meeting, the Board debated the measure's specificity in delineating corridors and the possible inclusion of a map on the ballot pamphlet with Commissioner (and Long Beach Councilman) Russell Rubley fearing a map would alienate suburban municipalities excluded from the system. The ballot pamphlet ultimately included a map showing thick lines to designate corridors to be served, but it remained ambiguous as to the actual route alignments (LACTC Board 1980e). The areas shown to receive rail service followed those in the original Guideway Plan but had been expanded to include Sylmar in the North County area, Long Beach in the South Bay, and the city of Glendale, presumably to increase political support (see Figure 22). The entire proposed system included 180 miles of rail lines, including the 29-mile Wilshire Starter Line. It was projected to take 35 to 40 years to complete, with construction to begin in 3 to 5 years. A sunset provision (limiting the tax's imposition to a finite time frame) was debated but not approved. The ballot version of the measure listed the three main funding allocations and geographic areas to be served by the rail system.

The official ballot Argument in Favor of Proposition A, authored by Supervisor Hahn and others, pointed to the recent rise in gasoline prices, as well as the desire to capture a larger share of federal and state transportation funds. Supporters noted that Los Angeles County was the only urban area of its size that did not have a rail rapid transit system. Approval of the measure would,

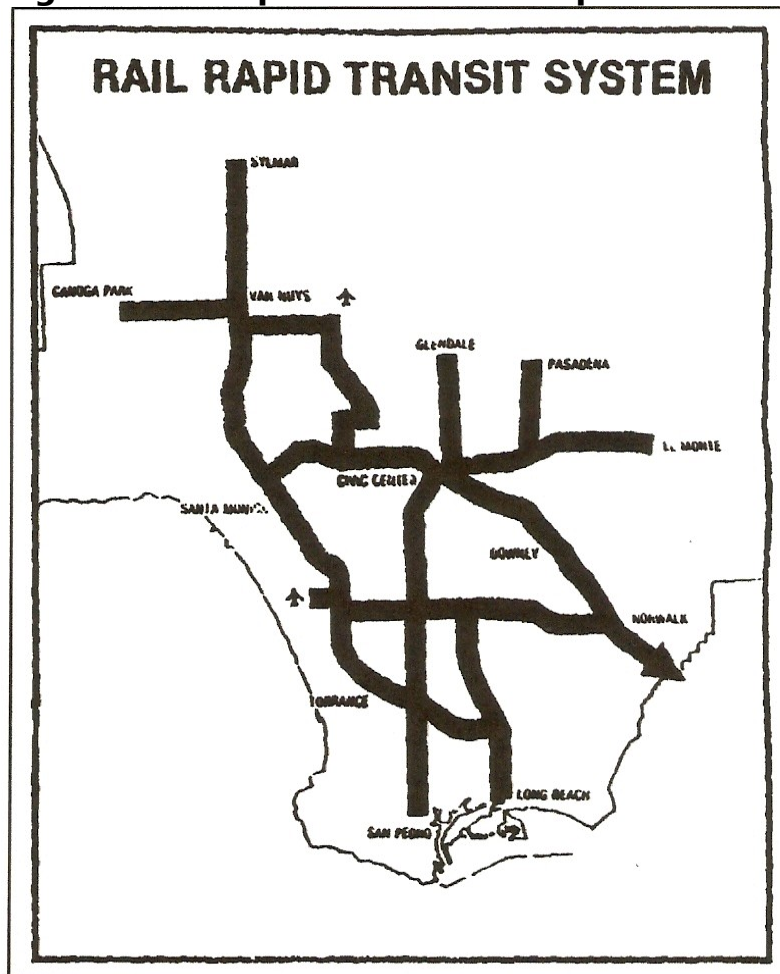
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<sup>37</sup> At the August 20, 1980 meeting, there had been a dispute between Hahn and rail advocate, Wendell Cox, whether to extend the subsidy beyond three years, which this unspecified commitment of funds was intended to partly enable.

supporters argued, conserve energy, reduce smog and congestion, create jobs, and improve a stagnant economy (Election Pamphlet, Los Angeles County, November 4, 1980 General Election).

Campaign materials supporting the proposition reflected in part the measure's emphasis on supporting existing transit ridership. A "Yes on A" Campaign Poster contained the heading "FOR LOWER BUS FARES" (For Lower Bus Fares Vote Yes Prop A n.d.) and other campaign materials touted the reduction of bus fares near the top of the list of reasons to vote for the measure (Citizens for Effective Public Transit 1980b). Other articles noted that fare increases affect the poor, elderly and students, promoting the fare reduction to a majority non-bus riding public by highlighting its social benefit (Citizens for Effective Public Transit 1980a; *Los Angeles Times* 1980d). Mirroring the language of Premo's Report, these papers, and newspaper articles supporting the measure, cited the need for a secure transit funding source to justify the measure (*Los Angeles Times* 1980c). Official "Yes on A" campaign pamphlets indirectly referenced this funding need by touting the \$225 million the proposition would raise for all components of a comprehensive transit system (Citizens for Effective Public Transit 1980c).

**Figure 23. Proposition A Rail Rapid Transit System**



Source: Proposition A Ballot Measure, November 1980.

At the same time, campaign literature continued to emphasize the measure's low costs—a "dime a day"—and substantial benefits (such as reduced congestion and smog), and highlighted the communities served by the conventional rail component of the system (Citizens for Effective Public Transit 1980a; *Los Angeles Times* 1980d; Citizens for Effective Public Transit 1980c). Editorials and a resolution by the County Board of Supervisors (endorsed by Hahn), raised the threat of another gasoline shut-off, still a palpable threat due to the outbreak of war between Iran and Iraq, as a cry for action (Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors 1980b; *Los Angeles Times* 1980d). Hahn claimed bus funding would provide an immediate alternative to the automobile in case of a new fuel crisis (Hahn 1980). Notably, pamphlets and fact sheets touted the benefits of the bus fare reduction (for different types of transit commuters) as strongly as the benefits of the rail system, (Citizens for Effective Public Transit 1980c; *Heritage Southwest-Jewish Press* 1980). Arguments supporting Proposition A

differed from earlier measures in their emphasis on an abstract need for transit funding (not tied to a particular rapid transit system) and in their enumeration of individual benefits for transit riders as frequently as those for drivers. The latter shift acknowledged the mounting discontent of bus riders, as well as the proposition's substantial funding of bus operations (for the first three years).

Opponents, including County Supervisor and LACTC Chairman Pete Schabarum, argued that there were no real assurances that any of the proposed rail lines would actually be built or that bus service would be improved. They also contended that the public was already heavily taxed to pay for transportation through gasoline taxes. Finally, they noted that Los Angeles had already received millions of federal dollars for the Century Freeway project, which would contain exclusive bus lanes, as well as funding for a downtown people mover system and the Wilshire Subway (November 4, 1980 Election, Pamphlet Rebuttal to Argument in Favor of Proposition A).

As was the case with those who attended the LACTC's public hearings, there were many perspectives on the potential downsides of the proposition. Some criticized the measure's tax increase for its effect not only on taxpayers but merchants, who, in places like the eastern San Gabriel Valley, could lose customers seeking to avoid the tax to businesses in the Inland Empire (*Pasadena Star-News* 1980). Despite the measure's multi-modal focus, several articles warned (just as in earlier years) that the measure would actually only fund costly rail lines like the Wilshire Subway, and thus benefit only a handful of the county's residents (*Independent Press-Telegram* 1980). Larger suburbs, like Burbank and Glendale, opposed the measure because it provided no fixed guideway routes to their areas (Elkind 2014). The Burbank City Council approved a series of resolutions opposing the measure for excluding the city from the guideway network because it would increase the city's taxes without providing any benefits (Burbank City Council 1980a, 1980b). In short, arguments opposing Proposition A continued earlier opposition campaigns' focus on budget-minded taxpayers and suburbanites.

Reflecting the pessimistic assessment of the measure by the LACTC Board, support first appeared tepid among local leaders. As noted previously, at the August 20 LACTC board meeting, Mayor Bradley's representative, Ray Remy, confided that the mayor had a "lack of enthusiasm" (Elkind 2014). Later articles noted that the mayor was upset the measure emphasized fare subsidies over rail construction (Stein 1980a). In May, prior to the measure's final drafting, even the Board of Supervisors opposed it (Simison 1980). Only the Los Angeles City Council (which voted in April to support the measure by a 10-2 margin) endorsed the measure consistently from an early stage (*Los Angeles Times* 1980a).

During the fall, Hahn won the endorsement of several newspapers and radio and television stations, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Valley News* and *Herald-Examiner* (*Los Angeles Times* 1980d; *Herald Examiner* 1980). However, the *Pasadena Star News* and KNBC news opposed the measure. Mayor Bradley came around to endorse the measure, albeit reluctantly (*On the Move*, n.d.; Stein 1980a), as did his San Fernando Valley Citizens' Advisory Committee on Transportation. At least nine suburban city councils, many in the south and southeast portions of the county, endorsed the measure (*Groups Supporting Proposition A* 1980; Dere 1980), as did the downtown Los Angeles Central City Association (Central City Association n.d.). Although the Board of Supervisors changed its stance towards the measure, some members of the Board, including the influential Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, remained opposed (Merina 1980d). Among advocacy organizations, the measure was supported by the Lung Association, whose presence marks a mounting interest in health concerns and transit, and such perennial support groups as the League of Women Voters and labor interests (represented by the county AFL-CIO) (Elkind 2014). However, fundraising in support of the measure was significantly reduced from previous campaigns, with only \$30,000 raised (compared to over \$500,000 which had been raised in support in 1968, when the dollar had higher value (Richmond 2005) (Contributors to Proposition A 1980). This reflected the business community's lack of confidence in the measure, coming on the heels of three losing ballot measures (Richmond 2005).

Despite the lack of support from the public at the LACTC's July meetings and polling (conducted in the same month) that indicated that less than 25 percent of county residents supported a sales tax for transit (Instapoll 1980), Proposition A won 54 percent of the vote, surpassing the simple majority threshold the Commission had agreed upon. The election results challenged the city/suburban paradigm that had characterized voting for previous measures. For instance, the measure won in the San Fernando Valley with 63.5 percent of the vote (Stein 1980b) and in South Bay cities like Rolling Hills where it received 74 percent of the vote. Pasadena residents supported the measure with 54 percent of the vote even though nearby Glendale and many cities in the San Gabriel Valley opposed it. Cities in the southeastern part of Los Angeles County also largely opposed the measure (Bell Gardens provided only 24% support), even though the measure proposed two rail lines in the immediate vicinity of the area (Birkinshaw 1980).

Because of Proposition 13's two-thirds vote requirement, Proposition A's victory had uncertain legal status. The Commission's cautious Executive Director, Rick Richmond, refused to pay the State Board of Equalization the fee which it charged to collect the tax, so the Commission—seeking not merely to prod Richmond but to settle the validity of the majority threshold—sued him in March 1981 (Merina 1981). After more than a year of litigation, the California Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Commission on the

grounds that the supermajority requirement only applied to taxes levied by agencies having the authority to impose property taxes (Hager 1982). Since the Commission lacked such authority, the measure's simple majority vote was sufficient to turn the measure into law and it could begin to collect sales taxes. Tax collection began on July 1, 1982, about one year behind schedule.

During the first year of the tax, over 60 percent of the revenue supported the fare reduction program, which produced a substantial increase in bus ridership (LACTC 1988). The expenditure was widely regarded as successful; ridership grew by more than 46 percent between the first four months of 1982 and the first four months of 1985 (Stein 1985).<sup>38</sup> The local funding program, which utilized the 25 percent of funds designated by the measure also proved to be popular, with around two-thirds of the county's cities submitting 255 projects in the first year of the program (the Commission approved 234 projects) (LACTC 1983a). By the 1986/87 fiscal year, the Commission had allocated \$450 million in local return funding. Typical uses of the funds included dial-a-ride and paratransit service (for the elderly and disabled), fixed-route or on-demand municipal transit, recreation and special events transit, and student bus pass subsidies. After the RTD cut service following the end of Proposition A's fare subsidies in 1985 (see discussion below), the City of Los Angeles funded private bus companies to continue service on 17 routes which the RTD had suspended (LACTC 1988).

At the same time, the rail transit plan became a source of political controversy even before the proposition had been validated. Supervisor Hahn, having shepherded the measure to victory, insisted that the original starter line route from Long Beach to Downtown get priority (Elkind 2014).<sup>39</sup> Despite objections from supporters of the Wilshire Subway, like Ray Remy and Supervisor Ed Edelman, Hahn convinced the Commission to approve planning of the light rail Long Beach Blue Line, later named the Blue Line, in March 1982, one month before the California Supreme Court's ruling. Approval of another light rail line along median of the Century Freeway, the Green Line, permitted as part of a court settlement with opponents of its construction, followed shortly thereafter (Elkind 2014). The LACTC would

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<sup>38</sup> It is somewhat ironic that, while the rail program was intended to increase transit ridership in Los Angeles, it was the fare reduction proposal, which was added to the ballot measure primarily to garner political support for the sale tax increase, that resulted a larger increase in riders to the system than rail was expected to provide.

<sup>39</sup> The Blue Line runs along abandoned right of way acquired from the Southern Pacific Railroad previously used by the Pacific Electric's famed Red Cars up until the early 1960s. The Blue Line was selected in part because it passed through the mostly minority district represented by Hahn, who had engineered the legislative compromise over Proposition A, and had important political support from the City of Long Beach. While the selection of the Los Angeles-Long Beach route was based more on political expediency than any careful planning rationale, the members of the LACTC believed it could be built quickly and cheaply and thus demonstrate tangible results from the sale tax. It was important for the LACTC to prove it could deliver on its campaign promises.



oversee light rail construction efforts while the RTD retained control over the heavy rail Wilshire Corridor subway project. To the board of the LACTC, the Wilshire Red Line represented a clear competitor for scarce transit funds it believed could be better spent on light rail. Thus began a competition between the LACTC and the RTD over who would be able to open a rail line first, with the brash young technocrats of the LACTC eager to prove that they could do a better job of bringing rail transit to Los Angeles than the old-line bus managers in the RTD. Formally approved by the Commission in March 1985, the Blue Line won the race and opened on July 14, 1990 from Seventh and Flower Streets in downtown Los Angeles, where it would connect to the Red Line, to downtown Long Beach.<sup>40</sup> Although Supervisor Hahn had long championed a Los Angeles-Long Beach rail line, he would later call the project a “gigantic boondoggle” as costs soared from the original \$200 million estimate to a final price tag of at least \$877 million and critics claimed that further cost increases were being hidden from public view (Rubin 2000). The contrasting styles between the two agencies, as well as their competing philosophies of transportation planning, led to a number of clashes and simmering animosity that ultimately pitted the entire rail program against bus patrons and their advocates.

The LACTC managers quickly realized, however, that even with the Proposition A funds, it would not be able to afford to construct its entire planned system at once, and possibly not at all. In its May 1983 Rail Implementation Strategy, the LACTC began to prioritize the 11 Candidate Corridors identified on the Prop A map to identify which most warranted rail service by the year 2000. The technical selection criteria included traffic congestion, rail construction cost-per-mile, expected level of patronage, proximity to growth centers, land use distribution, percentage of transit dependents in the corridor, and percent of the line that would use existing facilities. Using policy criteria developed for the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) by SCAG, staff ranked the corridors as to the degree of support for existing Centers (measured as the number of Centers “per mile”), the opportunity to relieve capacity deficiencies (measured by volume-to-capacity ratios), and the potential to promote balanced subregions by encouraging intra-corridor trips rather than travel between subregions (based on land use distributions and number of transit dependent riders). They also considered which corridors presented the greatest current travel demand and capacity deficiencies, which would have the highest ridership, and which had the most available rights of way.

In selecting among the corridors, the Commission was presented with the choice of focusing on serving the downtown area, or connecting the various Centers with crosstown rail service. As the staff’s report notes, “The desire to

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<sup>40</sup> The 103<sup>rd</sup> Street station located near the old Watts railroad station would eventually be named for Supervisor Hahn, who in the tradition of William Mulholland declared on the line’s opening day, “There is the Blue Line. Ride it!”

connect development centers with transit is a cornerstone of planning done by the City and County of Los Angeles (LACTC 1983b).” Serving designated Centers would take advantage of existing infrastructure and provide opportunities for joint developments. On the other hand, serving built up areas would be costlier, reducing the extent of the system that could be constructed. The report concluded that constructing rail within freeway rights-of-way would be less expensive but would not serve as many Centers because most Centers in Los Angeles were not located along freeways. Ultimately, six corridors were recommended for rail development:

- Century Freeway Corridor (Green Line)
- Pasadena Corridor (Blue Line extension, now Gold Line)
- West Los Angeles East-West Corridor (Red Line extension, now Purple Line)
- San Fernando Valley East-West Corridor (Red Line extension, now Orange Line)
- Santa Ana Corridor Transitway (convertible to rail), and
- West Los Angeles North-South/South Bay Corridor.

The remaining corridors (El Monte, Glendale, San Fernando Valley North-South, and Harbor/Long Beach East-West) were not considered high priority for rail, but warranted further study for busways or other highway improvements (LACTC 1983b).

The LACTC soon concluded that completing the entire Metro Rail system envisioned under Proposition A would require far more money than it currently had at its disposal. A financial analysis of the Rail Transit Implementation Plan showed that the projected \$100 million per year expected from Proposition A sales tax revenues would be insufficient to fund construction of all proposed rail projects.<sup>41</sup> The Commission faced a choice of whether to issue bonds for construction or finance the rail system out of current revenues. Bond financing produced more short-term capital to complete the system quickly but increased cost because of interest payments and implied that more of the cost of the system would end up being paid by future generations of taxpayers. “Pay-as-you-go” financing, on the other hand, would be less expensive and less risky, but also slower.

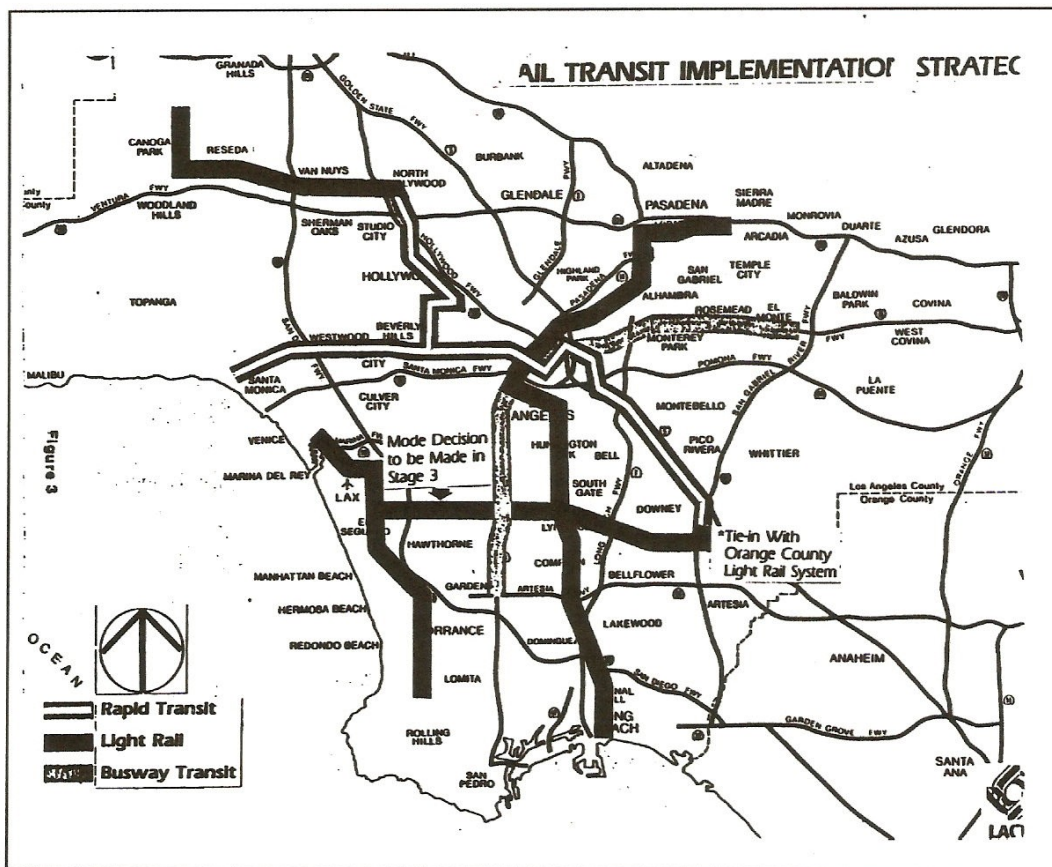
In the end, speed won out over prudence. LACTC staff reported that the Commission could conservatively borrow against future Proposition A rail funds to the point where annual interest and premium payments totaled one half of the annually available funds. Assuming the federal government provided up to 62 percent of the cost of the Red Line by 1991, up to 100 miles of the rail transit system could be built by the year 2000, with full

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<sup>41</sup>The analysis assumed that all the Rail funds (35% of the tax revenue) would go toward construction costs but that the Discretionary funds (40% of the revenue) would be used to subsidize bus and rail operations.

completion of the 130-mile system by 2005. With less federal support, the Red Line would have to be delayed as would other locally-funded projects.<sup>42</sup>

**Figure 24. Rail Transit Implementation Strategy (1983)**



Source: Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, *Rail Transit Implementation Strategy, Stage 1, May 1983*.

### 1990 PROPOSITION C

Later in the decade, it became clear that Proposition A addressed only the tip of the iceberg of transportation funding needs, particularly as the first new rail transit line -- the Blue Line -- proved far more expensive than proponents had hoped. At the end of three years it locked in over one-third of future expected revenues for rail construction. There was nothing in the proposal preventing the remaining funds from being used to improve bus service, but

<sup>42</sup>Important projects that staff concluded might be affected included (1) the Downtown Connector, (2) the Red Line Valley extension from North Hollywood, (3) the Metro Rail extension west to Century City and Westwood, and (4) the Coast line, running from Marina del Rey to the South Bay with a connection to the new Green Line.

as the costs of the rail project began to escalate the LACTC took the position that the fare reduction was only guaranteed for three years and that all Prop A funds other than the 25% Local Return were intended to support rail development. The end of the set-aside of funds for reduced bus fares in June 1985 posed a major challenge to the Rapid Transit District. The District ended up raising base bus fares from 50 cents to 85 cents, as well as the price of youth and senior fares and monthly passes. To alleviate the loss of funding, the LACTC dedicated all of the 40% discretionary Prop A funding to RTD bus service for the first year, although with the understanding that this would provide a lower subsidy than before (SCAG 1984).

The RTD's growing lobbying and administrative costs related to its management of the Metro Rail Subway project, moreover, placed increasing strain on its budget (Connell 1986b). Finally, the spectre of federal budget cuts and reduction in state funding resulting from a decrease in gas tax revenues gave the agency less certainty in its funding outlook and reduced the availability of alternative funding sources (Wolinsky 1985). In the ensuing fiscal years, the agency experienced mounting budget deficits, which reached over \$5 million in FY1987/88 (Hahn 1988). A 1988 letter from Los Angeles City Councilmember Ernani Bernardi to County Supervisor and LACTC Commissioner Ed Edelman portrayed the agency as being in a "state of disarray" (Bernardi 1988). "Regional bus service is in trouble," Bernardi declared, citing the agencies' service cutbacks, fare increases and rising costs and deficits.

At the very time the RTD began to depend on the LACTC for funding, the two organizations increasingly clashed due to disagreement on a host of issues. The LACTC, complaining about the share of funding it paid the District to run Metro Rail construction, sought to usurp this responsibility (Central City Association 1998). Publicity surrounding drug use (Vollmer 1986) and chronic absenteeism among RTD's unionized workforce led the conservative Supervisor Pete Schabarum to call for privatizing the RTD's operations (Schabarum 1986). In 1987, the Commission approved a proposal by Schabarum to transfer transit service in the San Gabriel Valley to a new privately-contracted local transit zone. The RTD consented to a brief pilot project testing this idea, but hesitated afterward to expand the privatization on a larger scale (*Los Angeles Times* 1988). The RTD also approved a labor contract that permitted non-merit pay raises and precluded outside contracting, in contravention of the LACTC's revised management guidelines (Callahan 1988). In retaliation, the LACTC withheld monthly funding and stipends for the RTD (totaling \$50 million in nominal value) starting in July of 1988 (Harris, S. 1988). The agencies did not reach an agreement until December of that year after the RTD had gone as far as to sue the LACTC, accusing it of a deliberate attempt to undermine RTD service (Boyarsky 1988). The agreement released the discretionary funds and preserved the RTD's authority over the Metro Rail system and its labor contract in

exchange for consenting to the establishment the independent Foothill Transit transportation zone (Merina 1988; Callahan 1988).

Such contention between the two agencies, along with the RTD's employment issues, prompted calls to consolidate the agencies. In 1986, County Supervisor Michael Antonovich introduced a motion for the County Board of Supervisors to consider merging the two agencies (Antonovich 1986). In early 1987, state Senator Alan Robbins and Assemblyman Richard Katz proposed complementary legislation that would place the LACTC under control of the Board of Supervisors and convert the RTD board into a popularly-elected body (Ireland 1987). The measure received support from conservative commissioners like Deane Dana, who had grown weary of the RTD's power (Dana 1987). By September, Robbins and Katz had combined and revised their measures into a bill that proposed consolidating the two agencies into a Metropolitan Transit Authority. The bill, however, (SB 1) stalled in the legislature (Connell 1987). The legislation was still up for vote in 1989 (Callahan 1989), by which time the LACTC had come to endorse the it while the RTD had come to oppose it (on grounds that it did not expand representation for secondary cities in the county and would complicate rather than streamline transit governance (Pegg 1989). The Board of Supervisors approved a resolution by Supervisor Schabarum demanding inclusion of private contracting provisions, providing for the creation of transit zones by a simple majority board vote and more flexible contracting and hiring policies on the part of the new board.

Meanwhile, a more fiscally-conservative administration in Washington curtailed federal funding for rail projects. Shortly after entering office, President Reagan issued an executive order decreeing an end to new starts on rail projects and reduced UMTA's 80 percent federal funding commitment for rail projects (Elkind 2014). Reagan also appointed Ralph Stanley to be the new head of the federal Urban Mass Transit Administration, a conservative who favored privatization of transit and cuts to federal transit subsidies (Connell 1986a). The RTD had to divide the Wilshire Starter Line into phased segments in order to qualify for funding from UMTA, which ultimately only awarded grants sufficient for a 4.4-mile initial phase (the so-called "Minimum Operating Segment-1 or MOS-1") that ran from Downtown Los Angeles to MacArthur Park (Elkind 2014). The following year, as Reagan began a second term, worries surfaced that Congress would significantly reduce funding for public transit. Ultimately, Congress sustained funds for the MOS-1. Following an underground methane gas explosion near the Farmer's Market, however, Congressman Henry Waxman pushed through a provision in the 1985 Congressional Budget at the urging of local officials and homeowners' groups that precluded any expenditure of federal funds to construct the Wilshire line under a designated stretch along the Miracle Mile straddling the districts of Waxman and Congressman Julian Dixon (Connell 1985).<sup>43</sup> This Congressional

<sup>43</sup>Public Law 99-1980 (December 19, 1985).

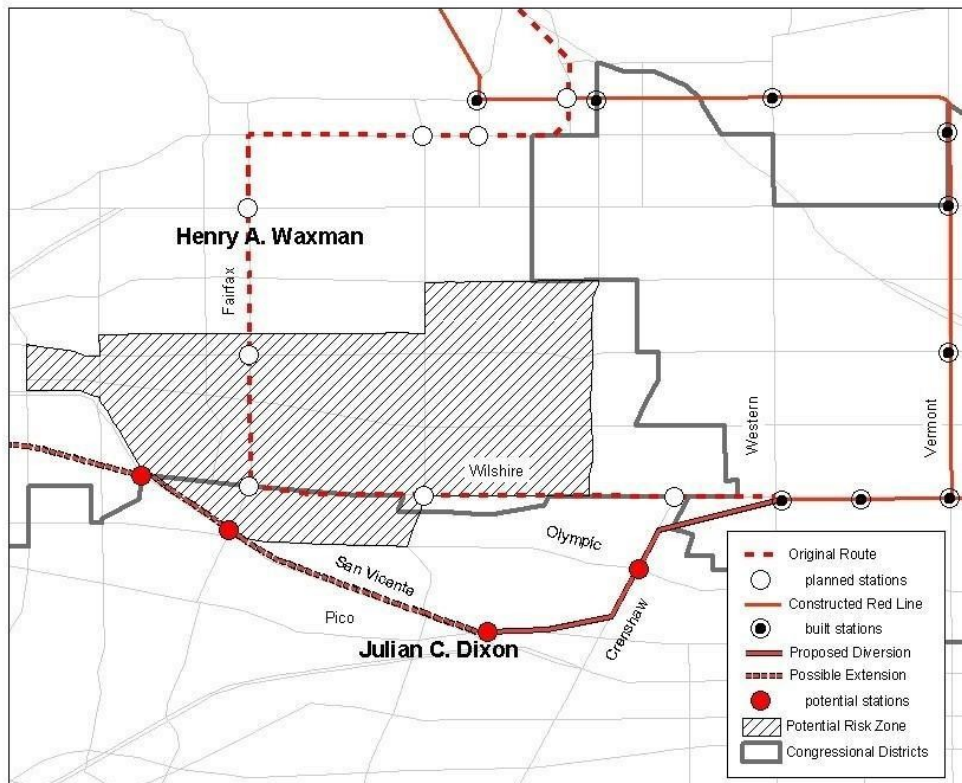
action forced RTD to scrap the originally proposed route and develop a new rail system that would not pass through the Fairfax Avenue area. This provision forced a change in the alignment of the second phase (MOS-2) of the Wilshire Starter Line to one that would turn north at Vermont, bypassing most of the Wilshire Corridor, as shown in Figure 25 (Taylor, et al. 2009, 188). This segment would be designated the Red Line while the westward extension from Vermont eventually became the Purple Line.

Following completion of the Congressionally Ordered Re-Engineering (CORE) Study of alternatives to the original alignment, the LACTC selected a southwesterly extension from the Wilshire/Western termini with stations at Olympic/Crenshaw and Pico/San Vicente (USDOT/LACTC 1992).<sup>44</sup> The routing decision was the result of a political deal struck with the largely minority area's Congressman Dixon to authorize additional federal funding to extend the Red Line while still avoiding the prohibited methane risk area. While routing the subway through the less dense Mid-City area would generate fewer trips than continuing along the Wilshire Corridor, the Congressional mandate made the move necessary. The Olympic/Crenshaw station would replace the disputed minority-serving Wilshire/Crenshaw station that was initially left off the original alignment in MOS-1, while the station at Pico/San Vicente would link to the RTD/Santa Monica interface bus terminal and serve an adjacent local shopping center which the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) had designated as a potential candidate for major renovation (and which would be almost completely destroyed during the 1992 civil disturbances). Local supporters viewed the planned extension of rail service to the Mid-City area as a measure of economic and racial justice.

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44U.S. DOT/LACTC, Los Angeles Rail Rapid Transit Project - Metro Rail for The Mid-City from Wilshire/Western to Pico/San Vicente in the City of Los Angeles with Stations at Olympic/Crenshaw and Pico/San Vicente, Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report, August 1992.

**Figure 25. Wilshire Subway Risk Zone and Route Realignment**



Unfortunately, as the federal government tightened its purse strings, the LACTC confronted higher costs than it had anticipated for the rail system that Proposition A had promised to fund. Technical challenges, including the need to build new tracks adjacent to existing rail lines and the need for improvements to satisfy communities along the route and adjoining railway lines, drove up the costs of the Blue Line, leading to a budget twice as high as the agency initially projected (Elkind 2014). By 1989, expenditures on the Blue Line, Green Line and first phase of the Red Line, left the Commission with just \$800 million in uncommitted funds from Prop A through the year 2000—enough money for the LACTC to build only an extension of the Green Line to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and a light rail line to Chinatown (the beginning of the Pasadena line). This would mean delaying or dropping proposed light rail segments to Pasadena, Santa Monica (from the Green Line) and through the San Fernando Valley (from the Red Line’s future north Hollywood terminus) as well as promised lines to the San Gabriel Valley, West Los Angeles, the South Bay/Harbor area, and along the Santa Ana Freeway Corridor (Harris 1989).

In the late 1980s, funding for road repairs and traffic improvements also became scarce for both the county and municipal governments in the region. Proposition 13 and the 1979 Gann Amendment, which capped state and local

governments' expenditures from proceeds of general tax revenues, reduced state funding for highways (Armstrong 1988). A 1987 letter from the Commission to state Senator Quentin Kopp, noted a \$13.3 billion gap between the cost of transportation projects "needed" in Los Angeles County and available revenue, with highway and street expenditures comprising \$8.3 billion of the shortfall (Taylor 1988c).

Paradoxically, cities throughout the county received an annual influx of local return funds from Proposition A over the decade. Because the LACTC allocated funds based on population rather than on transit service, many mid-sized suburban municipalities, accumulated revenue disproportionate to local demand for transit-related projects. Some of these cities (e.g. Cerritos, Alhambra, and Claremont) traded local return revenue for general fund money with cities having a greater need for transit, but did so at a loss (Boxall 1987). Not surprisingly, several political figures began to call for relaxing the local return guidelines so that they could fund street- and signal-related repairs (Antonovich 1987). Supervisor Schabarum proposed a ballot measure for the June 1988 election that would have allowed localities to use local return funding to support non-transit related projects like road and street improvements, in exchange for increasing the RTD's discretionary transit funding share (Taylor 1988a). Although Schabarum's measure did not make it to the ballot, a motion supporting a similar measure, that would have expanded the allocation of Proposition A Funds to roadways used by transit, passed in the Los Angeles City Council in March 1988 (Los Angeles City Council. 1988). As had happened earlier in the decade, figures like Kenneth Hahn criticized the widespread trading of local return funds and their expenditure on administrative uses (e.g. office equipment) having only a tangential relationship to transit, as undercutting the purpose of Proposition A (Chorneau 1988).

Other counties in California also raised sales taxes to meet their own needs. In the November 1988 elections, sales tax measures funding a mixture of transit and highway projects (as well as active transportation and paratransit in certain cases) were enacted in Riverside, Sacramento and Contra Costa counties (Taylor 1988b) and in 1987 in San Diego (*Los Angeles Times* 1987).

Finally, although it had long been a salient issue in local transportation politics, concerns about congestion gained more prominence during this period. A search of *Los Angeles Times* articles with the keyword, "congestion," between 1968 and 1990 shows a spike in articles between 1985 and 1989. One article from April 1987 claims that afternoon traffic jams "are becoming more common," with rush hour traffic dispersing from the freeways on to arterial and local streets (Roderick 1987). Wachs et al.'s (1993) study of commutes by employees of Kaiser-Permanente health care facilities between 1984 and 1990 found that average travel times rose by 5 percent per year, even though average commute distances decreased



slightly. These concerns nourished anti-growth sentiment, as residents of single-family neighborhoods perceived denser development to be a cause of worsening traffic. Because the county's population density also grew substantially during this period such views are hardly surprising. Such sentiments helped spur the passage of measures like Proposition U, a 1987 municipal ballot measure which down-zoned commercially-zoned parcels along major arterials in the city of Los Angeles even though higher densities, particularly along the Wilshire Corridor, were needed to sustain demand for high capacity rail projects, and increased property taxes from new development were important (Ring 1987).

Responding to the congestion and funding concerns, the LACTC produced a report in 1986 entitled *On the Road to the Year 2000*. The report warned that cities in Los Angeles county "had \$100 million less than they needed to maintain their existing street system" and presented the harrowing statistic of 485,000 hours lost annually by Los Angeles commuters to congestion (LACTC 1986). It identified a series of road and highway infrastructure projects and TDM measures crucial to meeting regional transportation needs and recommended creating a stable local funding source for transportation. It noted the general transportation sales taxes that other counties had recently approved and suggested exempting gasoline taxes from the Gann Amendment.

Early in 1988, the LACTC commissioned a telephone survey of voters in Los Angeles County to assess their attitudes towards various roadway improvements recommended in the report. Nearly three quarters of the respondents favored increased spending on streets and freeways and almost half indicated that they would support a tax increase to fund it (The Wirthin Group 1988a). A follow-up focus group study suggested that voters agreed the county had severe transportation problems but that any tax increase should be tied to specific transportation projects. Participants indicated a preference for a half-cent sales tax increase over an 11-cent hike in the gasoline tax (The Wirthin Group 1988b). Using the list of projects identified in the report, the LACTC worked with cities over the next several years to devise a sales tax measure that would address general road and highway projects and resolve perceived deficiencies in Proposition A's local return program.

The Commission had the authority under its mandate to impose another half-cent sales tax in addition to that already approved in Proposition A. The ensuing "Fight Gridlock Ordinance," unveiled in November 1989 (LACTC 1989), proposed such a tax for the next twenty years to fund local street, freeway and transportation systems management improvements. Specifically, 30 percent of the tax revenue would fund Transportation Systems Management (TSM) programs (such as computerized traffic signals) on regional streets and highways; 30 percent would provide new local return

funds for street maintenance and signalization improvements, addressing cities' demands for local return reform; and 25 percent would fund a series of highway and freeway improvements—primarily road widening projects, the addition of carpool lanes (e.g. on I-605 and SR 57), interchange improvements, and additions to the Smart Street Network. The remaining 15 percent of funds would sponsor the construction of transit centers, freeway bus and park-and-ride facilities, and the acquisition of railroad rights-of-way for commuter rail. Interestingly, the limited transit component did not specify funding for Metro Rail. Two-thirds of sampled voters indicated support for the proposal (Fairbanks, Bregman and Maullin 1989).

Since the proposed ordinance would fund primarily road and highway improvements as opposed to public transportation, the LACTC had to authorize the tax through state Senate Bill (SB) 142 rather than Assembly Bill (AB) 1246 (Pegg 1990). SB 142 mandated that a sales tax be approved by the County Board of Supervisors and by city councils of a majority of cities (comprising a majority of population) in the county.<sup>45</sup>

The measure also alluded to an offer the Commission had received from the Southern Pacific Railroad to sell three of the company's rights-of-way connecting downtown Los Angeles with San Bernardino, Santa Monica and Santa Ana, respectively (Brady 1990). Notably, the latter two lines served routes and regions that the Proposition A ordinance had designated for future transit service. The right-of-way along the Exposition Corridor (to Santa Monica) had been evaluated as a prime candidate for light rail since the beginning of the post-Proposition A planning process (Elkind 2014). The Commission entered into negotiations with the company shortly thereafter and by mid-July, the railroad had added the Burbank Line (one of five rights-of-way that the RTD had evaluated three years earlier for a San Fernando Valley light rail line) to the list (Taylor 1989). The Commission also discussed obtaining the Santa Fe's Pasadena line. Although requiring no new infrastructure, the purchase proposal proved controversial in an atmosphere hostile to growth. Within weeks of Southern Pacific's initial offer, the West of Westwood neighborhood association (representing neighborhoods adjacent to the Santa Monica right-of-way) had mobilized 300 people to speak out against the deal at a town hall meeting, vocalizing opposition to the noise and traffic the rail line would bring (Callahan and Gottlieb 1989). Likewise, neighborhood groups in the San Fernando Valley, which had already gone on record as opposing a light rail route along the Burbank corridor (fearing impacts on traffic flow, noise and safety), opposed the purchase of the Burbank line (Taylor 1989).

The LACTC initially intended to place the Fight Gridlock Ordinance on the ballot in June 1990 (Peterson 1990). However, three state initiatives

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<sup>45</sup> Senate Bill 142 (Deddeh). Local Transportation Authority and Improvement Act. Stats. 1987, Ch. 786, sec. 1.

authorizing increased revenue for public transportation had been placed on the ballot in the June election. Proposition 108 (Passenger Rail and Clean Air Bond Act of 1990) funded a \$1 billion bond to acquire rights-of-way, capital expenditures, and acquisitions of rolling stock for intercity rail, commuter rail, and rail transit programs (California Proposition 108 1990). Proposition 116 (Clean Air and Transportation Improvement Act of 1990) provided a \$1.99 billion general obligation bond to fund passenger and commuter rail systems (with eligible projects in Southern California including the Los Angeles-to-San Diego rail corridor and the regional commuter rail system) (Reich 1990). Finally Proposition 111 (The Traffic Congestion Relief and Spending Act of 1990) proposed a 55 percent increase in the truck weight fees and a five-cent per gallon increase in the gasoline tax to fund both highway and transit projects (California Proposition 111 1990). The passage of Proposition 108 depended on the passage of Proposition 111. The LACTC feared that having an additional transportation-related tax on the ballot would harm the statewide measures' chances of success and suspended work on the ordinance late in 1989 until after the June election (Peterson 1990).

The campaign in support of the three propositions emphasized their role in reducing congestion, conserving oil and improving the environment—appeals that would also be used in the November campaign for what would become Proposition C. Opposition to the measures was limited (Reich 1990) and on election day, all three propositions were approved, making funds available for both rail and road projects (Trombly 1990).

On the day of the June elections, the general manager of the RTD, Alan Pegg, wrote a memo proposing a sales tax ballot measure for November (which he dubbed "Proposition T") to fund operating costs incurred by the county's transit agencies (Pegg 1990). The proposal would have specifically allocated 10 percent of the funds to the LACTC for the purchase of clean-air transit equipment (mentioning as examples upgrading to electric buses or buses that ran on alternative fuels), 9 percent to the LACTC for special demonstration projects (such as a smart card for fare payment) and 80 percent to transit operators in the county (in proportion to the amount of service utilized by riders and the costs operators needed to spend per boarding or passenger mile). The remaining one percent would go to support the LACTC's development of a Countywide Transit Plan that would provide a comprehensive program of transit improvements, to which each operator receiving funds would have to adhere.

Pegg cited the RTD's need for stable funding to meet service mandates set by SCAG's Regional Mobility Plan and the Air Quality Management District's management plan as the rationale for the new proposition. He additionally highlighted how Propositions 108 and 111 provided no funding for transit operations and how the reduction of federal subsidies deprived the RTD of

resources to meet regional transit growth and air quality targets. In comparison to the general transportation tax, Pegg noted, the LACTC could place the transit sales tax measure directly on the ballot using the remaining half-cent taxing authority granted by its founding legislation.

The LACTC, however, continued to work on the Fight Gridlock Measure following the election, revising the program improvements to reflect changes in funding need resulting from passage of the state measures (Peterson 1990) and mustering support from more city councils (Pegg 1990). Later in June, the LACTC requested the RTD's "concurrence" with the "street and highway measure" but the RTD board was vocally opposed (SCRTD Board 1990).

In the middle of July, the LACTC's negotiations with the Southern Pacific broke down after the company refused to accept the Commission's offer of \$335 million (almost half of the Commission's non-committed \$800 million) for the several rights of way (Brady 1990; Taylor 1989). According to Elkind (2014), this led LACTC staff to realize that future rail expansion might necessitate a new transit sales tax. At the beginning of August, the Sheriff's Department placed a sales tax measure for county jails on the November ballot that would bring the county sales tax up to the 7.25 percent state limit if successful. Worried that the November election might provide the last opportunity in the immediate future for any transportation-related sales tax, Neil Peterson, the LACTC's executive director, wrote a memo on August 7 that advised the Commission to place a "broader" transit sales tax measure on the ballot, that would fund transit operations (such as clean fuel buses) included in the RTD's measure, the commuter rail line purchase funded by the LACTC's previous measure, and local return funding for general street improvements which municipalities had been demanding for the past two years (Peterson 1990).

On August 8, less than two days before the deadline,<sup>46</sup> the LACTC voted by a 6-5 margin to place a new transit sales tax measure on the November general election ballot (LACTC Board 1990). Mayor Bradley, the decisive vote on the board, initially hesitated to support the measure, worried that the voters would not approve a new transportation measure so soon after the June propositions. Bradley voted affirmatively only after Tom Houston, a former deputy mayor who worked as a lawyer for Southern Pacific, assured him that Southern Pacific would support the measure if it would provide sufficient funds for the Commission to purchase their rights-of-way (Elkind 2014). The measure reflected the priorities addressed by Peterson and the RTD, with 40 percent of the projected revenue designated for "improving and

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<sup>46</sup> State law required the LACTC to obtain supporting resolutions from the city councils of a majority of the cities in the county representing a majority of the incorporated population, and the approval of the Board of Supervisors for the measure to qualify to be placed before the voters. California Senate Bill 142, Local Transportation Authority and Improvement Act.

expanding” rail and bus transit service (a designation purposely intended, according to the ballot resolution to incorporate both operations costs for existing services and capital expenditures on a regional rail program); 25 percent designated for (countywide) “transit-related improvements” on streets and highways (a category that included both transit priority lanes and general traffic improvement measures such as emergency tow services; 20 percent allocated to a new Local Return program that cities could use to fund improvements on streets heavily used by transit (in addition to the local transit and paratransit expenditure permitted by the Proposition A Local Return program); and 10 percent designated for commuter rail and freeway bus facilities (LACTC n.d.b). The measure also designated 5 percent of funding to “improve and expand bus and rail security.” Unlike Measure A, this proposition did not guarantee any further fare reductions, only that funds *could* be used to subsidize fares.

Early in September 1990, the County Board of Supervisors approved placing on the ballot Proposition C (An Ordinance Establishing an Additional Transactions and Use Tax in the County of Los Angeles for Public Transit Purposes) following the passage of state legislation that would reduce the rates of the sales taxes proposed by Proposition C and the county jail measure to .25 percent each in the event that both passed to prevent the county sales tax from exceeding the state’s sales tax cap (Ellis 1990). The campaign supporting Proposition C, dubbed the “1990 Fast-Track Anti-Gridlock Transit Improvement Proposition,” involved a coalition similar to previous campaigns, including the League of Women Voters, Mayor Bradley, the County AFL-CIO and the *Los Angeles Times* (Elkind 2014). After resuming right-of-way negotiations, in October the LACTC purchased more than 175 miles of rail corridors from Southern Pacific for \$450 million (using Proposition A funding). In exchange, and as Houston had promised, the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe Railroad (which was also negotiating a purchase with the LACTC) donated almost \$662,000, boosting the campaign’s funds to \$1 million (Taylor 1990).

The ballot language for the measure only directly mentioned funding for “transit security, graffiti removal and clean air buses,” all relatively small funding allocations that were judged to appeal to voters concerned with security. Ballot language also reflected a commitment to upgrade the RTD’s bus fleet by stating that the measure would improve the “frequency, speed and reliability of rail and bus service” without mentioning the investments in commuter rail or Metrorail that would enable this.

Because the measure followed recent sales tax and gas tax increases but addressed genuine funding deficiencies, the supporters of Proposition C sought to convince voters of the need for additional funding. The LACTC argued that “Los Angeles County residents are drowning in a sea of gridlock and choking on dirty air.” Since only limited funds would be made available

for transit from the state gasoline tax increase, additional local funds would be necessary to meet the county's transit and highway needs. According to the LACTC, the measure would "improve transit operation, reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality and reduce dependence on foreign oil (LACTC 1990a).<sup>47</sup>

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47 In particular, the LACTC stated that the measure would:

[I]mprove and expand rail and bus transit services, enhance transit security, construct commuter rail, park and ride and bus transit facilities, improve the operation of major streets and freeways in those corridors served by transit, repair and maintain streets and roads utilized by public transit, and fund freeway enhance public transit service.

**Table 1. Comparison of Measures A and C**

<b>PROPOSITION A</b>	<b>PROPOSITION C</b>
40% Discretionary	40% Discretionary
For public transit purposes	For public transit purposes (except for Metro Rail Project capital improvements between Union Station and Hollywood)
25% Local Return Allocated to cities by population	20% Local Return Allocated to cities by population
35% Transit Construction and operation of rail transit system (after first three years)	25% Transit Related Improvements to Highway Capital improvements related to the highway system, may not be used for operating bus or rail services
	10% Commuter Rail Restricted for commuter rail, transit centers and park and ride purposes Used as operating subsidy contribution to SCRRRA (Metrolink) Monies may not be used for operating bus or urban rail services
	5% Security Restricted to transit securing operations and capital Nearly all allocated to bus and rail security

The LACTC stressed that the sales tax increase was needed to operate intercounty and commuter rail service, meet state and local requirements for

cleaner, fuel-efficient buses, and importantly, to “speed the construction and operations of the 150-mile rail system” (LACTC 1990b). Proposition C would, according to the LACTC, result in an integrated transportation network because the funds would be used for priority projects that were not otherwise funded by state, federal or Proposition A monies. In addition, they could be used for road projects on streets that would be “heavily used by public transit.”

The campaign literature for Proposition C continued to press the need to expand the rail construction program:

Only with Prop. C can we quickly create a comprehensive transit system for Los Angeles County providing urban rail, commuter rail, clean-fuel buses, ridesharing, and smart streets to stop congestion and promote mobility.

Within two years, Prop. C will bring 280 miles of commuter Rail into operation from San Bernardino through San Gabriel Valley, from the San Fernando Valley and Santa Clarita Valley and from Orange and Riverside Counties through Norwalk to downtown.

Prop. C will accelerate completion of the San Fernando Valley and Pasadena Rail systems. With Prop. C the Pasadena Line could be completed within five years and the Valley Line could be completed within eight years (LACTC 1990c).

As it did with Proposition A, the LACTC argued that the tax was needed to provide local matching funds to qualify for state assistance. While promising that funds would not be used to cover cost overruns on the Hollywood portion of the Red Line, the LACTC proposed to use Prop C funds for a number of other rail projects including:

Green Line northern and southern extensions to Marina del Rey and Torrance and the eastern section to Norwalk  
San Fernando Valley Red Line East/West extension to the I-405 Freeway  
Blue Line downtown to USC/Exposition Park extension, Downtown Connector to Union Station, and Dodger Stadium connection to the regional rail system.

In addition, the LACTC suggested that Prop C funds could be used to develop commuter rail to Simi Valley and Santa Clarita Valley as well as constructing the LAX-Palmdale high-speed rail project along the I-405 freeway median.

A *Los Angeles Times* editorial asserted that the “drying up” of federal funding for the LACTC’s transit projects during the preceding decade



necessitated a new tax to “maintain momentum” on these projects (*Los Angeles Times* 1990a). An information brochure issued by the LACTC noted that the June state propositions (108 and 111) left a “gap” between the LACTC’s revenue and desired expenditures, and explicitly noted that the former propositions provided no funding for commuter rail (LACTC n.d.a).

Newspaper articles also mentioned the light rail system expansions (beyond the Red, Blue and Green Lines) and extensive commuter rail network the LACTC planned (Metrolink), for which the Commission needed additional funding (Taylor 1990; *Los Angeles Times* 1990a). However, neither these articles nor the measure itself made hard funding commitments. A question-and-answer portion of the LACTC informational brochure did list, by county sub-region, a medley of “project ideas” the measure might fund, ranging from “signal synchronization” along Valley and Foothill Boulevards (under the “San Gabriel Valley” section) to a transit pass for use on the RTD, Santa Monica and Culver City bus systems (under the “Westside” section), in an attempt to appeal to different geographical constituencies.

Environmentally-focused appeals also appeared in much of the LACTC’s campaign literature, touting not only the measure’s potential smog reducing effects but its funding for environmentally-friendly diesel locomotives for the commuter rail system and electric bus purchases (LACTC n.d.a). These statements not only reflected growing concerns with the environment (Kemp 1990), but also the controversy over a recent plan proposed by the Southern California Air Quality Management District for drastic automobile trip reduction measures to bring air quality in the basin up to federally-mandated standards (Leshner 1988). The environmental appeals also provided justification for the RTD’s intended use of funds to purchase new buses. References to the measure’s effects on gasoline usage also spoke to public concerns with rising gas prices following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August (Lee 1991). As with previous measures, the official campaign brochure emphasized the measure’s effects on reducing congestion and touted its benefits to several areas of the county including the South Bay, San Gabriel Valley, San Fernando Valley and Westside (LACTC n.d.a).

Opponents of Proposition C included County Supervisor Pete Schabarum, anti-tax groups like the Howard Jarvis Taxpayer’s Association, and neighborhood groups like the Encino Homeowner’s Association, who were concerned with neighborhood impacts from rail development (Taylor 1990; Los Angeles County 1990 Ballot Booklet, Argument Against Proposition C). Not surprisingly, Proposition C’s opponents referenced the previous sales tax measures. Gerald Silver, the president of the Encino Home Owner’s Association, argued that approval of Propositions 108, 116 and 111 in the June election precluded the need for another transportation-related tax. The ballot argument against Proposition C went one step further, calling the half-cent sales tax that had been in place since 1982 a failure for having led to

the completion of only one transit project (the Blue Line) up to that point. The argument pointed out the “cost overruns” and “mismanagement” that accompanied the Long Beach light rail and Wilshire subway projects, concluding that Proposition C would only “throw more money” away without achieving tangible results. The rebuttal to the argument in favor of Proposition C similarly noted the Proposition A sales tax committed \$423 million to transportation projects, before asking (rhetorically) whether the freeways were less congested. Proposition C’s critics drew upon the troubled implementation of projects funded by the previous sales tax to provide a clear warning for the future.

Despite the supposedly disappointing implementation of the previous sales tax measure and its last-minute Commission approval, Proposition C eked out a victory by a margin of only 14,000 votes (50.43%) (*Los Angeles Times* 1990b, 1990c). The proposition succeeded in winning razor-thin voter approval by maintaining the shaky regional coalition in support of major rail transit improvements. It won in the traditional transit-friendly liberal voting areas of the Westside and Central Los Angeles by comfortable margins but lost in the San Fernando Valley (Proposition C Election Results Breakdown n.d). Voters in some of the largest cities in the South Bay (including Long Beach, Carson, and Hermosa Beach) supported the measure but many cities in the region opposed it. In contrast to previous elections, Proposition C carried many cities in the San Gabriel Valley (including Pasadena, Monterey Park, and even Pomona), only narrowly losing the San Gabriel Valley as a whole. The change in regional patterns of support may indicate the continued importance of specific projects: several of the cities in the eastern San Gabriel Valley lay along the proposed commuter rail line to San Bernardino. On the other hand, the reversal of voting in the San Fernando Valley (compared with 1980) likely reflected the intense opposition of neighborhood advocacy groups to at-grade construction along the Burbank right-of-way.

Proposition C was the only one of five tax measures on the county ballot to be approved. Measures that would have funded the jail system, parks, and a 911 call system upgrade all failed), although another transportation sales tax measure in neighboring Orange County that funded freeway improvements and the county’s purchase of right-of-way for its portion of the Metrolink Commuter Rail Line also won (Proposition C Election Results Breakdown n.d.; *Los Angeles Times* 1990b). The defeat of the jail measure, which provided for a division of the increased revenue between jails and transit had both

measures been approved, allowed for the imposition of the full half-cent sales tax for transportation (Fritsch and Simon 1990).

Following the vote, to sustain support for its program, the LACTC began preparing a long-term plan to identify specific highway and rail projects that would be undertaken with the approved funds. The final 30-Year Plan, adopted in April 1992, called for a program of urban rail lines in the densest, most congested corridors, commuter rail for long-distance travel, buses for access to and from rail stations, local circulation, and express transit service in non-rail corridors, new HOV lanes for carpools and express buses and closing existing gaps in the freeway system. The plan presented three potential rail scenarios: a "Fundable Plan," an "Expanded Plan," and an "Unconstrained Plan." The Fundable Plan included 200 miles of urban rail and an additional 200 miles of rail projects either completed, under construction or for which funding was considered feasible.<sup>48</sup> In addition, to satisfy various local jurisdictions, eight additional rail projects from the Candidate Corridor list were added, including:

- San Fernando Valley East-West project (Sepulveda to Canoga Park)
- Burbank-Glendale-Pasadena Airport Corridor project
- Exposition Boulevard Corridor project (USC to Santa Monica)
- South Coast project (El Segundo to Torrance),
- Green Line east extension to the Orange County Rail Connection
- Green Line west extension (LAX to Westchester)
- Pasadena Blue Line extension (Sierra Madre Villa to Azusa), and
- Route 60 Corridor (San Gabriel Valley)

(SCRTD 1991).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>The committed rail projects, those where funding and political support were in place, consisted of the Metrolink project, the Red, Blue and Green Lines, including the Green Line western extension, the Red Line San Fernando Valley East-West Transit Project extension to Sepulveda Boulevard, the Orange Line east and west extensions, the Pasadena Blue Line extension, the Blue Line Downtown Connector and the Union Station to Exposition project.

<sup>49</sup> While staff provided some information to the Board to evaluate the 14 potential rail lines, it did not include any detailed analysis of alternatives. In fact, staff indicated that:

The subjective nature of most criteria underscores the fact that no formula or calculation can produce a conclusive answer as to how these projects should be prioritized. However, these criteria capture in an approximate fashion the important considerations involved in evaluating the potential effectiveness of rail lines.

The criteria included: Project capital and operating costs estimates; year 2010 patronage estimate; cost per trip; demographics; project history/status; planned transportation improvements; impacts on rest of system; adequacy of existing transit; and local funding commitment (SCRTD 1991).

While the Fundable Plan assumed future financial and in-kind contributions from local jurisdictions, it did not provide for what the LACTC considered to be all needed highway, bus and rail projects. The Expanded Plan included five additional rail projects and new HOV facilities in the second and third decades to be funded through anticipated revenues from federal gasoline taxes and additional state rail bonds. In addition to all of the Candidate Corridor projects in the Fundable Plan, this plan included a connector line linking Burbank, Glendale, and Pasadena; connecting the Exposition and Green lines along the Crenshaw Corridor; extending the Pasadena Blue Line to the Pomona Valley; and extending the Green Line from Westchester to Marina Del Rey. Finally, the Unconstrained Plan contained a laundry list of non-prioritized projects the LACTC believed were needed in the county, however, there was no financial analysis undertaking for these additional projects.

The 30-Year Plan presented itself as a “balanced, integrated transportation system” that would increase transportation alternatives and significantly improve mobility, increase access to job markets, education and recreational facilities, and provide significant economic benefits for the region. The plan contained something for almost everyone. It promised expanded bus service, and contained hundreds of miles of new highway, bus and high capacity rail projects. Ambitious, but ultimately unrealistic, it reflected political needs in the region more than financial realities. It reflected, but explicitly deferred resolving, the continuing “bus vs. rail” debate. Buses were seen as an intermediate solution; a flexible and inexpensive alternative to automobile travel, providing local service in corridors not yet served by rail. But the LACTC made it clear that their effectiveness would ultimately become limited by increasing traffic congestion and that rail lines would be necessary. Rail, the agency insisted, was preferred despite its high capital cost, since it could operate two to three times faster and serve dense, heavily traveled corridors with greater safety and reliability and at much higher capacities than buses.

Throughout the 1980s, the “centrists” at the RTD pursued its subway project linking downtown, Miracle Mile, Hollywood, and the San Fernando Valley. The LACTC Board, dominated by county rather than city interests, viewed the RTD and its subway as pursuing a parochial agenda which failed to serve the broader interests of the entire region. To many of the new “regionalists” in the LACTC the downtown subway project was a product of old technology, and worse, outmoded politics. With the passage of Prop A and Prop C, the LACTC was poised to create what considered to be a truly modern, truly *regional*, rail system for Southern California.

## THE MERGER OF SCRTD AND LACTC

On April 1, 1993, following years of interagency wrangling, the state Legislature forced the consolidation of the Southern California Rapid Transit District and the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission to form the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) (Elkind 2014, 151). The two agencies had co-existed since the formation of the LACTC in 1976—the LACTC managed planning, design, and construction of the regional transportation system while the RTD was responsible for system operations (Garrett 2006, 440-441). By the early 1990s, neither agency was in good political standing. Among other problems, the RTD faced construction cost overruns on the Red Line subway as well as frequent bus driver strikes while the LACTC faced criticism over its expense accounts and choice of a foreign company to supply the Green Line’s rail cars (Elkind 2014, 148-149). Furthermore, the co-existence of the two agencies resulted in administrative gridlock and redundant overhead costs (Garrett 2006, 593). The merger was intended to place planning and operations under one entity and provide a more unified delivery of transit service in the Los Angeles region. The merger also sowed seeds of internal conflict between two parts of one organization that had different missions. The RTD staff were committed to operating a surface bus system while the LACTC staff was more concerned with planning for the future and building a regional rail network. The merger also created an awkward conflict between the central regional body that operated the largest regional bus network and the eighteen municipal bus system operators which depended on the new agency for their annual funding.

The new agency carried over financial commitments from both pre-existing agencies, placing it in a precarious and overcommitted financial situation from the very beginning. Though the Blue Line had opened in July 1990, the MTA still owed debt on the capital investment for its construction. The decrease in sales tax revenue from an ongoing economic recession meant that all Proposition A revenue for rail was dedicated to repaying the Blue Line debt and local match for the Metro Rail Red Line MOS-1 and MOS-2 (Elkind, 2014). Gasoline tax revenue was also declining as a result of a combination of increasing automobile fuel efficiency and stagnant tax rates that did not keep pace with inflation (Katz 2017). The ambitious rail program adopted by LACTC also took up most of the 40% Discretionary Funds provided under Proposition C. With so much revenue tied up in capital-intensive rail projects, the MTA had few uncommitted funds left to cover increasing rail and bus operating costs (Garrett 2006).

On May 14, 1993, the MTA Board reached a funding agreement with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for the final improvements to the Red Line (MOS-3), covering the North Hollywood, Mid-City, and Eastside extensions. The North Hollywood Extension would stretch from the Hollywood/Vine station northwest underneath the Hollywood Hills to the North Hollywood Station near Lankershim and Chandler Boulevards in the

San Fernando Valley. The Mid-City Extension, would run southwest from the Wilshire/Western Station, through the Olympic/Crenshaw station and on to the Pico/San Vicente Station. The third segment, the Eastside Extension, would run generally east from Union Station to the intersection of Whittier Boulevard and Atlantic Boulevard, serving Little Tokyo, Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles. This was the only major transit project programmed for the predominantly Latino Eastside Corridor.

Meanwhile, the MTA obtained environmental clearances and prepared engineering studies for the Exposition Corridor project, the Burbank/Glendale/Los Angeles light rail project, and the Northern and Eastern Green Line extensions. Storm clouds were on the horizon though, and the entire optimistic rail program would soon receive a cold drenching of fiscal reality.

By the mid-1990s, a number of factors were putting increasing financial pressure on the MTA. Congress had capped transit operating assistance funds, and the prolonged economic recession had triggered a sharp decline in sales tax revenues from both Prop A and Prop C and state gas tax monies (TDA). Even the most ardent rail proponents in the MTA began to recognize that the agency could no longer adhere to the 30-Year Plan developed by its predecessor, the LACTC.

## 1998 PROPOSITION A

By 1994, the MTA faced a \$300 million budget shortfall, \$126 million in operating funding needs and \$170 million in capital commitments (Henry 1994). The Metro Rail Red Line project was \$200 million over budget, making it one of the costliest subways per mile built in the United States (Yaroslavsky 1994). The MTA had only \$335 million in reserves, of which \$233 million was needed to complete the Green Line and Pasadena Line (Garrett 2006). In addition to its financial troubles, the Metro Rail engineering contractor, Shea-Kiewit-Kenny (SKK), encountered a number of construction setbacks that raised concerns over the agency's competency to manage and oversee a major construction project. Setbacks included groundwater flooding at the excavation site which stopped construction from July 1993 to January 1994 (Willman 1994a), a locomotive accident in March 1994 that hospitalized three workers (Willman 1994b), a welding-relating explosion that injured three workers in July 1994 (Willman and Pool 1994), and most significantly, a sinkhole that opened up along Hollywood Boulevard which buckled the iconic Walk of Fame in August 1994 (*Los Angeles Times* 1994).

On October 5, 1994, in response to these ongoing construction problems that captured the daily headlines, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) froze

\$1.6 billion in federal funding for Red Line construction (Willman and Simon 1994). The freeze prompted a *Los Angeles Times* article to call the MTA “the least credible public agency in the region” and the Metro Rail project a “public embarrassment” (Newman and Stark 1994). The FTA restored funding on November 10 after the MTA fired rail construction president Edward McSpedon and approved a number of management and engineering changes designed to prevent future construction mishaps (Simon and Willman 1994).

In an effort to increase revenue, the MTA board voted on a fare increase and fare structure change in July 1994. The plan proposed increasing the base fare from \$1.10 to \$1.35 per ride and eliminating the \$42 monthly pass (Elkind 2014).<sup>50</sup> MTA staff estimated that the fare increase would generate an additional \$51.4 million annually, but would decrease bus ridership by 6.9 percent. The board approved the fare structure change on September 1, 1994 (Garrett 2006). Coupled with the fare increase was a reduction in bus service and fleet size. The board voted to reduce annual bus service hours by 375,000, roughly 5 percent, as a combination of reduced service on low-performing routes and anticipated ridership decline from the fare increase. At the same time, the budget included funds to complete the Red Line MOS-1, tunneling and station construction for MOS-2, engineering work on MOS-3, completing construction on the Green Line, and work for two bridge segments for the Pasadena Blue Line (Garrett 2006),

Critics of the plan included the Labor/Community Strategy Center (L/CSC) and the Bus Riders Union (BRU) who argued that the fare increases and bus service reductions targeted lower-income minority bus riders and violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They filed a civil rights class action lawsuit on behalf of MTA’s bus riders for disproportionately investing in rail construction at the expense of bus service operations (Elkind 2014). The lawsuit resulted in the parties’ agreeing to a Consent Decree, effective October 1996, which required the MTA to improve its bus system. The Decree included provisions for reducing maximum load factors, increasing fleet size, and freezing the current fare structure for three years for general passes (Garrett 2006). The MTA faced an \$18 million increase in annual bus operating cost in order to comply with the agreement (Simon and Markman 1996b).

While the lawsuit was being heard in court, the MTA continued to face Metro Rail construction problems. Tunneling to the San Fernando Valley stopped twice in early 1995, once when ground sank half an inch in February (*Los Angeles Times* 1995) and once when the surface of Lankershim Boulevard sank five inches in March (Markman and Henry 1995). In June, a 70-foot-by-

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<sup>50</sup> The \$42 monthly pass cost was calculated based on average use of 38 rides per month. MTA estimated actual average use of 100 times per month, yielding the MTA only \$0.42 per ride (Garrett 2006, 647, n.114).

70-foot sinkhole opened in front of the main staging area for Metro Rail construction on Hollywood Boulevard. The MTA fired Shea-Kiewit-Kenny in July, terminating their \$179 million contract (Daunt and Boyer 1995). The sinkhole delayed construction until February 1996, significantly increasing the cost of the project (Simon and Lichtblau 1996).

In the aftermath of these events, state Senator Tom Hayden from Santa Monica declared that the MTA had demonstrated its inability to manage its own affairs and that lawmakers should act to “kill the subway before it kills us” (Lichtblau and Simon 1995). Undercurrents of anti-subway sentiment continued when Mayor Riordan called the \$2.2 billion subway line to the San Fernando Valley too expensive and suggested it should be replaced by a cheaper alternative such as a surface rail line (Martin 1995). That same week, Mayor Riordan also led the successful campaign to fire MTA CEO Franklin White, blaming him for failing to stop the “hemorrhage of bad publicity” as well as the cost overruns and management problems with subway construction (Simon and Lichtblau 1995). This change in management signaled an effort by the Mayor to restore the credibility of the MTA, and discussions of ending subway construction became more common in 1996 and 1997 as the MTA began to realize it had committed itself to projects it could not afford.

By the end of 1996, the MTA faced a series of significant financial problems, compounded by an anticipated \$33 million less in sales tax revenue based on revised economic projections and their commitment to funding bus service improvements imposed by the Consent Decree (Simon and Markman 1996b). In August, the state audited the MTA’s 20-year long-range plan and identified a \$1.3 billion shortfall based on projected revenues and expenses. At that time, the subway was \$123 million over budget, and the state auditors were wary of the agency’s past record of underestimating the cost of building future rail projects. The MTA recognized it would have to cut back or delay projects in its plan, potentially the proposed rail line to the San Fernando Valley and the extension of the subway to the Westside (Simon 1996). Two weeks later, Congress awarded the MTA less than half the federal funds the agency had requested for subway construction, resulting in a \$53 million hole in the construction budget (Simon and Markman 1996a). In December, the MTA board began to study building rail above ground to save money and extend transit to more neighborhoods sooner. The *Los Angeles Times* referred to these discussions as a “fundamental shift in the county’s transit plans (Simon and Markman 1996c).” Seven of the thirteen MTA board members told the *Times* that they had had “second thoughts about proceeding with the \$300-million-per-mile subway (Simon and Markman 1996d).

The passage of Proposition C in 1990 demonstrated that there was public support for subways and light rail in Los Angeles. By the mid-1990s,



however, the MTA faced a rising crescendo of criticism from the media and by several high-profile public officials for poor management and lax oversight of subway construction. This criticism may have stemmed from the perception that the MTA promised more to voters and the people whom they elect than the agency could realistically afford, and the agency as a result faced ongoing financial problems and funding shortfalls. For example, the Red Line subway project greatly exceeded its original cost estimates, leaving fewer funds for other voter-approved projects. There was general sentiment among those favoring other projects that the MTA focused too many of its resources on a single, very expensive subway that was eating up more and more of the agency's limited funds while benefiting only a small percentage of system riders. Both bus riders throughout the County and San Fernando Valley residents expressed frustration that they were not getting their fair share of service and improvements. Frequent construction setbacks such as the dramatic occurrences of sinkholes, worker injuries, and flooding raised concerns in the minds of many. These setbacks, coupled with budget overruns, led policymakers in the mid-1990s to question whether subway construction was the best use of limited funds.

From January 29 to February 2, 1997, the *Los Angeles Times* conducted a poll of 1,143 adults to assess on-going public support for subway construction. When asked if they favored or opposed building a subway in Los Angeles, 51 percent said they were opposed, 46 percent said they favored it, and 4 percent did not know. The results were split along racial and geographic lines. Fifty percent of Latinos favored the project while only 41 percent of whites and 38 percent of blacks did. Support was highest in South Los Angeles at 52 percent and lowest in the Valley at 41 percent (the Westside had 47 percent in favor and Central LA had 43 percent in favor). Fifty percent of respondents said it was unrealistic to think that a subway will reach most people who need public transportation, and 53 percent agreed that instead of spending more money to complete the subway, the MTA should use the money to put more buses on the streets. Forty-seven percent of white respondents agreed to prioritize buses, as did 56 percent of blacks and 53 percent of Latinos.

Overall, the results of the survey showed that residents were close to evenly split on support for the subway project. The survey also found that only one in four respondents had ever ridden the subway then in operation from Union Station to Wilshire Boulevard and Western Avenue. Only 37 percent of Latino respondents, 28 percent of blacks, and 20 percent of whites had ever taken a trip on the subway. A majority of those surveyed said they were closely following news about the subway project, and the prevalence of news articles regarding construction mishaps and cost overruns may have affected support for the project (Rabin and Markman 1997).

The MTA's leadership spent 1997 trying to regain credibility with the federal government. In January, Gordon Linton of the FTA wrote a letter to the MTA demanding a recovery plan to show how the agency planned to address the \$1 billion deficit in its 20-year long-range plan. He wrote that he was "alarmed by the lack of consensus of purpose among the members of the board and the lack of local political will to keep the subway on track (Simon and Markman 1997)."

The FTA rejected the MTA's first recovery plan proposal stating that they lacked confidence in the plan's underlying financial assumptions. The FTA demanded the MTA set up a reserve fund for improvements required by the Consent Decree and reduce sales tax projections for 1999-2013 by \$2.1 billion. The MTA approved a second recovery plan proposal in June. This proposal would ensure that the agency met the requirements of the Consent Decree but would delay the start of rail construction to the San Fernando Valley by seven years, from 2004 to 2011 (Simon and Rabin 1997). In response to this proposal, the Valley representatives on the City Council voted to withhold \$200 million in City Prop A and C matching funds unless the time frame was moved up (Garrett 2006). As a compromise, MTA officials agreed to start construction in 2007 instead of 2011 and to return \$50 million of the city's funds to the Valley if construction did not commence by this deadline (Martin and Simon 1997). The FTA rejected this second recovery plan proposal declaring that it was based on "optimistic and questionable financial assumptions (Simon 1997b)." FTA officials rejected three proposals in all and ultimately placed a freeze on transportation funds until the agency produced an adequate financially-constrained plan (Garrett 2006, 743).

In May 1998, the MTA board approved a "Restructuring Plan" which reflected the board's decision to temporarily suspend rail projects not currently under construction. FTA officials finally accepted the MTA's plan and Congress agreed to release \$62 million in rail transit funds and \$31 million for vehicle purchases. Los Angeles County Congressional representatives Julian Dixon and Esteban Torres agreed to release Red Line funding only after being assured the MTA would consider alternatives to the Eastside and Mid-City subway extensions (Garrett 2006).

By the start of 1998, the MTA projected an \$85 million budget deficit just to maintain current operations (Rabin and Simon 1998a). In response to their precarious financial position, the board voted to suspend construction on the Eastside, Mid-City, and Pasadena rail lines for at least six months until the agency could get its finances in order. Supervisor and MTA board member Zev Yaroslavsky expressed the view that this action did not go far enough and threatened to sponsor a ballot initiative to cut off sales tax funding for subway construction (Simon 1998). Yaroslavsky had announced in May 1997 that he was considering a petition to repeal the pair of half-cent tax

increases used to fund the MTA or redirect the \$866 million in annual receipts to improve bus service instead of heavily investing in new rail projects. He stated it was time to stop the agency from committing more sales tax money to rail construction as all signs “point to nothing for the next 15 to 20 years (Simon 1997a).” Yaroslavsky was not opposed to subways in general, but recognized that everyone wanted a subway in their own district, and believed no one would be willing to sacrifice their own project in order to maintain the financial stability of the MTA (Yaroslavsky 2017). By June, Yaroslavsky had gone ahead with his initiative, which prohibited the use of Proposition A and Proposition C sales tax funds for the construction of any new subways, and it had qualified for the November ballot (Rabin 1998a).

Talk of terminating subway construction accelerated in Spring of 1998. In April, Congressman Xavier Becerra from Los Angeles declared that the county should stop all subway construction, including ongoing projects, and reinvest all resources into light rail and bus service. He argued that the cost of building the subway was four to five times greater than constructing a light rail line and called on the MTA to abandon heavy rail (Rabin and Simon 1998a). The *Los Angeles Times* ran comments about the disproportionate investment in rail that currently was only used by 9 percent of transit riders. The *Los Angeles Times* also wrote that only \$50 million of the \$2.4 billion the agency had received in sales tax revenue did not go towards rail construction (Rabin 1998a). In June 1998, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that the MTA was \$7 billion in debt, with annual debt payments of \$360 million accounting for the authority’s largest single operating expense (about 30%). The MTA had borrowed \$3.4 billion for rail lines and its new headquarters, with an associated \$3.72 billion in interest payments and \$120 million in fees. To finance this debt, the MTA borrowed against anticipated receipts from the one-cent sales tax generated by Propositions A and C until 2029. The MTA kept borrowing and paid only interest and no principal payments on many of its bonds to keep payments low. While this is attractive in the short-term, it significantly increased the MTA’s long-term debt. One of the biggest problems with such a large amount of borrowing is that high interest payments reduced the amount of funds the MTA had to provide bus and rail service to its passengers (Rabin 1998a).

Yaroslavsky’s ballot measure was titled the “MTA Reform and Accountability Act.” He promoted the initiative on the basis that it would give Los Angeles a chance to create a new vision for its regional transportation system. By changing course, the MTA could free up future dollars for a more affordable and effective transit system. He maintained that he did not come to the decision to oppose subway construction lightly, as he had once supported the project “based on a set of assumptions that now have gone up in smoke: that we would have a higher rate of federal financial participation; that the MTA staff would competently manage its construction program; and that the MTA board would exercise rigorous oversight in protecting its taxpayers. It

didn't work out that way (Yaroslavsky 1998).” In addition to ending subway construction after completion of the North Hollywood line (Leeds 1998), the initiative would create a five-member Citizens Oversight Committee to monitor the MTA's spending of sales tax revenues and require an annual independent audit of the agency to ensure it complied with voter-approved restrictions on the use of transit tax monies (Rabin 1998b). An important though often overlooked aspect of this initiative is that it only banned the use of sales tax revenue for subway construction and did not prevent state or local funds from financing a future subway projects or using sales tax revenue for subway operations (Rabin 1998c).

Although many of Yaroslavsky's colleagues may have agreed with his view that the beleaguered MTA could not afford to emphasize expensive subways over more cost-effective light rail, others expressed concern that a permanent ban on subways was short-sighted and misguided. Supervisors Yvonne Brathwaite Burke and Gloria Molina, and Duarte City Councilman John Fasana, proposed a rival initiative to place a temporary moratorium on current subway projects for six years. It would also forbid future construction of underground heavy rail unless other alternatives were not feasible or would severely disrupt neighborhoods. Finally, it required extra safety measures where light-rail tracks met major intersections. (Bernstein 1998). The MTA board voted 7 to 4 against putting this alternative initiative on the November ballot.

No formal argument opposing the Reform and Accountability Act was submitted. Even Supervisor Burke who had championed the alternative initiative agreed that “the MTA is held in such low regard that any ballot argument against the initiative would be widely misinterpreted as an attempt to justify unjustifiable problems and poor decision-making (Rohrlich 1998).”

Yaroslavsky's measure was approved by voters on November 3, 1998 with 68.5 percent of the countywide vote. A total of 1.7 million people voted on the proposition, constituting 45 percent of eligible voters (County of Los Angeles 1998). The initiative passed in every assembly district in the county (Rabin and Simon 1998b). Even Eastside residents voted for the measure, despite the fact that the area was next in line for a subway. Eastside Latino politicians and transit advocates had openly opposed the measure, arguing that it was “unfair to punish the Eastside for past subway mismanagement” and “unfair to deprive one of the most densely populated and transit-dependent parts of the region from getting a subway (Elkind 2014, 180-181).” The *Los Angeles Times* wrote that the Eastside Latino vote was “an emotional response to the MTA's problems (Rabin and Simon 1998b).” A spokesman for Supervisor Molina said that “this initiative was really a referendum on the MTA. In our district, which is transit-dependent, if you asked for a vote thumbs up or thumbs down, our community would give a

resounding thumbs down to the MTA (Rabin and Simon 1998b).” Others, such as Supervisor Burke, believed the vote was a response to the lack of an opposing campaign against the initiative; voters had not been presented with a strong counterargument. Los Angeles City Councilman Nate Holden believed many voters may not have been aware that they had been paying taxes to build subways in other communities and were denying themselves the chance to get subways in their neighborhoods (Rabin and Simon 1998b). Author Ethan Elkind commented that MTA officials “privately expressed hope that they could overturn the measure after a few years, when the negative news stories about mismanagement and construction accidents faded from people’s memories and as the convenience of the subway became apparent to more voters (Elkind 2014, 181).”

Elkind’s commentary raises the question of how much negative media coverage of the MTA and the subway project influenced voting on Proposition A. Between August 15 and October 22, 1996, the MTA conducted a telephone survey of Los Angeles County residents to understand public perception of the agency. They collected 3,487 valid questionnaires (NuStats International 1998). Forty-five percent of respondents recalled hearing news stories about MTA in the past six months. Those respondents were two times as likely to rate the overall quality of transit service offered by the MTA as “poor” or “extremely bad” than those who had no recall of news stories (NuStats International 1998, 40). The survey found an association between recall of news stories and attitudes about the MTA as shown in the Table 2 (NuStats International 1998, 41). Responses to the statement “LACMTA has efficient cost-conscious management” varied the most between people who recalled news stories about the MTA and those who did not. While the absolute effect of negative media coverage of the MTA on the November 1998 cannot be determined, the results of this survey suggest it may have influenced the way residents voted in the election.

**Table 2. MTA Public Perception Survey 1996**

Percent Agree (includes “strongly agree” and “agree”	No News Recall	News Recall	Difference
LACMTA has efficient cost-conscious management	64%	42%	-22%
LACMTA decision-makers consider needs of residents	75%	61%	-14%
LACMTA effectively manages complex system	79%	70%	-9%
LACMTA employees care about quality service	74%	69%	-5%

*Source: NuStats International 1998.*

## CONCLUSION: TWO DECADES OF TRANSITION

The historical analysis in Chapter 2 showed that as Los Angeles grew from a small village to a sprawling metropolis, its citizens repeatedly participated in electoral politics by assessing, approving, and financing a wide variety of transportation investment programs. The nature and outcomes of electoral politics addressing transportation were in each period a reflection of rapid regional growth and the emerging technologies of their eras, particularly as railways grew to dominance and then were eclipsed by a focus for decades on autos and highways. The nature of propositions put before voters also reflected the national political mood of each period, for example in the early twentieth century when regional measures supported private investments in railways, to investments in ports and aviation later on that encouraged and matched federal programs, and finally to a regional highway network after the World War II. In Chapters 3 and 4 we saw how those influences played out in Los Angeles over four decades while it was emerging as a world class region.

Electoral politics in Los Angeles during the last four decades of the twentieth century were seen to be characterized by fits and starts and steps forward and backward, as is typical in American politics during periods of transition. The eighties and nineties marked transitions of several types from the previous two decades. At the start of this period, federal grant programs were the dominant element of transportation politics. Even as the enormous national Interstate Highway investment program wound down, in the early eighties the direction pursued clearly was to make local plans that would maximize federal grants. This meant shifting away from freeway building and turning instead toward rail transit. In combinations these trends led Los Angeles to craft a proposal for one significant federally sponsored “starter

line.” During these decades, the transportation agencies of the region repeatedly were reformed as they became in the eyes of the press and the public increasingly inadequate to address the rapidly changing national political environment and Los Angeles’ maturation as a region. Traffic congestion, important throughout the twentieth century, now became a dominant concern and congestion worsened despite many large freeway investments. Ironically, worsened congestion was coupled with focus on highways as transit was framed, perhaps ambitiously, as a better cure for regional ills.

By the end of this period of transitions, the reformulated agencies more boldly addressed meeting their transportation needs locally. They had faltered, lost public confidence, changed leadership and direction several times, but gradually a new regional transportation politics emerged, and Los Angeles was ready to take long strides in the new century. This meant developing a new regional politics based on multimodalism and dependent on local financial support and governance. While always trying to garner as much federal and state support as possible, early emphasis on a single starter rail line seems just a few decades later to have been misguided and almost quaint. As the County entered the new millennium transportation politics meant providing and financing its own programs with the approval of a supermajority of an increasingly diverse population. That in turn led to plans that self-consciously provide something for every community in the county and address users of multiple modes of transportation. In the next chapter we describe the ways in which that shift led in a relatively short time to the largest locally financed transportation investment program in the nation’s history.

# CHAPTER V. TRANSPORTATION TAX MEASURES, 2000-2016

With the completion of the final segment of the Red Line to North Hollywood in 2000, subway construction in the region appeared to face an uncertain future. During the first decade of the new century, however, the Wilshire Subway returned to center stage. The project was a core component of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's vision for the city after he was elected in July 2005 (Luberoff 2016, 1). At the same time, the MTA was working to rebrand itself under a new image. It adopted the nickname "Metro" and applied the easily identifiable "M" logo to all vehicles, signage, and information for consistent messaging (LACMTA 2004). Increasing efforts to promote a positive image of the agency and growing concern over traffic congestion combined to create an opportunity to revisit the question of subway construction. Finally, a number of barriers preventing subway construction under Wilshire Boulevard were lifted.

In February 2005, the Metro board voted 11-2 to put the issue of subway expansion back into regional long-range transportation plans. LA City Councilman Tom LaBonge, who represented Hollywood, sponsored the measure and called on the agency to support the removal of local and federal bans to tunneling under Wilshire Boulevard. Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who had championed the 1998 measure banning sales tax use for subway construction, voted in favor of the measure. The two dissenting votes came from Supervisor Michael Antonovich and MTA Chairman Frank Roberts, the Mayor of Lancaster (Williams 2005).

Next, in October 2006, U.S. District Court Judge Terry J. Hatter Jr. lifted the Consent Decree that had overseen and monitored MTA operations since 1996. Under the Consent Decree, Metro spent more than \$1 billion to purchase new buses and added more bus service to reduce overcrowding. For proponents of rail, the end of the Consent Decree created an opportunity for the agency to restructure its bus service around new rail lines, reduce duplicative service, and have more flexibility in allocating resources among service modes (Guccione 2006a).

Third, Congress lifted the ban on tunneling under Wilshire Boulevard that had been in place for two decades. In 2005, Mayor Villaraigosa and Councilman LaBonge worked with Congressman Waxman's office to convene a panel of experts to reassess tunneling risk under Wilshire Boulevard. The panel included two geotechnical tunneling experts chosen by Waxman and three others selected by the American Public Transportation Association. The panel concluded that "by following proper procedures and using appropriate



technologies, the risk would be no greater than for any other subway systems in the U.S.” Waxman agreed to lift the tunneling ban after receiving the panel’s report (Taylor et al. 2009).

Fourth, the Wilshire Subway began to receive support from previous opponents as traffic congestion worsened in Los Angeles. In November 2005, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote that homeowners who had previously opposed the Wilshire Subway had “mellowed as development has continued apace and traffic has increased (Groves 2005).” Cities that had previously resisted mass transit on the Westside such as Beverly Hills and West Hollywood now endorsed the Wilshire Subway as a way to help solve Los Angeles’ traffic problems. The president of the Beverly Wilshire Homes Association stated that “Things have gotten progressively worse over the past 20 years, and today we need rapid transit more than we ever did (Groves 2005).”

Yaroslavsky, the champion of the 1998 ban on using sales tax revenue for subway tunneling, came out strongly in support of the subway. He stated, “It is imperative...that Los Angeles figure out a better way than buses to serve the Wilshire corridor, the most heavily traveled in the city...We’ve got to find funds to dig a hole under Wilshire (Groves 2005).” He argued that his ban would not stop the project from moving forward as sales tax revenue could still be used for non-tunneling parts of the project while other local revenue sources could be used for tunneling (Levey 2006).

Instead of repealing the 1998 ban, policymakers looked to alternative funding sources for the new subway. Even if the ban had been repealed, future sales tax revenue had already been committed to new projects, and using those funds for the subway would only mean delaying projects that had already been promised to voters (Hyman 2006). The 2001 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) for Los Angeles County estimated that only \$11.2 billion (11%) of FY2000-05 revenue streams were uncommitted and available for projects not designated in earlier ballot measures. Of these funds, \$9.1 billion were designated to be spent only on capital projects, while \$2.1 billion could be used for operating or capital projects. Additionally, \$7.6 of the \$11.2 billion would only become available after fiscal year 2021 (LACMTA 2001, 7-8). The LRTP ultimately concluded that the service alternatives that could be added to the regional plan within existing funding constraints were “not likely to be acceptable to the public” and that “more aggressive strategies [were] needed to identify additional resources beyond \$11.2 billion (LACMTA 2001, 10).” As in earlier years, Metro’s pursuit of new funding mechanisms followed in part from the need to serve simultaneously the widely different geographic constituencies that had supported earlier measures.

In his introductory letter to Metro’s fiscal year 2007 budget, CEO Roger Snoble wrote that “in spite of extreme financial constraints, this resilient

agency will push forward on service improvements and major transit projects (LACMTA 2006a, I-1).” The budget increased annual Metro Bus service hours by 96,000 and Metro Rail service by 36,000 hours to offer the citizens of Los Angeles “new ways to beat traffic and the high price of gas (LACMTA 2006a, I-1).” In order to afford these service improvements, Metro drew down its Special Reserve Fund by \$131 million (LACMTA 2006a, IV-12),<sup>51</sup> depleting reserves from \$571 million to \$440 million (MTA 2006a, IV-17), an all-time low for the agency according to the *Los Angeles Times* (Guccione 2006b). Snoble also acknowledged in his letter that as operating costs continued to increase at a faster rate than operating revenues, the agency would need to find new ways to generate additional funds from advertising, property development along rail lines, or through the new automated fare system (LAMTA 2006a, I-2). The budget did not include a fare increase, responding to a Bus Riders Union (BRU) request that the agency not increase fares so soon after the lifting of the Consent Decree (Guccione 2006b). The following year Metro did raise fares to generate an additional \$30 million in revenue each year. While fare revenue increases when fares go up, ridership also decreases in response to the higher price. Discretionary transit riders can take alternative modes of transportation, so the burden of the fare increase tends to fall on transit-dependent people who have no choice but to continue to ride. The *Los Angeles Times* opined that the fare hike would not raise enough money “to build the kind of transit network L.A. needs” and that “the most obvious...solution would be a sales tax increase (*Los Angeles Times* 2007).”

## 2008 MEASURE R

By the start of 2008, Metro made it clear that it needed more funds to adequately meet the mobility demands of Los Angeles’ residents. Metro’s staff presented the 2008 Draft LRTP to the agency’s Planning and Programming Committee on January 16, 2008 (LACMTA Planning and Programming Committee 2008, 17). In order to maintain all projects promised under the 2001 LRTP, the agency would have to lift the Prop C debt cap as early as 2013 to increase the agency’s borrowing power (LACMTA Planning and Programming Committee, 2008, 2). The agency would need to delay projects from the original 2001 LRTP, and no major new capital projects could be started before 2030 (Luberoff 2016, 17). Metro called for aggressive pursuit of new revenue sources as current funding levels were not enough “to reach the level of mobility that this county requires (LACMTA Planning and Programming Committee 2008, 39).” The presentation referenced the instability of state and federal funding sources, the declining purchasing power of the gasoline tax, and the need for a protected funding source.

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51 The Special Reserve Fund is where Metro stores its revenue from Proposition A, Proposition C, the Transportation Development Act (TDA) sales tax revenue, and State Transit Assistance (STA) gasoline tax revenue.

A week before this presentation, hundreds of transit advocates met to discuss a potential ballot measure to more raise funds. The event, held at the Cathedral of our Lady of Angels, was perhaps the most pivotal event in the development of the 2008 ballot measure. It was sponsored by MoveLA, a “broad-based coalition of environmental, labor, and business leaders who supported increased spending on transit (Luberoff 2016, 18).” MoveLA was created in October 2007 by Denny Zane, former mayor of Santa Monica, with support from Terry O’Day and Diane Forte of Environment Now. Growing out of an earlier coalition called the “Subway to the Sea Coalition,” It brought together over 300 people to identify new sources of funding for transit in Los Angeles, with raising the sales tax a potential funding option. Zane stated the event was a way to show local politicians that a “broad coalition of interests would stand behind a campaign for transit funding (Hyman 2008a).”

At the event, John Fairbanks reported results of a survey his polling firm had conducted in November 2007. The survey found that 60 percent of respondents expressed initial support for a sales tax measure while 69 percent expressed support after hearing more about what projects the measure might fund and why it was needed (Luberoff 2016). Fairbanks’ polling found that the sales tax was the most popular of potential funding sources among all major categories of voters, including those having lower incomes—the stated rationale being that “it doesn’t feel like you’re being punished and its shared by everybody (Luberoff 2016, 19).” Two more polls, one paid for by Zev Yaroslavsky, and one by Metro in June, found 70 and 66 percent of voters, respectively, willing to support a transit tax measure (Luberoff 2016, 21). The results of these polls were promising and indicated that 2/3 voter support might be achievable.

State Assembly member Mike Feuer introduced Assembly Bill (AB) 2321 in February 2008, providing the legislative foundation for the ballot measure that was to become Measure R.<sup>52</sup> The bill amended the sales tax authority granted by MTA’s founding legislation to increase the period during which the agency could impose a half cent sales tax from 6 ½ to 30 years .

As noted in the previous chapter, Proposition 13, enacted in 1978, required special taxes imposed by counties, cities, and special districts to achieve a two-thirds vote for passage. In 1982, as noted in the previous chapter, the California Supreme Court had determined in *Los Angeles County Transportation Commission v. Richmond*, 31 Cal. 3d 197 (1982), that Prop A, passed in 1980, did not require a supermajority vote since the LACTC was not considered a special district because it did not have the authority to levy

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52 Assembly Bill 2321 (Feuer), 2007-2008 Reg. Session (Cal. 2008). Retrieved from [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab\\_2301-2350/ab\\_2321\\_bill\\_20080221\\_introduced.pdf](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_2301-2350/ab_2321_bill_20080221_introduced.pdf).

a property tax. This also applied to passage of Prop C in 1990. However, in 1991 the Court overturned this ruling in *Rider v. County of San Diego*, 1 Cal. 4<sup>th</sup> 1 (1991), by redefining a special district as any “local taxing authority created to raise funds for city or county purposes to replace revenues lost because of the restrictions of Proposition 13 (1 Cal. 4<sup>th</sup> at 11).” Therefore, by the time Measure R was in development, Metro was required to secure a supermajority vote for the measure to pass. This change had important political ramifications.

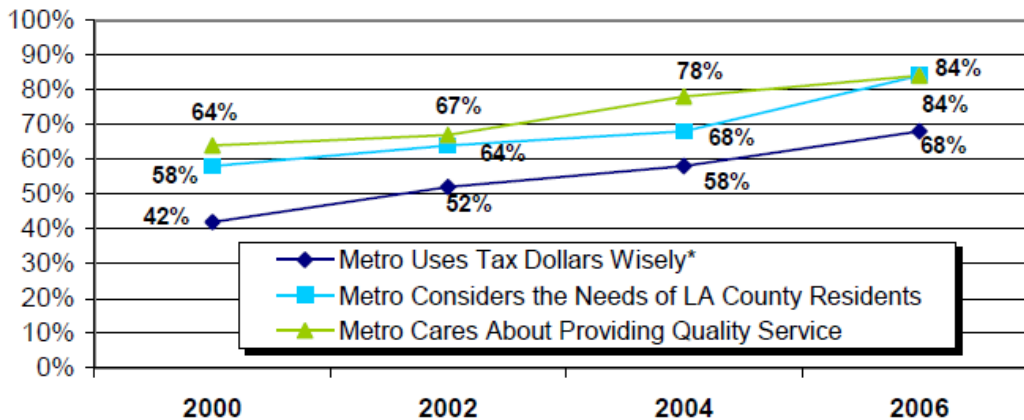
While the construction of the Wilshire Subway may have been the initial driving force behind the sales tax measure, it was clear that the measure would have to include a wide variety of projects to appeal to 67 percent of voters in the county. The Westside cities to be served by the subway<sup>53</sup> comprised just 5.5 percent of the countywide population (American Community Survey 2009), so asking the whole county to pay for the project would be a difficult sell. As a representative of northern Los Angeles County, Supervisor Mike Antonovich was opposed to the measure from the beginning, on grounds that that all of the money “would be drained into the subway (Hyman 2008a).”

Another obstacle was Metro’s public image. The passage of the MTA Reform and Accountability Act in 1998 had signaled general distrust in the agency’s ability to responsibly manage its finances. When Robert Snoble replaced Julian Burke as CEO he waged a strong campaign to rebuild the agency’s public image with a five-pronged strategy (Luberoff 2016, 11). Snoble worked to improve management of day-to-day operations, increase farebox recovery, reprioritize and sequence new capital projects, rebuild relationships with local businesses, and increase the agency’s advertising budget tenfold. Part of his outreach effort included forming “Mobility 21,” a group devoted to developing solutions to countywide transportation issues. This diverse organization includes elected officials and representatives of businesses, local municipalities, and community leaders, including the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and Automobile Club of Southern California. As shown in the chart below, Metro’s periodic polling showed an increasingly positive public perception of its image (Figure 26).

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53 Including Beverly Hills, Culver City, Santa Monica, West Hollywood and the unincorporated areas of Ladera Heights and View Park-Windsor Hills.

**Figure 26. Metro General Public Survey (2006)**  
**Changes in Opinions About Metro**



\* This question was "Metro has efficient and cost conscious management" through July, 2004 and then changed to "Metro uses tax dollars wisely."

Source: LACMTA 2006b, p. 20.

Metro staff presented a draft spending plan for inclusion in a sales tax ballot measure was presented to the Metro board in June 2008. The initial funding allocation is shown in Table 3. While the original plan tried to give everyone a "slice of the pie," it was still met with opposition from key stakeholders (Luberoff 2016, 21-22). The BRU and bus employee unions pointed out that significantly more money was dedicated to rail improvements over bus improvements, so the final plan decreased the rail funding allocation by 5 percent (from 40% to 35%) and increased the bus allocation by a like amount (from 25% to 30%). The Automobile Club of Southern California wanted more funding dedicated to highway improvements. Its support for the measure was critical because its large membership results in a great deal of influence on transportation policy in the region. In response, the final plan increased funding for highway improvement projects by 5 percent (from 15% to 20%). To afford this increase, local redistribution was reduced from 20 to 15 percent (Luberoff 2016, 23).

**Table 3. Funding Allocation for Measure R**

Project Type	Initial Funding Allocation	Final Funding Allocation
New Metro Rail/BRT projects	40%	35%
Local distribution for transit, street, bikeway, and pedestrian improvements	20%	15%
Metro bus service and operations	15%	20%
Highway improvements, HOV lanes	15%	20%
Operation and maintenance of new rail lines	5%	5%
Commuter rail (Metrolink) investment and operations	5%	3%
Metro rail capital - system improvements, rail cars	0%	2%

The original plan had also upset some officials in the region that labels itself the Gateway Cities who wanted more projects in the southeast part of the County. State Senator Jenny Oropeza of Long Beach insisted on guaranteed funding for the Green Line extension to Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). Supporters of the Pasadena Gold Line demanded a funding guarantee for construction beyond Azusa. Finally, state Senator Gil Cedillo wanted funding guaranteed for a costly tunnel project that would enable completion of the SR 710 Freeway between the Santa Monica Freeway and Pasadena, a link in the regional highway network that had been bitterly fought over for five decades. The revised plan mollified the first two of these complaints, by including \$240 million for a project that would connect the Gateway Cities with Union Station, and accelerating the timeline for the Green Line airport connection (Luberoff 2016, 24).

On July 24, the Metro board voted 9-2 in support of the ballot measure to raise the local sales tax another half cent for 30 years. The same day, the usual practice of rotating the chairmanship of the Metro board led Los Angeles Mayor Villaraigosa to become its new chairman. He encouraged support of the sales tax measure by emphasizing the costs of traffic congestion:

There is no comparison between the \$25 our measure will cost the average Angeleno each year and the \$2,000 we each spend on wasted

gas, car repairs and time lost in traffic...In L.A., traffic congestion costs the region \$9.3 billion every year, and we waste 384 million gallons of gas stuck in traffic. The average commuter spends three full days each year trapped in gridlock...while the congestion blocking our delivery trucks is driving up shipping costs by up to 250 percent (Villaraigosa 2008).

The two dissenters were conservative County Supervisor Michael Antonovich and John Fasana, a city council member from Duarte (Luberoff 2016, 27). Fasana expressed concerns over regional equity and questioned what would happen to revenue earmarked for projects that ultimately could not be built. He sponsored a motion to allocate \$80 million in seed money to the Gold Line extension immediately, so it could begin to seek out federal funds (Hymon 2008b). The board declined to approve the motion, upsetting representatives from the San Gabriel Valley. County Supervisor Gloria Molina stated that the measure was not fair to some parts of the county and abstained from the vote, expressing dissatisfaction with the fact that the Eastside got a light rail line while the Westside got a subway (Hymon and Weikel 2008; Hymon, 2008).

The Board also voted on the following \$26 billion expenditure plan:

#### Local Return

\$6 billion to cities for transportation needs

#### Transit Improvements

\$7.9 billion for countywide bus operations

\$1.1 billion for Metrolink operations

\$4 billion for Westside subway extension

\$1 billion for transit along the 405 Freeway in the Sepulveda Pass

\$971 million for Crenshaw Boulevard light rail or busway

\$925 million for Expo Line light rail to Santa Monica

\$735 million for Gold Line from Pasadena to Claremont

#### Highway Improvements

\$906 million for interchange improvements on the 405, 110, 105 and 91 freeways

\$780 million for a 710 Freeway tunnel under South Pasadena

\$590 million for 605 Freeway interchange improvements

\$590 million for 710 Freeway improvements in south L.A. County

\$400 million for Alameda Corridor East street crossing separations

\$250 million for countywide sound wall expansion

The County Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 in August against putting the measure on the November ballot. Those opposing the measure, Supervisors Don Knabe, Mike Antonovich, and Gloria Molina, argued that “this ordinance

was not crafted with countywide consensus nor does it provide an acceptable standard of long-term equity for all regions of Los Angeles County (Rutten 2008).” Supervisors Yaroslavsky and Burke supported the measure. The 3-2 vote forced the sales tax to be placed onto a supplemental ballot which would cost taxpayers an additional \$10 million. After learning about this additional cost for a separate ballot, Supervisor Knabe reversed his negative vote, even though he continued to voice opposition to the measure (Hymon, 2008). The next step was to have it approved by the state Senate.

On August 14, the state Senate Appropriations Committee approved AB 2321 (Feuer)<sup>54</sup> after it had been amended to include \$200 million for the Green Line airport extension at the insistence of state Senator Oropeza (Hymon 2008c). Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the bill on September 25, giving Metro the authority to place Measure R on the November 4<sup>th</sup> ballot.<sup>55</sup>

The pro-Measure R campaign raised over \$4 million in October 2008. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) provided \$900,000, excited by the prospect of having a subway stop at its front door on the proposed Wilshire Subway. The museum’s president noted that congestion and lack of connections to highways and transit were among the top reasons people did not visit the museum. As in the Proposition A campaign, labor groups, a real estate development firm, a transportation engineering firm and businesses with investments in downtown and along the subway route rounded out the list of top supporters. Major donors to the pro-Measure R campaign included (Luberoff 2016, 30):

- \$900,000 - LACMA
- \$200,000 - Laborers International Union of North America
- \$200,000 - Jerry Perenchino, former head of Univision
- \$150,000 - Casden West LLC, local development firm on the Westside
- \$125,000 - Carpenters-Contractors Cooperation Committee
- \$100,000 - AECOM, transportation engineering services
- \$100,000 - Anschutz Entertainment Group, owner of the Staples Center
- \$100,000 - Eli Broad, Los Angeles’ leading philanthropist
- \$100,000 - Occidental Petroleum, support of Armand Hammer Museum located along proposed Wilshire subway alignment.

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54 Assembly Bill 2321 (Feuer), 2007-2008 Reg. Session (Cal. 2008). Retrieved from [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab\\_2301-2350/ab\\_2321\\_bill\\_20080814\\_amend\\_ed\\_sen\\_v93.pdf](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_2301-2350/ab_2321_bill_20080814_amend_ed_sen_v93.pdf).

55 Complete Bill History. Assembly Bill 2321 (Feuer), 2007-2008 Reg. Session (Cal. 2008). Retrieved from [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab\\_2301-2350/ab\\_2321\\_bill\\_20080925\\_history.html](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/07-08/bill/asm/ab_2301-2350/ab_2321_bill_20080925_history.html).



The Measure R campaign developed five television advertisements which, as in the previous two campaigns, touted provisions of the measure that appealed to different constituencies. The first laid out the transportation benefits of the measure, stating that Measure R was “the roadmap to traffic relief” and would provide expanded mass transit, modernized freeways, light rail to the airport, and synchronized traffic lights. Another ad claimed that Measure R would “cut the rates of childhood asthma by reducing smog and air pollution,” appealing to those concerned about public health and environmental issues. A third one featured a UCLA professor of earthquake engineering opining that Measure R would “reduce the likelihood of ‘devastating damage from future earthquakes,’” portraying Measure R as a safety measure, even though bridge and tunnel repairs were a small portion of the overall spending plan (Luberoff 2016, 31). Measure R also received endorsements from The *Los Angeles Times*, *La Opinión*, and the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

Measure R had a number of opponents, but no coordinated opposition campaign effort. The BRU was one of the strongest opponents who argued against the measure on equity and environmental grounds. They maintained that Measure R’s highway projects would lead to more pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and that the increased sales tax would place a heavy financial burden on low-income communities (Luberoff 2016, 31-32). Metro board member John Fasana critiqued the measure on the traditional grounds of geographic inequality, claiming that it was unfair for residents of the San Gabriel Valley to receive only 85 cents worth of transportation improvements for every dollar of sales tax that they paid (Luberoff 2016, 32).

On November 4, 2008, voters were presented with the following statement on their ballots:

**Measure R - Traffic Relief. Rail Extensions. Reduce Foreign Oil Dependence:** To: Synchronize traffic signals; Repair potholes; Extend light rail with airport connections; Improve freeway traffic flow (5, 10, 14, 60, 101, 110, 138, 210, 405, 605, 710); Keep senior/student/disabled fares low; Provide clean-fuel buses; Expand subway/Metrolink/bus service; Dedicate millions for community traffic relief; Shall Los Angeles County’s sales tax increase one-half cent for 30 years with independent audits, public review of expenditures, all locally controlled? (Official Sample Ballot and Voter Instructions, General Election, November 4, 2008).

The ballot language was generally vague, while alluding to a few specific projects, to appeal to a broad voter base. Unlike previous measures, the text led with the provisions for road improvements including traffic signals and fixing potholes. While the language went into some detail about which

freeways would see traffic relief, it provided few details on how the transit network would be expanded. “Expand subway/MetroLink/bus service” could mean increasing the frequency of existing subway service rather than constructing new subway routes. Voters not familiar with the ballot measure would not know this phrase meant funding a subway under Wilshire Boulevard. The only specific transit project mentioned was the reference to light rail airport connections. As noted earlier, failure to include extending the Green Line to LAX had almost cost the measure approval by the state Senate. Despite the title, the ballot language included no reference to how the measure would help reduce foreign oil dependence.

Just like the ballot language, the formal argument in the voter instruction booklet in support of Measure R was creatively crafted to appeal to a wide range of voters. A vote for Measure R was a vote for “traffic relief, light rail, and cleaner air” Echoing previous campaigns, the pro-Measure R argument emphasized “traffic relief for every part of Los Angeles County” for only an average of \$25 per person per year, half the cost of a tank of gas (Official Sample Ballot and Voter Instructions, General Election, November 4, 2008, 161-016). It refrained from referring to any specific project or the dates by which voters could expect projects to be completed. The emphasis was not placed on subway, light rail, or bus service, but rather the synchronization of thousands of traffic signals throughout the County. Measure R promised to improve traffic flow by adding 160 miles of freeway capacity, through a combination of new freeway lanes and enhancements on existing freeways. The argument briefly mentioned new light rail (**bolded and underlined**) and subways (neither bolded nor underlined). There was no mention of new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines, better bus service, or MetroLink improvements. The only bus improvements mentioned were better express service, new clean-fuel vehicles, and low fares for seniors, students, and persons with disabilities. Finally, Measure R promised to create 210,000 new jobs and emphasized that federal and state funds would be reinvested locally rather than going to other municipalities. Measure R was formally endorsed by former Mayor Richard Riordan, LA County Business Federation CEO Tracy Rafter, Police Commissioner John Mack, MTA Chair Mayor Villaraigosa, and County Supervisor Yaroslavsky (Official Sample Ballot and Voter Instructions, General Election, November 4, 2008, 161-016).

The ballot argument against Measure R focused on the issue of geographic equity emphasizing that areas outside of Central LA would not receive their fair share of funds. It insisted that residents in these regions would be subsidizing subway construction in other parts of the county with little benefit to their own communities. For example, the San Fernando Valley comprised 15 percent of the population but would only receive 5 percent of Measure R funding. Finally, appealing to concerns over wasteful spending, it stated that the \$5.6 million going to Metro would not guarantee any new bus service and would instead just help the agency out of its operating deficit

(Official Sample Ballot and Voter Instructions, General Election, November 4, 2008, 161-016, 161-018 to 161-019). The Argument Against Measure R was sponsored by County Supervisor and MTA Board Director Michael Antonovich, City of El Monte Mayor Pro Tem Juventino Gomez, County Supervisor and MTA Board Director Don Knabe, City of Duarte Mayor Pro Tem and MTA Board Director John Fasana, and City of Glendale Councilmember and MTA Board Director Ara Najarian.

The argument makes no mention of whether or not Measure R would actually lead to reduced traffic levels, and does not draw attention to the efficacy of rail lines already constructed (as the argument against Proposition C had done). Instead, the “No on R” argument focused on nuances of transit projects in specific geographic areas that many voters were likely not at all interested in. The Rebuttal Argument countered these geographic concerns by pointing out that every municipality would receive millions of local return dollars to repair potholes, synchronize signals, and improve safety (Official Sample Ballot and Voter Instructions, General Election, November 4, 2008, 161-020 to 161-021). This was intended to resonate with the majority of voters who did not use transit and to encourage them to vote for Measure R.

Assembly member Mike Feuer believed that November 2008 was the ideal time for Measure R because the historic presidential election would attract an electorate more in favor of mass transit (Hyman 2008d). The proponents of Measure R were not alone in thinking the November 2008 election was a strategic time to ask voters for more money. Voters faced four additional tax-related measures on the November ballot, though if approved the others would raise property taxes or increase bonded indebtedness backed by general revenue rather than increasing sales taxes:

Proposition A—a property tax increase to fund anti-gang programs.

Measure Q—a \$7 billion bond issue requested by the Los Angeles Unified School District Measure J—a \$3.5 billion facilities bond for community colleges.

Proposition 1A—a \$10 billion bond issue for the California High-Speed Rail (HSR) project.

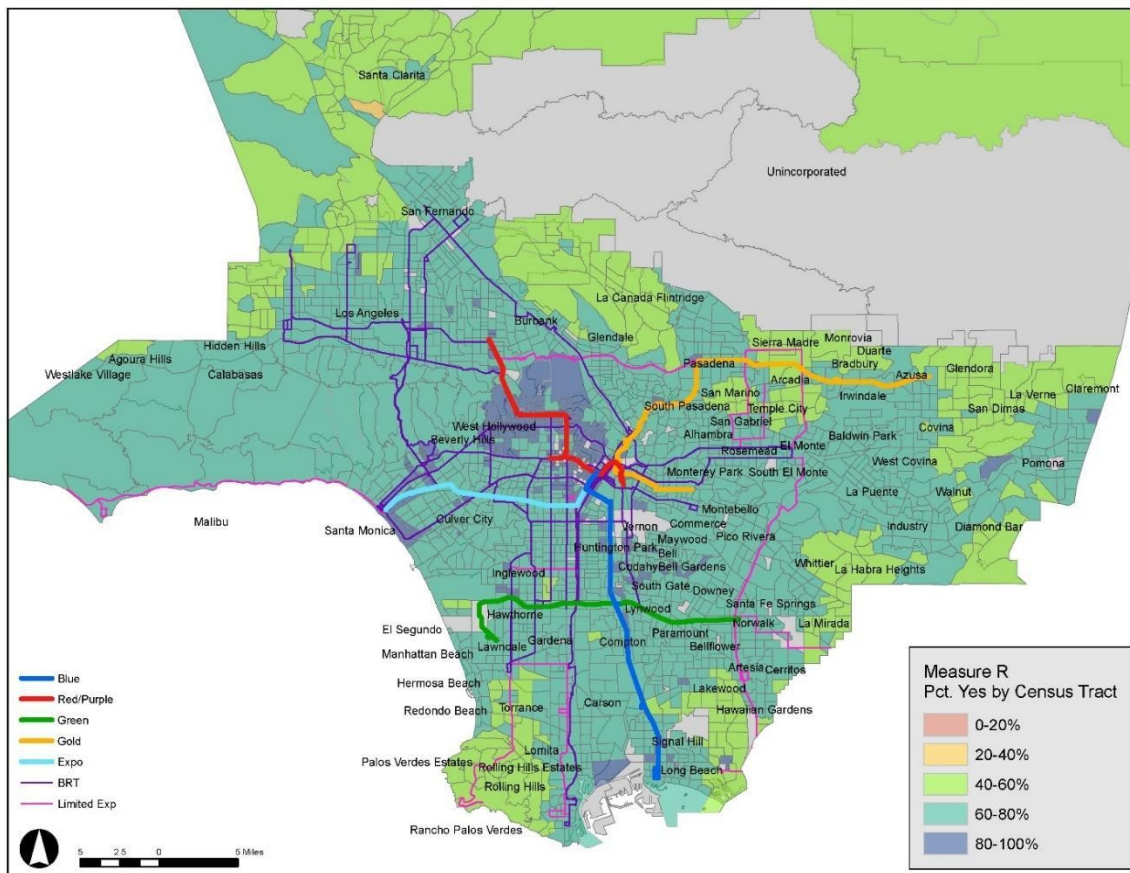
The educational measures only required 55 percent of the vote to pass compared to the 67 percent required for the anti-gang tax and Measure R (Zahniser 2008). The HSR project was estimated to cost \$45 billion for a system that will extend over 800 miles, connecting San Francisco and Los Angeles in less than three hours travel time (Lazarus 2008). The large number of new tax-related initiatives on the ballot coupled with the start of the Great Recession increased uncertainty as to how people would vote. Unemployment was increasing, consumer confidence was decreasing, and

people were starting to worry about the security of their financial assets. Some of the campaigns refocused their messages to emphasize job creation and economic revitalization to attract votes. In particular, Measure R proponents stated frequently that 210,000 new construction jobs would be created by the new transit and highway projects (Zahniser, Hymon and Groves 2008).

On election day Measure R was approved with 67.9 percent of the vote. Eighty-two percent of registered voters turned out for the Presidential election, and 89 percent of people who voted cast a ballot for or against Measure R (County of Los Angeles Department of Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk 2008). Barack Obama received 69.2 percent of the Presidential vote in Los Angeles County, indicating a liberal electorate. Dense and liberal West Hollywood supported the measure most strongly among municipalities in the county, with 84 percent of votes in favor. La Habra Heights, in the San Gabriel Valley, was the least supportive city, with only 46 percent of votes in favor (Luberoff 2016, 33). The measure won the majority of the vote in almost every community in the San Fernando Valley, the South Bay and the southeast county—three areas which Proposition C and many of the earlier measures had failed to carry. In the San Gabriel Valley, the measure failed to win 50 percent or more of votes in only a few communities on the northern and southern fringes, amounting to a significant improvement over the voting patterns in 1990 despite the opposition of local politicians. The map in Figure 27 shows the voting results by census tract. Zev Yaroslavsky attributed Measure R's success to the fact that "there was something in this for every part of the county" and that it coincided with President Obama's election. He also commented that the Measure R's success during the worst recession in recent history was a testament to people's frustration with growing traffic congestion (Luberoff 2016, 34).

Measure R took effect on July 1, 2009 and increased the Los Angeles County sales tax rate to 9.75 percent (Hymon 2008e). But due to the poor economic conditions, forecasts predicted it would generate \$1.8 billion less in sales tax revenue over its 30-year life than initially projected. Revenues from Proposition A and Proposition C sales taxes were also in decline, down 19.5 percent in the first quarter of 2009 compared with the same quarter in 2008. The *Los Angeles Times* speculated that the high tax rate coupled with the economic downturn may have discouraged residents from shopping or led them to shop in other counties which had lower sales tax rates (Weikel 2009a).

**Figure 27. Map of Measure R Voting Results by Census Tract**



*Source: Data compiled by authors from Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder Statement of Votes Cast, November 4, 2008 General Election.*

## 2012 MEASURE J

Shortly after Measure R was approved by the voters, Mayor Villaraigosa began lobbying the Metro board to accelerate construction of major projects to create jobs and revitalize Los Angeles' declining economy. Construction employment had peaked in 2006 and had fallen by half in the following two years (Luberoff 2016, 37). To raise the money to advance project timelines, the agency would have to borrow against future sales tax revenues.

Despite the passage of Measure R, Metro faced uncertain financial conditions at the start of 2009. The economic downturn led people to curtail their spending leaving public transit agencies reliant on declining sales tax and farebox revenues. The State of California faced a \$41 billion deficit and sought to save \$559 million by eliminating grants to local transit agencies. Metro relied on state grants for 16 percent of its operating budget; the loss

of state grants coupled with less revenue from sales taxes would force the agency to make service cuts or operate at a deficit (Fausset 2009).

Metro could not increase fares to offset the revenue loss because Measure R banned regular fare increases until 2010. Additionally, for many of its projects Measure R funds provided only the local match for state and federal funding. With uncertainty in those sources, the agency faced the prospect of having to postpone projects recently promised to voters (Fausset 2009).

In Fall 2009, Mayor Villaraigosa released his “Los Angeles 30/10 Initiative,” a plan to construct Measure R’s transit projects over a 10-year period instead of a 30-year timeframe (Rutten 2010). According to the plan, accelerating the construction schedule would allow the agency to avoid \$13.7 billion in project costs due to inflation, reduce project delivery costs by \$3.7 billion (20%), immediately create hundreds of thousands of new jobs, and provide transportation benefits to Los Angeles residents sooner (Office of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa 2010). A poll conducted by Fairbanks, Maslin, Maullin & Associates found that 61 percent of registered voters did not think Measure R projects were being built fast enough to relieve traffic congestion (Weikel 2009b). Summarized in Figure 28, this plan would address those concerns by accelerating the Green Line LAX and South Bay extensions by 10 and 17 years, respectively, the final phase of the Westside Subway (Purple Line) by 19 years, and the Eastside-Phase 2 (Gold Line) extension by 18 years. The plan’s biggest hurdle was that Metro needed an additional \$8.8 billion to complete the projects and only \$5.8 billion was available in the 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan (Office of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa 2010).

**Figure 28. 30/10 Initiative Timeline**

Project	Status	Year Opens Current Plan	Year Opens “30/10”
SFV North-South (Canoga)	Construction	2013	2013
Exposition - Phase 2	Environmental	2015	2015
Gold Line Foothill (Azusa)	Start < 12 mos.	2017	2014
Crenshaw	Environmental	2018	2016
SFV East North-South	Planning	2018	2018
Regional Connector	Environmental	2019	2017
Westside Subway (Purple Line)	Environmental	2019, 26, 36	2017
West Santa Ana Branch	----	2027	2018
Green Line - LAX	----	2028	2018
Eastside - Phase 2	Environmental	2035	2017
Green Line - South Bay	Environmental	2035	2018
SFV I-405	----	2039	2018

Mayor Villaraigosa appealed to the federal government for the needed funding, but Congress was slow to respond amid a severe economic crisis. Villaraigosa turned to other approaches, primarily a new ballot measure that would extend Measure R beyond 2039 so the agency could borrow against future sales tax revenues. On January 4, 2012, Assembly member Feuer introduced Assembly Bill 1446 to give Metro authority to extend Measure R for an indefinite number of years subject to voter approval.<sup>56</sup> Feuer stated that this would allow Metro to accelerate projects without having to rely on uncertain state or federal funding (Bloomekatz 2012a).

As initially proposed, Measure J—the “J” stood for the “jobs” it would create—would have extended Measure R until voters decided to end it. Measure J would not have raised the sales tax yet again. It would instead have made permanent the sales tax increase that voters had approved with 2008’s Measure R. Measure R had narrowly passed, with 67 percent of the vote, but only raised the sales tax for 30 years. Shortly after its victory, people both inside and outside Metro came to see the sunset provision as limiting. The relatively short span of the tax made its revenue more difficult to bond against, which slowed delivery of the measure’s projects. By making Measure R’s tax increase permanent, Measure J would have enhanced Metro’s financing capacity, and enabled the agency to deliver on Measure R’s promised projects faster. Measure J would speed up project timeframes so major projects would be completed in 13 rather than 27 years.

Initial polling on Measure J by Loyola Marymount University found that only 54 percent of respondents would be willing to extend Measure R beyond 30 years, significantly below the voting threshold required for the measure to pass (Bloomekatz 2012b). On June 28, the Metro board voted 10-3 to put Measure J on the November ballot. Director Diane DuBois proposed an amendment to include a 30-year sunset provision. Her argument was that eliminating the tax in the future would be very expensive without such a provision because ending it would require a campaign and another election (LACMTA Board of Directors 2012, 13). The board preferred to make the extension permanent and defeated her motion.

County Supervisor and Metro Board member Mark Ridley-Thomas proposed a motion to delay the vote on the grounds that polling on Measure J support was outdated in light of three new state financing measures that had been placed on the ballot. He believed that voter opposition to measures designed to raise revenue may have been growing, and that Metro should not commit to spending \$10 million on the campaign if the measure was unlikely to pass.

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<sup>56</sup> Assembly Bill 1446 (Feuer). California Legislature, 2011-12 Regular Session introduced January 4, 2012.  
[http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab\\_1401-1450/ab\\_1446\\_bill\\_20120104\\_introduced.pdf](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/11-12/bill/asm/ab_1401-1450/ab_1446_bill_20120104_introduced.pdf).

He proposed delaying the vote until new polling could be conducted to confirm public support for the measure. His amendment was defeated in a 9-3 vote (LACMTA Board of Directors 2012, 14).

The Measure J campaign raised \$3.3 million. As was the case with the campaign for Measure R, the largest donors included businesses (and a developer) with investments adjacent to proposed rail lines, labor unions and LACMA (Luberoff 2016, 37-38; Saillant and Mai-Duc 2012):

- \$500,000 - LACMA
- \$250,000 - Eli Broad
- \$250,000 - Los Angeles Dodgers
- \$200,000 - Laborers Union
- \$200,000 - Westfield LLC
- \$200,000 - Anschutz Entertainment Group
- \$100,000 - NBC Universal
- \$100,000 - Occidental Petroleum
- \$100,000 - Unite Here, labor union.

One argument made against the measure was that heavy borrowing against future sales tax revenue for current projects would reduce the amount of funds available for future projects. Metro could not anticipate the agency's biggest needs in 30 or 50 years and might find itself without the financial resources to meet them (Bloomekatz 2012b). Some argued that it was unfair to burden future generations with a tax they would have no say in. Finally, many distrusted Metro's ability to manage its finances and did not believe that the agency would stop borrowing when it had enough money to complete the Measure R projects. They were hesitant to give Metro a "blank check" with no accountability (*Los Angeles Times* 2012).

Mike Antonovich and the BRU opposed Measure J just as they had opposed Measure R. The BRU stressed that Measures R and J placed too much investment in rail over bus service. Eric Romann of the group argued that Measure J was "a blank check for corporate welfare at the expense of the well-being of local communities (Bloomekatz 2012c)." In another op-ed, Romann and Sunyoung Yang elaborated that the rail projects the measure would fund would facilitate the gentrification in low-income communities of color (Romann and Yang 2012). The BRU contended that Measure J invested too many resources in capital projects and did not leave enough funding to operate the system once it was constructed. Metro's 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan also called for a fare increase every two years until the agency could sustain a 33 percent farebox recovery ratio (meaning one-third of its operating and maintenance costs would be covered by passenger fare revenue). The BRU feared that Metro would have no choice but to increase fares to afford its ambitious rail program, placing a significant financial



burden on the County's low-income bus riders (Zahniser and Bloomekatz 2012).

A number of new opponents emerged for this election including Beverly Hills High School which opposed having the Wilshire Subway pass underneath the school, the Crenshaw Subway Coalition, and opponents of the SR-710 gap closure project in Alhambra and South Pasadena. The Crenshaw Subway Coalition wanted part of the Crenshaw line to be built underground and a new station erected at Leimert Park Village. Despite the growth in the opposing coalition, the opposition campaign only formally received \$5,000, from the Labor/Community Strategy Center (Luberoff 2016, 38).

On November 6, voters were presented with the following ballot language:

**Measure J - Accelerating Traffic Relief, Job Creation:** To advance Los Angeles County's traffic relief, economic growth/job creation, by accelerating construction of light rail/ subway/airport connections within five years not twenty; funding countywide freeway traffic flow/safety/bridge improvements, pothole repair; keeping senior/student/disabled fares low; Shall Los Angeles County's voter-approved one-half cent traffic relief sales tax continue, without tax rate increase, for another 30 years or until voters decide to end it, with audits/ keeping funds local?

The Argument for Measure J was signed by Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce CEO Gary L. Toebben, Executive Secretary of Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council Robert Hunter, Mayor of City of Alhambra Barbara Messina, President of Los Angeles Business Council Mary Leslie, and Director of Southern California Environmental Justice Project of the Natural Resources Defense Council Adriano Martinez. It laid out six major arguments. It promised 410,000 new jobs to help Los Angeles combat its 12 percent unemployment rate. Freeway traffic flow as well as earthquake safety would be improved. Senior fares would remain low. Finally, all Measure J funds would stay within Los Angeles County instead of going to Sacramento, and spending would be subject to strict accountability. While the Measure R ballot argument had made no mention of project timeframes, the Measure J argument talked about accelerating project completion by up to 14 years.

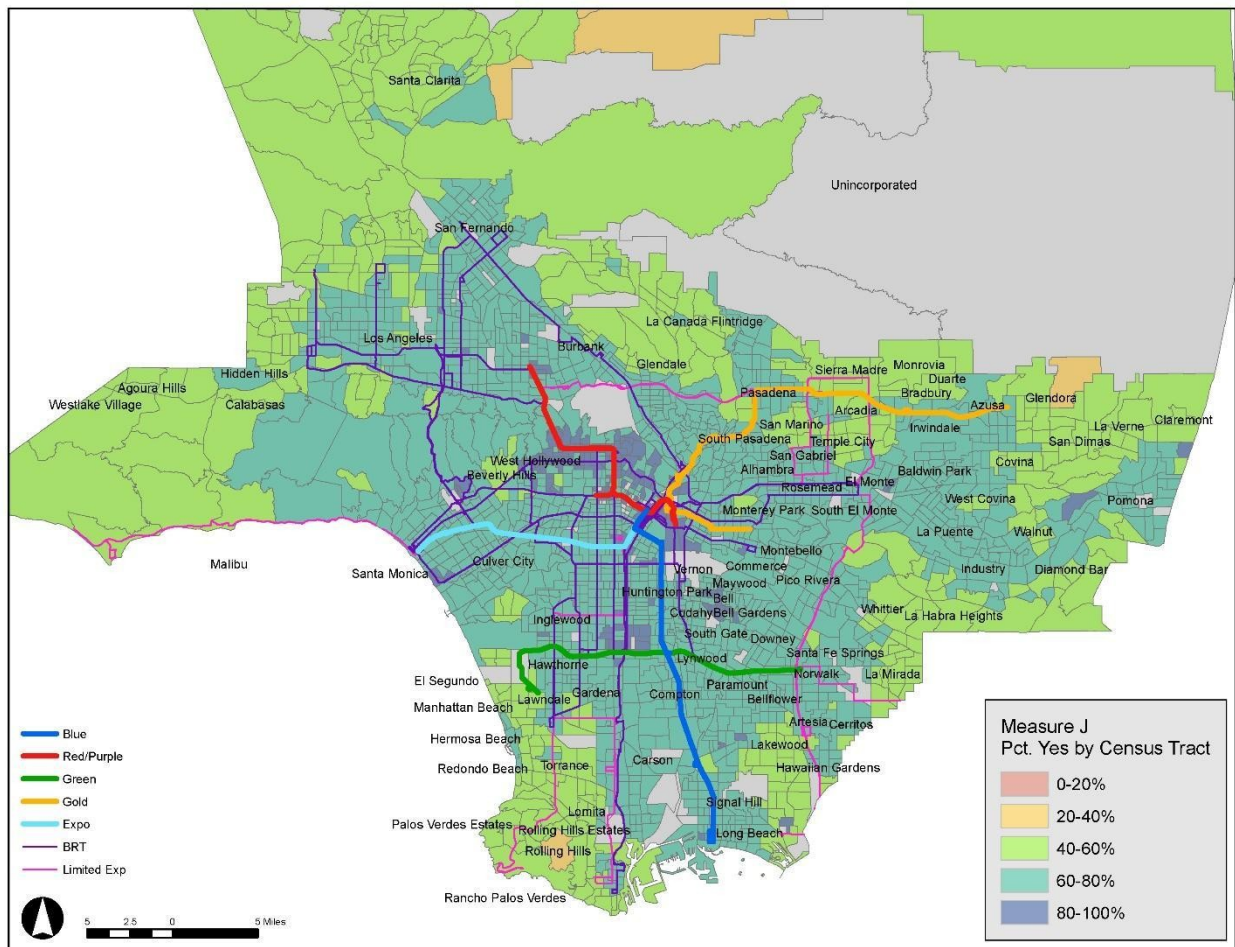
The Argument Against Measure J was more strongly worded than the arguments presented against Measure R four years earlier. It asserted that Measure R had failed to live up to its promise of delivering new projects on time and on budget and that taxpayers should not vote to tax themselves again to build the same projects. The argument also stated that accelerating the flow of money did not guarantee projects would be built, as many relied on outside state or federal funds. It emphasized that the measure would give

the County a blank check that would be paid for over the next sixty years, burdening future generations. Signatories to the ballot argument included MTA Chairman and County Supervisor Michael Antonovich, Los Angeles County Supervisor and MTA Board member Don Knabe, United Chambers of Commerce of the San Fernando Valley Board Chairman John Parker, City of Downey Councilmember Mario Guerra, and City of Claremont Councilmember Sam Pedroza.

The Rebuttal to Arguments for Measure J also questioned the measure's promises, stating outright that "Measure J won't fix gridlock" and that "Measure J is filled with FALSE PROMISES of job creation and accelerated traffic relief." It likewise argued that Measure J would fund the same projects already promised as part of Measure R in 2008, with a taxation period of 60 rather than 30 years. On Election Day, Measure J narrowly lost, garnering 66.1 percent of the vote when it needed 66.7 percent for passage. Beverly Hills and Pasadena, which both had supported Measure R overwhelmingly, flipped and voted Measure J down resoundingly. Beverly Hills went from 77 percent support for Measure R to 58 percent support of Measure J. Several other cities flipped as well. The 2012 election saw a lower turnout of 70 percent than the 2008 election which had an 82 percent turnout (Luberoff 2016, 38).

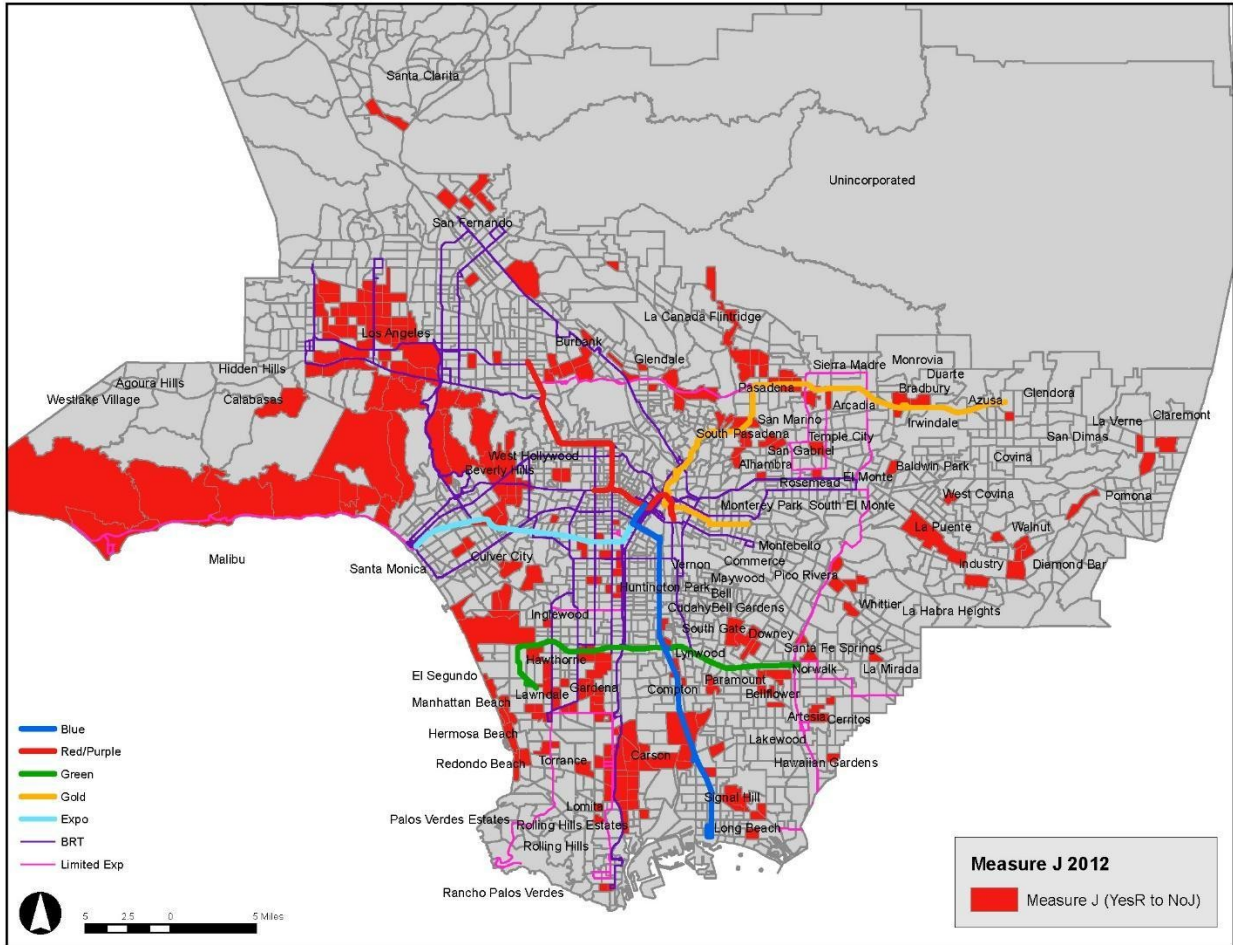
As shown in Figures 27 and 28, census tract-level analysis reveals that the level of support for the measure had declined from 75 percent or higher to the 50-75 percent range in many census tracts including those in Beverly Hills (which had turned against Measure J over the subway tunneling) and adjoining areas of West LA; in the eastern San Fernando Valley; and around the Harbor. Support declined below the 50 percent threshold (compared to the previous election) in census tracts in the northeastern San Gabriel Valley (along the Claremont Gold Line Extension); the Palos Verdes Peninsula; and around Pasadena and La Canada Flintridge. The measure seems to have fallen short of a super-majority by losing votes in scattered suburban precincts and on the Westside. The *Los Angeles Times* speculated that organized labor may have focused their campaign efforts on other ballot measures and that voters may have been confused by the ballot language and thought they were being asked to vote on a new tax instead of extending an existing one (Bloomekatz 2012d).

**Figure 29. Measure J Voting Results by Census Tract**



*Source: Data compiled by authors from Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder Summary of Votes Cast, 2017*

**Figure 30. Comparison of Measure R and Measure J Voting Results by Census Tract**



Source: Data compiled by authors from Los Angeles Registrar-Recorder Summary of Votes Cast, 2017

## 2016 MEASURE M

With local officials gaining confidence in and commitment to ballot measures for transportation, the Measure M campaign took root shortly after Measure J failed. By the end of 2013, Metro was set on presenting voters with another transit tax ballot measure; the two questions were whether to pursue a vote during the 2014 election cycle or wait until 2016, and whether to extend Measure R or introduce a new half-cent sales tax (*Los Angeles Times* 2013). The 2016 election was a presidential election and likely to have higher turnout. Furthermore, a \$3 billion street-repair bond had been proposed by Los Angeles City Council for the 2014 ballot which could compete with a new transit measure (Nelson 2013), but support for this weakened as the election approached and it was not put to a vote. MoveLA, which had been

instrumental in advancing Measure R, introduced a proposal for a 2016 ballot measure in March 2014 (Nelson 2014).

In May 2015, Metro sponsored a regional poll of 1,414 county residents to assess support for the 2016 measure. Before hearing any details about the proposed measures, 70 percent of respondents said they would likely vote yes. Interestingly, the top priority for over two-thirds of respondents was street and freeway improvements with only one-fourth preferring light rail and bus projects (Nelson 2015). Programs that resonated most with respondents were those that included traffic congestion relief, freeway improvements, low fares for seniors/students/persons with disabilities, bridge safety improvements, and paving local streets (MTA Board of Directors 2016a). The early strong support for a ballot measure was promising. On October 7, Governor Brown approved Senate Bill 767 (de León) which authorized Metro to place a half-cent sales tax transportation measure on the November 2016 ballot.<sup>57</sup>

In March 2016, the Metro board voted to present a draft expenditure plan for a November ballot measure to the public for review (see Table 4). The ballot measure both would introduce a new half-cent sales tax and extend Measure R to 2057 (MTA Board of Directors 2016a, 1). The draft plan included \$120 billion in expenditures over a 40 plus-year period (MTA Board of Directors 2016a, 2, 5-9).

**Table 4. Measure M Draft Funding Allocation**

Project Category	Funding Allocation
Transit Construction (new rail and BRT)	35%
Transit Operations	20%
Highway Construction	17%
Local Return	16%
Metro Rail Operations	5%
Metro State of Good Repair	2%
Active Transportation	2%
ADA Paratransit and Senior/Student	2%

<sup>57</sup> Senate Bill 767 (De Leon). California Legislature, 2015-2016 Regular Session. Stats, 2015, ch. 560. [http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/sen/sb\\_0751-0800/sb\\_767\\_bill\\_20151007\\_chaptered.pdf](http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/pub/15-16/bill/sen/sb_0751-0800/sb_767_bill_20151007_chaptered.pdf).

Discounts	
Regional Rail	1%

Source: LACMTA Board of Directors (2016a).

A state law enacted in January 2016 had mandated that every tax proposal on a ballot was required to disclose both the amount of money it would raise annually and its duration. Metro faced the possibility that a ballot that prominently called for a permanent tax increase might prove unpopular. Before the Metro Board voted on the final plan in June, Metro had the survey firm Fairbanks, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (FM3) conduct a poll of 2,125 likely voters in the November election. Survey respondents were presented with two different ballot summaries, one with a 50-year sunset sales tax and one with no sunset. The firm found no statistical differences in the ways people would vote between the two scenarios, and each received support from 64 percent of the potential voters (LACMTA Executive Management Committee 2016a, 17). After consulting with its lawyers, the agency chose to place on the ballot a measure that stated the measure would be in place “until ended by voters.” The agency by choosing this wording attempted to signal that this was not a permanent tax and that in reality the voters had the power to end it.

Survey respondents were presented with five names for the potential ballot measure, and the best response was for the “Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan” which garnered 67 percent of the vote. It was the only name that received more than the two-thirds vote required to pass. Other names considered were “Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement and Safety Plan” (64%), “Improve Transportation Relieve Traffic” (62%), “Improve Transportation Reduce Traffic” (62%), and “More Transportation Ease Traffic” (43%) (LACMTA Executive Management Committee 2016a, 18). Respondents were asked to rank some features of the proposed measure on a scale of 1 (not at all important) through 7 (very important). The responses in Table 5 show the percent of respondents giving each item a score of 6 or 7 (LACMTA Executive Management Committee 2016a, 18-21). Interestingly, after learning about features of the measure, 70 percent of respondents stated they were likely to vote in favor of a plan with a 50-year sunset and 72 percent were likely to vote in favor of a plan with no sunset (LACMTA Executive Management Committee 2016a, 29).

**Table 5. "Very Important" Features of Draft Ballot Measure M**

Project Category	Percent “Very Important”
Keeping senior, disabled, student fares affordable	73%

Creating jobs	73%
Repairing potholes	70%
Earthquake retrofitting bridges	69%
Improving freeway traffic flow	67%
Improving freeway safety	64%
Improving bridge safety	63%
Reducing polluted runoff flowing into waterways and onto beaches	63%
Improving job, school, and airport connections	62%
Requiring oversight	59%
Requiring independent audits	59%
Improving job, school, stadium and airport connections	58%
Expanding rail and bus systems	58%

*Source: LACMTA Board of Directors Executive Management Committee 2016a.*

In June, a final Expenditure Plan was presented to the Metro Board, and it included a number of significant changes from the March plan. First, it introduced a new local contribution for major transit capital projects: Cities receiving a rail transit station would be responsible for a three percent local match, under the presumption that their city would disproportionately benefit from the project compared to the rest of the county. The municipality would be responsible for contributing three percent of the cost of the project as defined by the centerline miles of the project within the local jurisdiction and Metro would withhold up to 15 years of Measure M local return funds in jurisdictions that did not provide such funding. The three percent local match was estimated to produce \$830 million in funding in addition to the sales tax revenue that would be critical for completion of proposed transit projects (LAMTA Executive Management Committee 2016b, 2-3).

The second major change was to increase funding for local return to cities within the county. One percent would be moved from Metro administrative costs in fiscal year 2018 and three percent would be moved from capital program funding in fiscal year 2040 for a total of 20 percent of funds

allocated to local returns by FY2040 (LACMTA Board of Directors Executive Management Committee 2016b, 3).

The third major change eliminated the 2039 sunset date of Measure R and extended the tax indefinitely to enable more project acceleration and local return, effectively implementing the goals of Measure J that had failed in the 2012 election (Nelson 2016b). The elimination would allow Metro more flexibility in responding to unforeseen future conditions (LACMTA s Executive Management Committee 2016b, 3-4). One common theme heard from public outreach efforts was that people wanted to see the capital improvement projects accelerated. Removing the sunset clause allowed Metro to considerably advance current projects and introduce two new projects. Projects to be moved up are listed in Table 6. The Las Virgenes-Malibu area highway projects were accelerated in the name of geography equity because the region had no major projects opening in the first 15 years. Ultimately, staff recommended:

Leaving the termination of the proposed ballot measure up to future voters, with no specified sunset date. This recommendation creates a sustainable financial source for maximum early project delivery, increased financial responsibility, more local return, more State of Good Repair, saves taxpayer money through reduced debt risk, and provides for the ability to tackle the transportation infrastructure tomorrow, not just today, but once and for all (LACMTA Executive Management Committee 2016b, 9).

**Table 6. Accelerated Timeframe for Measure M Projects**

Project	Original Timeframe (3/24/2016 Plan)	New Timeframe (6/16/2016 Plan)	Acceleration
Las Virgenes-Malibu Active Transportation and Highway Efficiency Programs	FY2018-FY2057	FY2018-FY2032	25 years
Orange Line BRT Improvements	FY2024-FY2028	FY2019-FY2025	3 years
West Santa Ana Transit Corridor LRT 1	FY2023-FY2029	FY2022-FY2028	1 year
West Santa Ana Transit Corridor LRT 2	FY2038-FY2047	FY2032-FY2041	6 years
Green Line Extension to	FY2031-	FY2026-	5 years



Torrance	FY2035	FY2030	
I-5 Corridor Improvements from I-605 to I-710	FY2041- FY2047	FY2036- FY2042	5 years
Crenshaw Northern Extension	FY2049- FY2055	FY2041- FY2047	8 years
Lincoln Boulevard BRT	FY2050- FY2054	FY2043- FY2047	7 years
Green Line East to Norwalk	FY2051- FY2057	FY2046- FY2052	5 years
Gold Line Eastside 2 <sup>nd</sup> Extension	New project	FY2053- FY2057	--
High Desert Multi-Purpose Corridor, LA County Segment	New project	FY2063- FY2067	--

*Source: LACMTA Executive Management Committee 2016b, p. 5.*

The Metro board voted 11-2 to place Measure M on the November 2016 ballot (Nelson 2016a). The negative votes came from Don Knabe and Diane DuBois who were both from the southern part of the county, and opposed the measure based on the regional division of revenues. They had also authored a motion along with Board member James Butts, the Mayor of Inglewood, to use funds generated from the new ballot measure to accelerate projects scheduled as a result of earlier measures for implementation in the second and third decades before building new projects enumerated for the first time in Measure M. They saw this motion as pursuing the goals established by the 30/10 Initiative from 2010—to ensure that Measure R projects promised to voters would actually be completed and not superseded by new projects. Their motion was rejected on a 9-4 vote. The four yes votes came from the three motion authors as well as Ara Najarian of Glendale (LACMTA Board of Directors 2016b, 16). Don Knabe also proposed a motion to remove the three percent local contribution requirements and to amend the Expenditure Plan to include additional new project but this motion was voted down on a 10-3 vote, with the yes votes coming from Directors Knabe, DuBois, and Butts (LACMTA Board of Directors 2016b, 18).

On August 2, the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to place the measure on the November ballot. Supervisor Don Knabe voted in favor despite his negative vote at the Metro Board meeting in June (Nelson 2016b).

Measure M was both a companion to and expansion of Measure R. Measure M increased the existing sales tax by another half cent, and made the Measure R increase, previously to expire in 2039, permanent but revocable by a new voter approved measure. Like Measure R, Measure M was multimodal: it included funding for road and highway improvements as well as transit. The largest category of its funding would be designated for public transportation, with new rail service constituting the bulk of the transit expenditures.

Once Measure M was approved for the ballot, Metro and its allies framed the campaign in terms of its concrete benefits—higher employment and reduced congestion—for people who would continue to drive. Reflecting early polling indicating a preference for road improvements over transit, Measure M was championed as a way to reduce traffic congestion in Los Angeles. The ballot measure was officially titled the “Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan” and the ballot language emphasized improving freeway traffic flow over all other transportation improvements even as the measure provided for major transit investments. The language was similar to that of Measure R with the addition of earthquake retrofitting, creating jobs, improving freeway safety, and improving job/school connections. It removed references to public review of expenditures and clean-fuel buses which had both appeared in the earlier measure:

**Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan:** To improve freeway traffic flow/safety; repair potholes/sidewalks; repave local streets; earthquake retrofit bridges; synchronize signals; keep senior/disabled/student fares affordable; expand rail/subway/bus systems; improve job/school/airport connections; and create jobs; shall voters authorize a Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan through a ½ ¢ sales tax and continue the existing ½ ¢ traffic relief tax until voters decide to end it, with independent audits/oversight and funds controlled locally? (Official Sample Ballot General Election 2016).

The Argument for Measure M stressed easing congestion and building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century transportation network and included the following major points in favor of the measure:

- Modernize Los Angeles County’s aging transportation system
- Build more light rail, Rapid bus, Metrolink, and better freeways
- Retrofit overpasses and bridges to withstand earthquakes
- Keep senior, student, and disabled fares low
- Invest in more service so seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities can live independently
- Create 465,000 new jobs
- Guaranteed source of funding that will direct state and federal dollars to Los Angeles

- Help 88 local cities fix potholes, streets, and sidewalks
- Measure includes strict accountability measures with an Oversight Committee and annual audit
- Measure M money is only for local use and cannot be taken by state government

(Official Sample Ballot General Election 2016, *Argument in Favor of Measure M*, LA 206-052).

As in 2008, there was no mention of how long it would take for any of these projects to be completed. The Argument for Measure M was signed by Duarte Councilmember/Metro Chair John Fasana, AARP California State Director Nancy McPherson, Chair of the Board of Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce Thomas Syles, Manhattan Beach Councilmember Amy Howorth, and Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti (Official Sample Ballot General Election 2016, *Argument in Favor of Measure M*, LA 206-053). The Rebuttal to the Argument Against Measure M was sponsored by Los Angeles County Business Federation CEO Tracy Hernandez, Los Angeles League of Conservation Voters President Tom Eisenhauer, US Congress member Judy Chu, Executive Secretary of Los Angeles/Orange County Building and Construction Trades Council Ronald Miller, and again, John Fasana, Metro Chair and Duarte Councilmember (Official Sample Ballot General Election 2016, *Rebuttal to the Argument Against Measure M*, LA 206-057).

The Argument Against Measure M focused on timing and equity. It argued that blue collar communities would not see traffic relief for decades while mega-projects in wealthier communities were first in line for funding. The major argument against Measure M was that it was a “forever tax” with “no end date, oversight or accountability” (Nelson 2016a). Not only would the new tax last indefinitely, but the measure would also extend the Measure R tax that would otherwise have expired in 2039. With no sunset date there was less accountability on the part of the agency and no way to stop Metro from continuing to rack up debt by borrowing against future sales tax revenues.

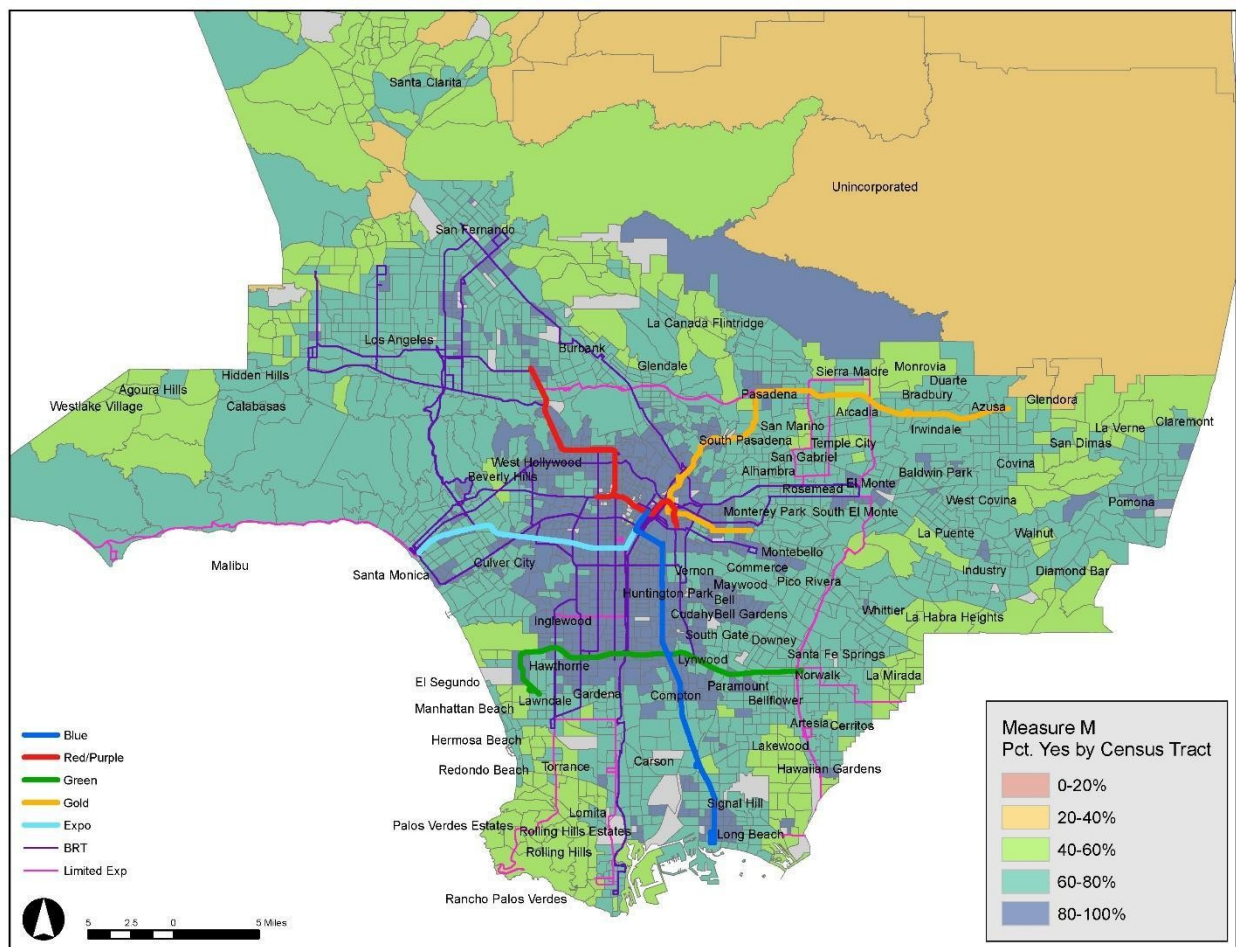
Despite the numerous concerns raised regarding Metro accountability in the nineties, they had not figured prominently in the campaign for Measure R. Ensuring that Metro responsibly managed new sales tax revenue was not a concern featured in *Los Angeles Times* articles or formal ballot arguments. Measure R did include provisions for an Independent Taxpayer Oversight Committee to review annual audits of Metro’s spending to ensure compliance with Measure R’s Expenditure Plan (LACMTA 2018a). Having the oversight committee in place may have placated concerns over spending abuses. In contrast, accountability was a major argument against Measure M, as a new sales tax with no sunset essentially gave the agency a “blank check” with no guarantee promised projects would actually be completed (Nelson 2016c).

Ultimately, the No on M Argument concluded that Measure M imposed a financial burden on those who could not afford it in order to build projects that would benefit a small, wealthy segment of the county population. The Argument was supported by Norwalk Mayor Mike Mendez, Local Chamber of Commerce Leader Jon Reno, Executive Director of the Crenshaw Subway Coalition Damien Goodmon, Co-Chair of the Bus Riders Union Barbara Lott-Holland, and Professor Sally Morales Havice. Not only would the new tax last indefinitely, but the measure would also extend the Measure R tax that would otherwise have expired in 2039 (Official Sample Ballot General Election 2016, *Argument Against Measure M*, LA 206-056).

The Rebuttal to the Argument in Favor of Measure M argued that it was a “**myth** that Measure M will solve traffic problems” and emphasized Metro’s history of cost overruns, accountability problems, civil rights violations, and discrimination. The Rebuttal argued that voting against Measure M would stop wasteful spending and specifically targeted the “unnecessary \$9.9 Billion Sepulveda Pass project.” It was supported by NAACP Southwest Area Director Ron Hasson, Mayor of Beverly Hills John Mirisch, City of Commerce Council Member Lilia Leon, Mayor of El Segundo Suzanne Fuentes, and again, Norwalk Mayor Michael Mendez (Official Sample Ballot General Election 2016, *Rebuttal to Argument in Favor of Measure M*, LA 206-055).

On November 8, Measure M was approved with 71.15 percent of the vote. The turnout for this election was only 69.5 percent, and 89.6 percent of those voting cast a ballot for or against Measure M (Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk 2016b). As shown in Figure 31, the measure was supported by at least 75 percent of voters in census tracts across the central and southern Los Angeles basin, including in the low-income and minority neighborhoods to the south and east of Downtown that would presumably be receptive to the opposition’s equity-focused arguments. The measure performed less successfully than Measure R in census tracts in and near Beverly Hills and on the Palos Verdes Peninsula, but made major gains in census tracts in the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys.

**Figure 31. Measure M Voting Results by Census Tract**



Source: Data compiled from County Registrar-Recorder Summary of Votes Cast, 2017.

**ANALYSIS OF VOTING FOR MEASURES R, J AND M**

We statistically analyzed voter support for Measures R, J and M by collecting precinct-level election returns, aggregating them to census tracts level, and matching voting data with U.S. Census and other demographic data. This provided data sets that (depending on the year) have between 2,100 and 2,700 tract-level observations. We compared the election results to socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of these census tracts in order to analyze the voting patterns.

There are four limitations to this approach. First, the matching process is imperfect, because precincts do not all align well with census tracts. We

followed a procedure suggested by the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk in making these matches, which minimizes the problem of tract-precinct mismatch, but the problem does not disappear. Second, tract-level census data only becomes available from the American Community Survey every five years. For example, tract-level ACS reports for 2012 are five-year averages of the 1-year ACS estimates from 2008-2012, not snapshots of those tracts in 2012, when voters considered Measure J. We used three different 5-year ACS' data sets to build tract-level data, but unavoidably some of the census data we matched to 2012's Measure J would have been collected during 2008's Measure R time period. Third, census tract boundaries change occasionally over time, and they changed considerably between 2008 and 2012. Thus, while we can compare 2012 and 2016's results on a tract-by-tract basis, we cannot do the same using the 2008 results.

The fourth limitation of our approach is what social science researchers label the ecological inference problem. Our goal is to make inferences about voters, but we examined places. So, if we were to find that lower income places were more likely to support LOST ballot measures, that would *not necessarily* mean that lower income *people* were more likely to support them. It would mean that voters in neighborhoods having higher average incomes were less likely to be supporters. To the extent that Census tracts are relatively homogenous by income, we can assume that most voters in low income places themselves have low incomes. But this is not always the case.

Our primary finding from analyzing all three elections is that lower tract socioeconomic status was associated with more support for LOSTs. In most of the regression models we specified, the only variables that yielded statistically significant results were either direct measures of, or proxies for, income or affluence. These measures—median tract household income, the proportion of the population below the poverty line, the share of housing units that were detached single family homes, vehicle ownership, and population density—were often collinear - so highly correlated with one another that we could not usually include many of them in the same regression. But the overall trend in results suggests that higher income places were less supportive of the measures.

Before detailing these results further, however, it is important to put them into context. The regressions show that LOST measures were less popular in higher income places. But *less popular* is not the same as *unpopular*.<sup>58</sup>

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58 Most local taxes are regressive, and voters are more likely to believe that that they will fund services that redound to their benefit, rather than be spent on other groups or places. As such, even ideological conservatives otherwise opposed to taxes will often accept local taxation (Fischel 2005; Slemrod and Bakija 2008).

Measures R, J and M all had remarkably high levels of support in most areas. Table 7 shows mean, median and interquartile ranges of support for these measures. Measure M in particular was remarkably successful throughout the county. The *median* tract vote in favor of Measure M was 76 percent, and the bottom quartile of support was 66.3 percent. Remarkably, even the 25 percent of tracts supported Measure M the least, almost attained the 2/3 majority necessary for approval. (There were some—very few—tracts that voted almost entirely against it). Among tracts in the City of Los Angeles—the median level of support for Measure M was 80 percent. Measure R was slightly less popular, but still had median and mean levels of support above 70 percent. Even Measure J, which narrowly lost, had median support above two-thirds, and it was only in the lowest 25 percent of census tracts where its average support fell under 60 percent.

**Table 7. Support for Measures R, J, and M**

	Measure R	Measure J	Measure M
Mean Share Yes	0.7	0.666	0.73
Median Share Yes	0.75	0.68	0.76
25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.64	0.6	0.66
75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	0.77	0.74	0.82

Each of these elections coincided with a presidential election, and in general support for these measures was highly correlated with support for the Democratic candidate. The simple correlation between tract-level support for Measure R and support for Barack Obama in 2008 was 0.79, and the correlation between support for Measure M and support for Hillary Clinton was 0.91. In all three elections, the average percent of voters who abstained from the LOST (entered a voting booth and cast a ballot, but not for the LOST) was 10 percent.

Table 8 shows regression results from Measure R. The most consistent predictor of opposition is the share of housing units that are detached single family homes. Income predicts opposition in one specification, and population density predicts support. These results are roughly consistent with summary data about Measure R. In 2008 median household income in Los Angeles County was \$59,000 (in 2015 terms) and the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile was \$82,000 and the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile was \$42,000. In tracts in which median income exceeded \$82,000, the mean level of support for Measure R was 62

percent, while in tracts in which median income was below \$42,000, it was 76 percent.

**Table 8. Support for Measure R**

Associations with Support for Measure R, Generalized Linear Models				
Dependent Variable = Percent Voting Yes				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Share Housing Single Family	-0.8479*** (0.2230)	- 0.9138** * (0.2491)		
Share Nonwhite	0.0047 (0.2614)	-0.1123 (0.2742)	0.0392 (0.2778)	-0.1199 (0.2749)
Share in Poverty	0.5371 (0.6565)			



Share Age 65 or Older	-0.5286 (1.1321)	-0.9075 (1.1032)	-0.6934 (1.1202)	-0.3549 (1.1234)
Share Households with Zero Vehicles	0.7266 (0.3897)	0.0896 (0.3640)	0.8059 (0.4186)	0.1268 (0.3675)
Share Homeowners with Pre-1979 Houses	0.3979 (0.4720)	0.1247 (0.4466)	0.4174 (0.4271)	0.1569 (0.4570)
Median Household Income		-0.0000** (0.0000)	-0.0000 (0.0000)	-0.0000 (0.0000)
Population density		0.0000** (0.0000)		
Constant	1.1120*** (0.2508)	1.3758** * (0.2713)	1.2356*** (0.2757)	0.8804** (0.3180)
N	1960	1960	1960	1960
]]	-794.8454	-802	-795	-797
Standard errors in parentheses *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001				

Regression results from Measure J (see Table 9) tell a similar story, albeit with slightly different variables. Income in this case is a more reliable predictor of opposition than single family housing, and poverty and density predict support. Variables related to vehicle ownership and transit use appear to explain little of the tract-level support for Measure J.

**Table 9. Support for Measure J**

Associations with Support for Measure J, Generalized Linear Models				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Share Housing Single Family	0.0002 (0.0004)	-0.0002 (0.0004)	-0.0001 (0.0002)	
Share Nonwhite	0.6823* (0.2984)	0.1319 (0.3450)	0.2093 (0.2258)	0.1082 (0.2272)
Share in Poverty	3.4457** (1.2299)			
Share Age 65 or Older	0.0054 (0.0080)	0.0011 (0.0078)	0.0013 (0.0031)	0.0026 (0.0033)
Share Households with Zero Vehicles	-0.0000 (0.0005)	-0.0001 (0.0005)		
Share BA or Higher	-0.0304 (0.0505)	-0.0699 (0.0579)	-0.0976 (0.0524)	-0.0389 (0.0410)
Median Household Income		-0.0000** (0.0000)	-0.0000*** (0.0000)	-0.0000** (0.0000)
Share Commuting by Transit			-0.0443 (0.0327)	
Population density				0.0000** (0.0000)

Constant	0.1676 (0.1906)	1.0918*** (0.2731)	1.0477*** (0.1755)	0.6991*** (0.1877)
N	1068	1056	2422	2413
]]	-452.3421	-446.7614	-1021.1594	- 1011.3612
Standard errors in parentheses *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001				

Regressions examining Measure M (see Table 10) are at this point the least telling, perhaps because the consistently high levels of support across tracts provide little variance. Relatively little in these regressions was statistically significant, although once again indicators of low income—the share of households without a vehicle, population density, and poverty—hover near conventional levels of statistical significance.

**Table 10. Support for Measure M**

Associations with Support for Measure M, Generalized Linear Models				
Dependent Variable = Percent Voting Yes				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Share Housing Single Family	-0.3804 (0.2139)	-0.2268 (0.2302)		-0.4480* (0.2095)
Share Nonwhite	0.3285 (0.2765)	0.3446 (0.2737)	0.2743 (0.2664)	0.4201 (0.2603)
Poverty Rate			1.096 (0.7690)	1.3248 (0.6963)
Share Age 65 or Older	-1.6617 (1.0489)	-1.4241 (1.0511)	-1.6639 (1.0588)	-1.5722 (1.0260)

Share Households with Zero Vehicles	1.0006 (1.0908)	1.3245 (0.8737)	1.8426* (0.8810)	0.6760 (1.0976)
Median Household Income	-0.0000 (0.0000)	-0.0000 (0.0000)	-0.0000* (0.0000)	
Share Commuting by Transit	1.3452 (1.1994)			0.9393 (1.175)
Population density				0.0000** (0.0000)
Constant	1.3515*** (0.2621)	1.0716*** (0.3073)	0.9248** (0.3046)	0.9417*** (0.2468)
N	2257	2256	2257	2265
J]	-870.2319	-868.6258	-871.5651	-872.5580
Standard errors in parentheses *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001				

A final comparison jointly examined Measures J and M, since they share census tract configurations and since Measure J lost so narrowly.

Measures J and M were both popular, and most people in most places voted for them. Though there are some notable differences in the maps--the South Bay and San Gabriel Valley are visibly less likely to support J--in many ways it is indistinguishable from the map for Measure M.

While there is a statistical correlation between neighborhood income and voting—lower income neighborhoods have a greater share of “yes” votes—the sheer magnitude of approvals reduces the explanatory power of that relationship. The *median* percent yes in an LA County Census tract was over 75 percent. Fewer than 25 percent of the tracts supported the measure

below the 2/3 threshold, and in only 3 percent of tracts did a majority of voters vote “No.”

The maps, and the data underlying them, also underscore how narrow the difference was between failure in 2012 and success in 2016. In 2012, the County contained 190 census tracts in which Measure J did not attain a simple majority, and 931 tracts where it did not meet the 2/3 threshold. The mean level of support in these tracts was 52 percent, and 25 percent of these tracts exceeded 63 percent support. So Measure J was popular—just not quite popular enough.

In 2016, almost all of the tracts that had been below 50 percent in 2012 (168 of the 190) crossed the 50 percent threshold, and gave Measure M majority support. Slightly more than a third of the tracts that in 2012 had been under 66.6 percent support and now exceeded the 2/3 majority (340 of 931) threshold. For these latter tracts, the swing in votes was 15 percent. Only 14 census tracts that had been pro-Measure J in 2012 became anti-Measure M in 2016.

## COMPARISON OF CAMPAIGNS FOR MEASURES R, J AND M

Measures R and M, both of which enacted half cent increases in the local sales tax, won at the ballot box despite needing a 2/3 vote for passage. Measure J, however, which merely proposed extending the Measure R increase, narrowly lost. In this section we look at some of the political factors which may have contributed to these different outcomes. The analysis draws on a novel dataset that Metro made available to one of the authors. In spring of 2017, Metro’s Communications office conducted detailed interviews with numerous people involved in the campaign for Measure M, asking for their recollections and interpretations of the measure and the election.<sup>59</sup> Rich qualitative data of this kind is unusual in transportation studies, so Metro’s data represent a unique source of information.

The data available from the interview transcripts, however, have some shortcomings. First, since the interviews were conducted with senior politicians and campaign executives the transcripts offer no direct evidence about why voters supported the measure. Instead they reveal why advocates and campaign architects *think* voters supported it. To the extent they gauged the electorate correctly when designing the campaign, their accounts can give some indication of voter preferences. On the other hand, their impressions could possibly be wrong. A second drawback of these interviews is that the information in them may suffer from an implicit

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<sup>59</sup> The Communications staff conducted 54 interviews with a wide range of people: senior Metro personnel, members of the Metro board, the Mayor of Los Angeles and members of his political team, local government officials from around LA County, representatives of the advocacy group MoveLA (which played a large role in Measure M) and representatives from many of the other advocacy groups who participated in the campaign.

“insider” bias. Respondents may have overestimated their own contributions to the success of the campaign (Lovallo and Kahneman 2003; Kahneman 2011) to give the campaign more weight than it deserves in explaining why the measure passed. In addition, the interviewees were almost entirely supporters of Measure M; only two—both representatives of the South Bay Council of Governments—opposed the measure. In fact, Measure M had very little organized opposition, and that opposition was barely active. Even in a representative sample of political voices about Measure M, the supporters would outnumber the opponents, but the ratio would perhaps be not quite as high as it is in these transcripts. Finally, the transcripts were edited (for brevity) by Metro before they were analyzed so the authors did not have access to the full set of questions and answers. As a result, some of the responses could be subject to different interpretations.

## Measure J

Despite the previous success of Measure R, only four years later voters did not approve by a sufficient margin a follow-up crafted to extend the Measure R sales tax in order to accelerate the delivery dates of the promised projects. Several factors may have contributed to this admittedly small change in attitude. Arguably it should have helped that Measure J did not raise taxes, and only extended an existing tax increase. At the same time, it did not deliver any new projects; it only advanced projects for which voters had already cast their ballots. Perhaps at least some voters thought that Measure J *looked* like a tax increase but financed no new projects.<sup>60</sup>

A second potential disadvantage facing Measure J was that, by not introducing any new projects, it did nothing to assuage hard feelings that had arisen during the campaign for Measure R. The debate over Measure R had been contentious; representatives from some regions of the county believed they would pay more in taxes than they would get back in benefits. This belief was particularly strong among elected officials in the North County, the San Gabriel Valley, and to a lesser extent the South Bay.

One of Measure R’s banner projects was a “subway to the sea”—the extension of the Purple Line from its current terminus in central LA to Santa Monica. People on the county’s lower-density fringes would be paying higher sales taxes to finance a rail line along the Wilshire corridor that they may well never use. To mitigate such concerns, Measure R (like the two successful ballots before it) had included a range of other projects as well as a “local return” component, where every city was guaranteed a portion of the sales tax revenue to spend at its discretion. Some elected officials in outlying areas had not been mollified, however, and several Metro board members had opposed Measure R as a result and authorized less money for

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60 Some post-election polling suggests that some voters believed, wrongly, that Measure J would have raised additional money for the California High Speed Rail project. It is not clear why or how they came to have this belief.

television and other advertising for Measure J than they had for Measure R. Had Measure J raised new revenue, it could have been used to deliver new projects to places that had voted against Measure R in 2008. Since it did not, it offered nothing to broaden the coalition of supporters.

Measure J faced additional political hurdles as well. Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaragoisa was the measure's most prominent spokesperson, just as he had been for Measure R. But in 2008 Villaragoisa had been a rising political star, recently and decisively elected as the city's first Latino mayor, by 2012 he was a weakened lame duck who had been hobbled by scandal. He was also personally disliked by Supervisor Mike Antonovich, who represented the rural North County. Antonovich, next in line to become Metro chairperson, had opposed Measure R, and now led the opposition to Measure J. Antonovich urged local elected officials in places that had supported Measure R—like Pasadena, Beverly Hills, and some neighborhoods in West Los Angeles—to change their positions. As noted above, in the years since Measure R, Metro had become embroiled in political and legal disputes with residents in these places over the location of new rail infrastructure. For instance, residents of Cheviot Hills in West Los Angeles were fighting the proposed Expo Line extension, and the Beverly Hills School District had sued to stop Metro from tunneling under its property to complete the Wilshire Subway.

## Measure M

Several factors contributed to the success of Measure M. Many of the interview respondents argued that Measure M patched the holes that had sunk Measure J. Perhaps surprisingly, Antonovich became a proponent for the measure.<sup>61</sup> The narrowness of Measure J's loss convinced him that another measure could be successful, but that it needed to address the regional concerns that had been overlooked by Measures R and J. He also got along well with the new mayor, Eric Garcetti. The leaders of MoveLA, who had been instrumental in Measure R but were less involved in Measure J, also became convinced by Measure J's narrow loss that support existed for another try. So too did Borja Leon, who had been a transportation deputy for Villaragoisa and would stay on to work for Mayor Garcetti. Leon, in October of 2013, asked political consultant Bill Carrick to begin basic voter research for a new ballot measure. Later in 2013 Mayor Garcetti hosted county mayors in a summit at City Hall; over 95 percent of the attendees indicated they would be willing to support a new ballot measure. Over the next three

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61 Explanations for this about face vary. By some accounts he had neither expected nor wanted Measure J to lose. While it had been politically important for *him* to oppose it, given his constituency, it was not to his advantage to be seen as the person who blocked a measure that almost two-thirds of county voters wanted. In 2017, moreover, term limits would prevent Antonovich from running again for County Supervisor, and any other office he sought (he ended up running for the State Senate) would have very different constituents, and likely many constituents who had heavily supported Measure J.

years, working both together and in parallel, Metro, MoveLA and Garcetti's office built the coalition in support of Measure M.

Our research indicates that much of the political work surrounding Measure M took place long before it was placed on the ballot. Creating a list of projects the measure would finance, and building an elite coalition to support that project list, took over three years. The actual campaign to win over voters, (in which the coalition played a large role) lasted about four months. Like Measure R, Measure M promised voters many transportation improvement projects. Passing a transportation bill often requires sacrificing some efficiency for political expediency, and as a result it often includes more capital projects than would be optimal, and often locates them in places where they will generate the most votes rather than where they will do the most good in terms of transportation service.

There was general agreement that the project list could not be developed by Metro, or advocates closely affiliated with the agency. Shortly after the election, Antonovich wrote to the county's Councils of Governments (COGs), the regional bodies that represent different areas of the county. In his letter, he proposed that they take the lead in crafting the project list. Measure M's success resulted from a "bottom-up" campaign that drew heavily on input from the COGs and other interest groups. Rather than creating a list of projects and then trying to bring local governments on board, Metro let local governments craft the list themselves. Under Metro's "Mobility Matrix" program the COGs solicited proposed projects from their local government members and passed them on to Metro. The matrix of potential projects soon grew into the hundreds. This process created a broad coalition around Measure M, and the breadth and depth (especially financial depth) of that coalition helped to both build support among voters and suppress potential opposition.

In reality, the project list was as much a result of forming the coalition as the coalition was the result of developing the project list. The goal of the list, as one political consultant put it, was to deliver "something for everyone" and thereby "avoid organic opposition." He continued: "We tried to nail everyone down: business, labor, seniors, AARP" as well as different areas of the county. Building the coalition and developing the project list occurred on parallel tracks for much of the next two years. One track was within Metro, via the Mobility Matrix. By 2015, each subregion of the county was submitting its contributions to the matrix, with projects prioritized by funding needs and time horizon. This was a large and complex undertaking; the North County matrix alone included over 300 projects.

In addition to Metro, MoveLA, in conjunction with the Mayor's office, began running large focus groups with a variety of stakeholders including those from labor, environmental and social and pedestrian improvements. Union



leaders considered this proportion too high; labor’s interest in Measure M stemmed from the jobs it would generate, and labor leaders believed bike/ped improvements did not generate enough construction or manufacturing work to deliver new employment to their membership. As a compromise, MoveLA reduced bike/ped funding to 2 percent to satisfy labor, but moved some projects into other transit projects, on the premise that making bicycling and walking easier would improve transit by helping solve first mile/last mile problems, thus retaining the support of the bike/ped community.

In addition to the critical importance of the project list, respondents frequently cited the efforts of Mayor Garcetti, and to a lesser extent Metro CEO Phil Washington (who Garcetti made a point of hiring) as vital to putting the coalition together and convincing voters to support the measure. Washington traveled and spoke extensively, and rallied Metro staff around the ballot campaign. Most of the aggressive campaigning, though, fell to Garcetti and the coalition pulled together by MoveLA that provided a campaign war chest of \$10 million, which went into television advertising, social media outreach, and other traditional campaign strategies. The Mayor became Measure M’s champion, and he visited every Council of Governments and many of the county’s cities as well. When a late internal poll showed Measure M at only 61 percent support, his political team quickly created and aired a television ad that featured the Mayor driving along a traffic-free freeway, talking about the importance of a strong transportation system.

Another factor was the campaign messaging, which largely ignored existing transit riders and environmentally-minded voters, both of whom were considered guaranteed “yes” votes, to focus on drivers. The political professionals who created the messages made very clear that the political campaign was *not* built around selling public transportation to the typical Angelino as an appealing *form of travel*. Indeed, Measure M’s campaign was designed to *avoid* suggesting that LA County voters might change their travel behavior. Instead, the focus was on drivers who had no intention of ever getting out of their cars and convincing them that others would get out of their cars and out of their way on the freeway. Measure M was labelled a “Traffic Improvement Plan”—traffic improvements benefit people who are in cars. Significantly, the final, last-ditch TV ad did not show Garcetti escaping congestion by boarding a train. It showed him driving unobstructed on a free-flowing freeway.

One of the key promises in the campaign was that Measure M “would reduce the time that people spend in traffic by 15 percent.” However, the ads did not mention that that this would not happen until 2040.<sup>62</sup> In addition to

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62 The claim came from a consultant study Metro had commissioned by Cambridge Systematics.

promising to reduce traffic, the campaign focused on the measure creating jobs—especially in outlying areas—and emphasized the potential of local return money to make improvements where voters lived. Since polling showed that many voters were unaware they were already paying three half-cent sales taxes to support Metro and that upon learning that they were, support for Measure M fell, the election materials did not emphasize the fact that it would extend the Measure R tax. Overall, the effort to sell Measure M may have been made easier by Metro’s improved public image; since 2008 the agency had increased its on-time performance, begun service on new rail projects, and its once-dire financial condition was now on a much stronger footing.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are several possible reasons for the different election outcomes though voting on different measures differed only to a small extent. Traffic congestion was probably a large factor in these elections, but congestion itself is notoriously difficult to measure in an aggregate way for the entire network, and its effect on attitudes is even more complex. Average delay per commuter, as measured by the Texas Transportation Institute, was roughly the same in 2012 as it was in 2016 (it was down considerably in 2008 due to the recession). This particular measure of congestion, however, is highly contested (Hertz, 2015), and in any event perceptions of congestion likely matter more than congestion levels themselves.

A second exogenous factor is turnout. Turnout overall, which is generally driven by the presidential race, was much lower in 2012 than it was in 2008 or 2016. Popular measures fare better when more people vote, but in 2012 3.2 million people turned out to vote, compared to 3.4 million in 2008 and 3.5 million in 2016.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, the share of voters who abstained from Measure J—who cast a presidential vote but not on the transportation ballot—was slightly higher, at 11.5 percent, than it was for Measures R or M for which abstention rates were just over 10 percent. This evidence could suggest that despite the campaign, thousands more people who turned out to vote did not in the end vote one way or another for Measure J.<sup>64</sup>

Moreover, all county measures and propositions in general fared worse in 2012 than they had in 2008 or 2016. In 2008 the average share of “yes” votes on county measures and propositions was 65 percent, and in 2016 it was 73 percent. In 2012, by contrast, it was 43 percent. It is not clear why

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63 Total turnout was estimated by summing presidential votes, on the assumption that almost everyone who goes to the polls casts a vote for president.

64 On the other hand, we know relatively little about why people abstain from ballot referenda, but since the literature on direct democracy suggests that many voters have a status quo bias and default to “no”, a higher abstention rate can also be considered an intermediate victory—the campaign has prevented some votes of “no” even if it could not gain a “yes.”

this was so—county ballots in 2012 competed with a proposed state sales tax increase that Governor Jerry Brown campaigned heavily for, which may explain some of the lack of success—but the overall result suggests that Measure J’s failure may have been in part an artifact of a political climate more hostile to ballot measures.

Comparing Measure M not to Measure J specifically, but to transportation tax ballots more broadly, suggests that Measure M stands out, not for its political success, but more for the large amount of revenue it is projected to raise; approximately \$120 billion. The size of Measure M’s tax increase—1/2 cent—was not unusual, compared to previous LA County sales tax measures or to sales tax ballots nationwide. Nor was the duration unusual; both Proposition A and Proposition C enacted permanent tax increases. The tax base, however, was 35 percent larger in 2016 than it was in 1980, and continues to grow, a fact that gives the measure its huge potential yield.

Measure M cleared California’s difficult 2/3 threshold, but it was not particularly any more successful politically than the average US transportation ballot measure. Transportation measures in general are popular, and have been for some time. Data from the Eno Center for Transportation and the Center for Transportation Excellence show that from 2000 to 2016 about 70 percent of transportation measures placed on local ballots succeeded, and the average support was 65 percent (CFTE n.d.). Among measures that won, the average share voting yes was 69 percent. In 2016, the average voting percentage was lower—61 percent for all ballots, and 65 percent for those that won. So Measure M, with 71.5 percent of the vote, was above the national average in popularity, but not dramatically so. This suggests that Measure J’s narrow defeat (16,000 votes out of 2.9 million cast) may simply have been due to unexplained conditions and does not mean that Measure M’s victory stands out for being strategic; slightly different weather or traffic conditions on election day could have yielded a different result.

The contrast between what Measure M would actually do, and the campaign rhetoric about why voters should support it, was clearly a factor. Measure M was held out as a transformative step for Los Angeles County, changing the way Angelinos move around, but on the other hand it was sold to voters as a package of amenities that would benefit people who *didn’t* plan to change the way *they* moved around. Of course, the fact that the campaign stressed Measure M’s benefits to people who drive does not mean that Measure M will not, in fact, reduce driving and increase transit use. But it is worth noting that as the county has steadily rolled out more transit service over the last 20 years its transit ridership has fallen. Recent history in Los Angeles suggests that the mere presence of transit facilities does not guarantee substantial transit travel levels. It is of course possible that the transit

network needs to reach a threshold that “tips” drivers into using it, but if such a threshold exists its required level is at this point not known.

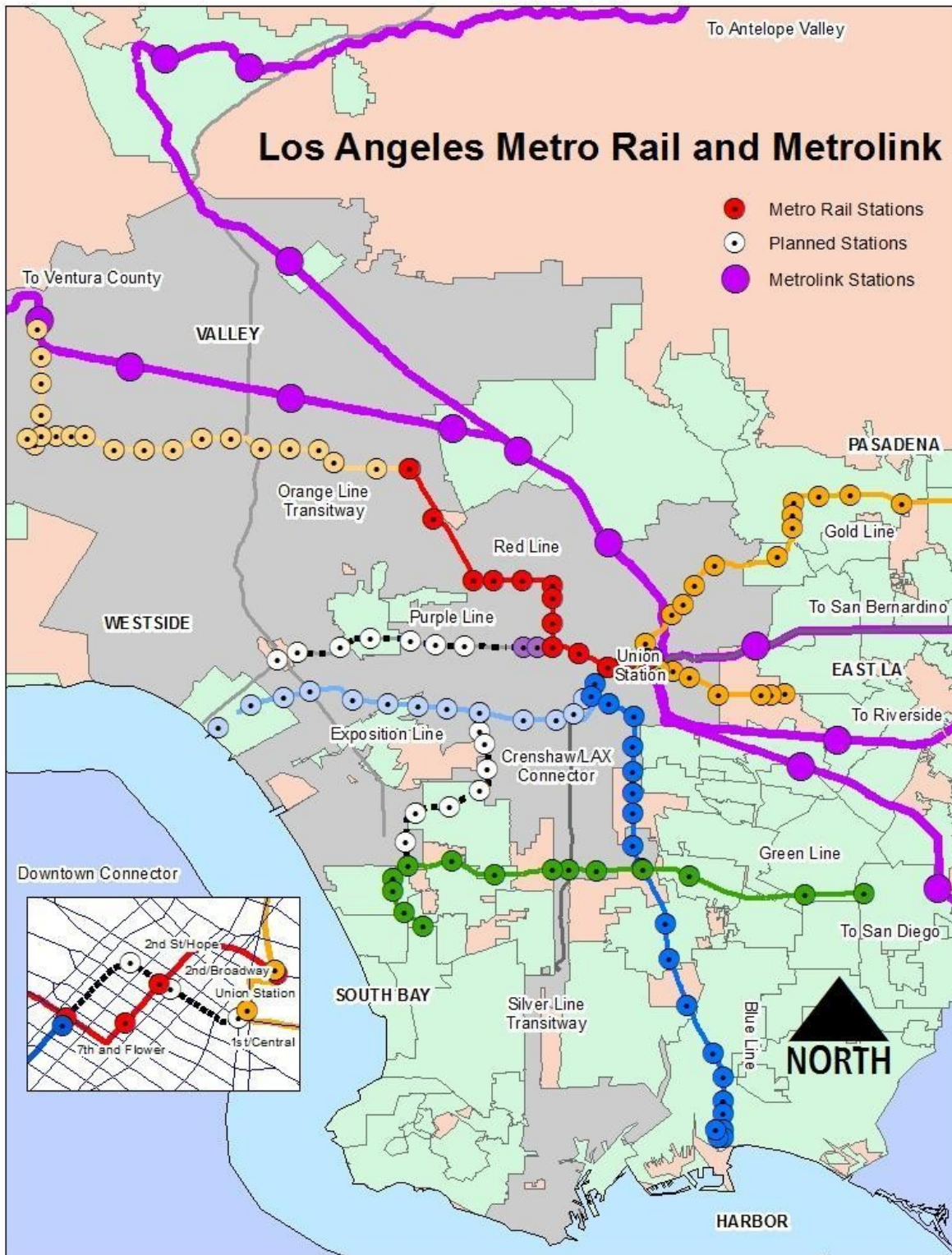
Measure M’s victory may have only partially been a reaction to its campaign message. Measure M had a sophisticated, well-financed campaign and it won, but many transportation ballots win necessary majorities with much less money and sophistication.<sup>65</sup> So it is possible—though unlikely—that most voters supported Measure M for reasons other than those emphasized in the campaign. It *is* possible that Measure M would have won with a less-sophisticated campaign or that the campaign was not decisive; but it is also likely that voters were motivated by the concerns the campaign identified and emphasized.

With the passage of Measure M, Metro is set to carry out a number of highway and transit improvements in the region. The current Metro Rail system, shown in Figure 32, will be expanded with the completion of the Purple Line extension to the 405 Freeway in West LA, the Crenshaw-LAX connector, and the Downtown Connector, all currently under construction. Additional planned projects include extending the Crenshaw-LAX line north to Hollywood/Highland (connecting with the Red Line), extending the Green Line south to the South Bay Cities (Torrance Transit Center) and east to Norwalk (connection with Metrolink), and extending the Eastside Gold Line (beyond Atlantic Boulevard) and Foothill Gold Line (from Azusa to Montclair). Other projects include an Automated People Mover to connect Metro Rail to LAX, a line from Westwood to the LAX Metro Center, a line linking the Orange Line from Van Nuys to San Fernando (connecting to Metrolink), and a line connecting the Gateway Cities to Downtown (from Artesia to Union Station) (LACMTA 2018b) Establishing a bus rapid transit connection from the Orange Line at North Hollywood to the Gold Line at Pasadena as well as converting the entire Orange Line Transitway from rapid bus to light rail are also under consideration.

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<sup>65</sup> One of the very first polls about Measure M, taken in 2013, showed 70 percent support. While the results of one poll should not be given much weight, even long before the campaign began the measure had a winning margin.

**Figure 32. Metro Rail and Metrolink Lines**



# VI. CONCLUSION

## THE LA STORY IN THE CONTEXT OF A NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE CRISIS

In 1983 a widely discussed book by Choate and Walter proclaimed that American infrastructure was in ruins. Decades of neglect had, they claimed, placed our nation at risk of economic and social decline. Unless the infrastructure crisis was addressed, and soon, deterioration would accelerate, seriously worsening conditions of roads, bridges, water supply, and sewage systems -- lives would be lost and the economic costs of recovery would escalate. That book marked the start of what has become a deluge of media attention to American infrastructure; attention that is both politically salient and overly simplistic.

Reflecting, no doubt, the complexity of the problem and daunting political challenges to addressing it, warnings about the imminent collapse of American infrastructure persist and are more common today than in the 1980s. The American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) annually issues "report cards," each one reporting that our federal, state, and local governments are collectively earning poor grades for their investments in infrastructure, particularly maintenance. Most recently, the ASCE issued its 2017 grades of D for highways and D- for transit, backing up its grading with statistics about declining public spending, deaths due to traffic crashes, hours of productive time lost to congestion, and a national backlog of transit maintenance needs of as much as \$90 billion (American Society of Civil Engineers 2017). Commentators continue to refer to American infrastructure using the word "crisis" and recitation of the problem has become rote. Presidential and congressional candidates all mention infrastructure and talk simplistically of spending billions more, but are unconvincing because their pronouncements neither lead to promised action nor reveal much understanding of the problem. A more nuanced approach to infrastructure policy and finance is needed.

While there are certainly many deteriorating highways and tens of thousands of substandard bridges in the United States, they are not uniformly distributed across the country. Despite the rhetoric of crisis few facilities have failed and while congestion has worsened it has been described as worsening for at least eight decades and certainly predates the current perceived infrastructure crisis. There are many new, modern, and high quality facilities in addition to those characterized as substandard. Some of the troubled assets are located in growing metropolitan areas and are heavily utilized. Others are to be found in declining towns and rural areas where existing capacity is adequate and sometimes underutilized. Inter-metropolitan facilities for long distance travel differ in terms of needs,

financial requirements, and governance arrangements from urban systems intended for local travel.

Transportation infrastructure spending includes federal, state, and local investments in capital plant and expenditures by those different levels of government in operations and maintenance. Capital programs and operations and maintenance are often financed differently. Some infrastructure is funded by user fees and other programs are funded by general taxes. A portion of transportation infrastructure is financed on a pay-as-you go basis while some is paid for over time through bonded indebtedness. It is misleading at best to issue a single sector-wide report card for a sector in which there are thousands of different systems under different jurisdictions employing dramatically dissimilar funding and financing arrangements.

Despite these many variations from place to place, careful study of transportation infrastructure programs reveals some noticeable trends and patterns. Total federal spending on transportation declined gradually but steadily from 2004 to 2014, and during the same period state and local capital spending also declined while state and local spending on operations and maintenance grew modestly. A national trend toward devolution from federal to state and from state to local responsibility for transportation has been underway for decades and it may be at least as important as aggregate spending trends. Some states and counties are on sound financial footing and manage their assets efficiently while others do not. Pay-as-you-go spending is declining and debt financed transportation infrastructure spending is growing; some areas are overextended in terms of credit while many others are not. A 2017 RAND Corporation study estimated that an increase in total annual spending by all governmental levels of less than three percent could likely restore the national system to a state of good repair, but the authors cautioned that far more is needed in some areas and some elements of the system than in others (Knopman et al. 2017).

Candidates for national political office and interest groups that might gain from increased spending - including civil engineers and construction labor unions - urge spending increases. The RAND authors conclude that new federal infrastructure policy is needed to provide leadership and primarily to manage assets of national significance, but that the vast majority of the transportation system is adequately managed by state and local governments. Local governments generally have the power to regulate land use and land use planning should be intimately tied to transportation system planning. It may be more necessary to consider transportation infrastructure a challenge to governance rather than a problem that can be resolved by more money alone. Deciding what, when, and where to build, what to maintain and upgrade, and when to replace aging facilities are complex challenges that involve social decision making that includes raising and allocating financial resources, but it includes many other factors as well.

Building financial partnerships among jurisdictions may be more difficult than finding funds to implement projects once such arrangements are agreed upon (Frankel and Wachs 2017).

## LEARNING FROM LOS ANGELES: WHAT'S UNIQUE, AND WHAT'S GENERALIZABLE?

To comprehend the meaning of national policy in our federal system we must study particular communities in which the problems play out. This case study of Los Angeles County suggests that gross generalization about American infrastructure is incomplete. In this global metropolis, there has been continuing attention to transportation infrastructure for better than five decades and an evolutionary transformation of the governance of its transportation systems. This LA story provides a window on how one mega-region has addressed the transportation infrastructure crisis at the ballot box. This unique case of America's second largest regional economy helps us understand decision making and politics that are unique to its location and history. While unique in many ways, the evolution of county transportation programs was influenced by state and federal policy as well as regional politics and economics. The most populous and one of the most economically and ethnically diverse counties in the nation has undergone steady and extensive change over a century and a half, and that change has always influenced and been influenced by its transportation programs. Shaped by early railway and port development, an early leader in the adoption of the automobile and freeway planning, the region's residents and leaders became increasingly concerned with congestion and the environmental impacts of its earlier choices. As population continues to grow and development density increases, Los Angeles County is now building one of the nation's most extensive public transportation networks financed largely by county sales taxes that were approved by the voters in a series of county-wide elections that evolved over five decades.

The early chapters of this study revealed that in the middle of the 20th century, the politics of transportation in Los Angeles had moved steadily away from reliance on private investment and voter willingness to tax themselves for particular facilities and systems. Supported by user fees in the form of gasoline taxes, which systematically produced increases in revenue as travel burgeoned, the region welcomed and became increasingly dependent on state-built facilities and federal aid. By the 1960s and early 1970s, transportation politics was dominated by efforts to influence Washington and to obtain commitments of federal money. As emphasis shifted from building a regional freeway network – which was primarily a project of state government with enormous federal contributions – toward building a regional rail network, early effort was shaped by the pursuit of



federal grants and dominated by appeals to and actions taken by its members of Congress including Henry Waxman and Julian Dixon.

Early failures to raise local property taxes that were intended to match – and thereby to encourage – federal transportation grants led gradually to the consideration of alternatives that depended increasingly on local self-reliance. When viewed through a Los Angeles lens, these early efforts appear to be necessary but halting and at times fumbling; though over time they gradually became more coherent and effective. When viewed from a national perspective they demonstrate what the devolution of federal policy does to regions. In other words, an important outcome of devolution has been the development of increased local decision making and financial capacity, as in the case of Los Angeles. While federal officials and members of Congress were major players in the earliest efforts to start a regional rail system in LA, local governments played increasing roles so that today local officials lead transportation policymaking in the region. The transition from federal and state to regional and local leadership has been painful at times, characterized by many setbacks along a crooked path, but quite visible with hindsight.

A small number of insightful leaders made fundamental and lasting contributions over the last half-century as policies shifted and alternative measures were tested and adjusted over time. Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley and County Supervisors including Kenneth Hahn, Zev Yaroslavsky, and others, persistently pursued their goals over many decades. While many give them credit for their vision of a regional rail system, our case study reveals that these politicians needed to be flexible as well as visionary. They sensed the public mood, the preferences of diverse constituencies, often exercised caution, gave credit to their ardent supporters and negotiated with their outspoken opponents, negotiating endlessly among competing parties and adjusting as often as was necessary. Their vision was important and can be discerned in retrospect when examining their actions over many decades.

The subtle qualities of leadership emerge especially when contrasted with the actions of other major regional politicians who also played leading roles in the dramas chronicled here. By contrast, other local political figures who also had high profiles and deep interest regarding regional transportation failed to emerge as effective leaders despite their prominence and vision. Baxter Ward and Pete Schabarum were high profile local political figures who took personal interest in transportation. They also promoted regional rail transportation systems but failed to persuade others to implement what they envisioned. There can be many interpretations as to why these high profile leaders were in the long term less influential than Bradley and others. To a certain extent their political conservatism was a drawback as the region gradually became more politically liberal, but it is not likely that liberals prefer one rail alignment and conservatives another, or that liberals prefer one transit mode and conservatives another. More fundamentally, they failed

because their proposals, while visionary, were less complete and less carefully considered and because they interacted with interest groups and political opponents with more rigidity – at times even petulance – than with flexibility and openness to negotiation. Instead of persuading and co-opting opponents, their inflexibility hardened their critics’ resolve.

The building of regional transportation planning capacity was led by people who in retrospect are said by many to have demonstrated the qualities of visionaries, but who also learned as they progressed, demanded and responded to careful technical and financial analyses, and were willing to change their perspectives from time to time in response to good information and political reality. Because many of these leaders were engaged in regional transportation decision-making for many years, and in some cases decades, this raises the question of whether the recent expansion of term limits for county supervisors and state legislators will hinder the sort of regional transportation policy leadership that enabled the rise of LA’s ambitious ballot box funded transportation program. Perhaps these leaders will still remain engaged for decades by moving from one influential elected position to another, and indeed there is some evidence that such an electoral game of musical chairs is taking place.

Transportation policy in Los Angeles evolved over the last three decades of the 20th century and the first two of the 21st from a focus on securing federal (primarily) and state (secondarily) funding for transportation, to a focus on crafting assortments of transportation projects to appear to at least two-thirds of the electorate. The passage of recent measures by solid majorities in virtually every geographic area of the county and across diverse ethnic groups is by any reckoning a remarkable accomplishment. What began in 1976 with an unsuccessful effort to get voters to pay for part of a vaguely defined rail rapid transit proposal so that the federal government would make a major contribution, has evolved into increasingly sophisticated crafting and selling of complex ballot measure expenditure plans for a county program with something in it for everybody, including highway, local streets and roads, bike and pedestrian facilities, and bus system improvements, in addition to rail system expansion. The potpourri of transportation modes funded by ballot measures has also been carefully, even cynically, dispersed geographically to ensure that voters around the county will have a project nearby, including in recent years substantial “return” of funds to municipal governments for (somewhat) discretionary local transportation projects.

Adding new projects to the mix to appeal to multiple constituencies has resulted in the passage of sales tax ballot measures, but clearly has a cost. Each new project built to satisfy the preferences of a community must be maintained in the future even if it does not draw the patronage that is hoped for. Each new transit line built evokes proposals for extensions and feeder lines, and each of those has costs not provided for in past measures. Thus, it

can be forecast with confidence that building the voter approved projects will evoke a need for more funding to extend, complete, maintain, and operate the projects designed to garner votes. And, the most obvious ways of raising those additional funds will be new voter-approved measures.

Los Angeles County voters have been educated over the years to think that costly investments in new freeways and added highway lanes are no longer viable because of increasingly dense surrounding land development. While not all voters or interests groups agree that new roads are passe, such a no-new-roads position has been necessary to secure the support of environmental and other progressive organizations. Conventional wisdom also holds that “induced demand” quickly fills new facilities with newly generated or rerouted traffic, making new roads largely a waste of money. As a result, recently successful ballot measures have both benefited from and promoted a change in public opinion toward public transit investments as a way to address regional growth in travel; subways, light rail, and busways in concert provide people with travel options if and when they choose not to drive in ever slower traffic. The promotion of recent ballot measures has relied heavily on presenting the benefits of alternatives to commuters stuck in automobile congestion, implying -- but without explicitly promising -- that transit investments will alleviate that congestion. Investments in rail links, while providing alternatives to car travel for some Angelinos, are broadly attractive, but are not themselves immune from the effects of induced demand for increased car and truck travel on streets and freeways. The concentration of new development at transit accessible locations also generates additional traffic, both adjacent to the transit-oriented developments, and on nearby streets and freeways as well. And no matter how well laid out and run, the public transit network cannot possibly reach as many destinations as quickly as private vehicles operating on a far more extensive (albeit congested) road network. As long as motor vehicle travel remains largely unregulated by road or parking pricing, traffic congestion will likely persist, and even worsen, in parts of the region increasingly well served by new transit investments.

The development of an increasingly extensive rail network that would secure ballot box success has meant extending rail to outlying parts of the county, such in the South Bay and San Gabriel Valley, where these politically attractive rail transit projects that will likely prove over time to have only modest transit markets. Attracting voters is very different than attracting riders, so these expensive-to-build, modestly-performing lines will generate little fare revenue and will require substantial operating subsidies for years to come.

Continued population and economic growth will exacerbate congestion, but the high passenger-carrying capacities of the new rail lines will not be fully utilized unless and until transportation officials began to manage motor vehicle travel -- such through congestion and parking pricing -- that have to

date proven as politically radioactive as they are effective. Drivers are concerned with growing congestion and so transit investments are likely to be complemented by continuing expansion of toll lanes on major regional facilities that provide faster alternatives for those who will continue to travel on automobiles.

This history of ballot box transportation finance and planning in Los Angeles County suggests that increased reliance on local governance and finance is ongoing, but it is difficult to predict how that reliance will support or impede the linking of who pays for and benefits from transportation systems in Los Angeles, and whether we have mortgaged the future to pay for popular transportation projects today. The success of sales tax revenues for transportation at the ballot box assures hundreds of millions of dollars in new transportation revenue for decades to come, which increases LA MTA's capacity to borrow against that future revenue stream. As the public transit system expands, and the need for new projects emerges, there will almost certainly be growing need for yet more revenues to operate, maintain, and further expand the transportation systems to which commitments have already been made. That could lead to new attempts to convince voters to increase sales taxes yet again. But the now very high (9.5% to 10.5%) total sales tax in LA County, along with competing demands for resources, such as to increase the supply of housing to low income families, may well limit the capacity of transportation agencies to go back to the voters for more sales tax funding. So in the years ahead, other forms of local transportation finance -- from property taxes to electronic road user charges -- may well be the new forms of transportation finance.

Voters have demonstrated that they will tax themselves to pay for tangible improvements to their local and regional transportation networks. Whether the sales tax -- which generates huge sums of money with very small incremental increases in the levy -- continues to be the finance instrument of choice, and whether shiny new rail transit lines continue to be the mode of choice for voters remains to be seen. New transportation technologies are already transforming urban travel, and many more such innovations are on the way. LA Metro is already planning "first and last mile" connections to their stations and stops that rely to an increasing extent on transportation network companies like Lyft and Uber. What these new services, and the autonomous vehicles following behind them, portend for travel in LA and in metropolitan areas around the country remains to be seen. We may see increasingly collective forms of personal and public provisioned mobility, or people may choose to drive alone (or be driven alone) even more than they do now. Only time will tell.



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# APPENDIX: LIST OF EARLY LOS ANGELES TRANSPORTATION BALLOT MEASURES

Year	Purpose	Notes	\$ Amount	Result
February 1868	Build Los Angeles and San Pedro Railroad		\$225,000	Passed
November 1972	Turn LA and San Pedro Railroad over to Southern Pacific			Passed
February 1905	Southern Pacific Railroad Expansion	Passed soon after the state-level 1907 "Good Roads Law" that enabled counties to hold bond elections for road improvement projects prepared by a Highway Commission	\$602,000	Passed
March 1905	Countywide highways		\$3,500,000	Passed
1909	Creation of LA's Public Utilities Commission			Passed
April 1910	Harbor bond issue	Only South Pasadena	\$3,000,000	Passed
June 1910	Concrete span across the Arroyo Seco			Passed
April 1913	Railway bonds	Voted on alongside 7 other bond measures	\$1,000,000	Not passed
April 1913	Harbor bonds	Voted on alongside 7 other bond measures	\$2,500,000	Passed
April 1915	Establishment of jitney bus line to LA	Voted on alongside two other bond measures, all failed	\$12,000	Not passed
October 1915	"Good Roads" bonds	Following the measure's failure, owners of businesses surrounding proposed tunnel stepped up and pledged needed funds. Tunnel was then successfully constructed. Voted on alongside four other bond measures, all of which failed to pass.	\$2,850,000	Not passed
June 1916	Second Street Tunnel	Long Beach only. Voted on alongside two other bond measures	\$300,000	Not passed
September 1916	Long Beach Harbor improvements		\$300,000	Passed
April 1919	Railroad to connect Pasadena to LA		\$3,000,000	Not passed
May 1919	Bond issue for the LA Harbor		\$4,500,000	Passed
June 1921	Bond issue for the LA Harbor	in alongside other bond measures. originally proposed for \$10, C	\$4,800,000	Passed
June 1923	Harbor bonds		\$15,000,000	Passed
July 1924	Major Street Traffic Plan of Los Angeles			Passed
July 1924	Bond to implement Major Street Traffic Plan of Los Angeles		\$5,000,000	Passed
1926	Approval/disapproval for rail union station			Passed
1926	Approval/disapproval of rail plaza site			Passed
May 1928	Airport improvements			Passed
1937	Arroyo Seco parkway extension to Devil's Gate	Only Pasadena	\$6,000,000	Not passed
June 1956	Airport improvements (LAX, San Fernando Valley)		\$60,000,000	Passed