

Stanislaus transportation tax moves toward November 2016 vote

HIGHLIGHTS

Recent poll shows 64 percent support – close enough to two-thirds threshold to encourage leaders

Public education could sway enough voters to accept higher sales tax, consultant says

BY GARTH STAPLEY
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Public support for a transportation tax across Stanislaus County is higher this year than last, poll numbers show, nudging leaders toward a November 2016 countywide vote to raise sales tax a half cent for road and transit projects.

A final decision will be made Jan. 20 by members of the Stanislaus Council of Governments, with opportunities for public input then and on Dec. 16, when leaders will review an all-important plan for how the money would be spent.

The recent poll suggests highest support for fixing potholes and maintaining neighborhood roads. Leaders will haggle over how much money should be given to scores of priorities with less enthusiasm, including:

- Reducing traffic.
- Senior mobility.
- Improving the Briggsmore Avenue interchange with Highway 99.
- A future Highway 132 bypass west of downtown Modesto.
- Pedestrian and bicycle paths.
- Extending Altamont Corridor Express passenger trains from Lathrop to Modesto and Turlock.
- Building the North and South county corridor expressways.

The telephone poll, conducted the third week of October, reached 804 likely voters throughout the county, 64 percent of whom voiced support for a transportation tax. It would need 66.67 percent to pass. StanCOG members discussed the matter at a meeting last week.

THE POLL'S MARGIN OF ERROR: PLUS OR MINUS 3.45 PERCENT

“Clearly, we’re in the hunt,” said Bryan Godbe, co-founder of Godbe Research, noting a March 2014 survey showing only 57 percent support. That discouraged leaders, who chose not to pursue a ballot measure last year, having seen similar

countywide votes fail in 2006 and 2008, the last by a sliver.

What might boost public support high enough next year?



IF WE BELIEVE IN THIS, WE’VE GOT TO GET OUT AND KNOCK ON DOORS. THAT’S WHAT’S GOING TO SELL THIS.

Jenny Kenoyer, councilwoman, Modesto

“We need to tell the residents what they’re going to get from this tax, iron clad,” county Supervisor Bill O’Brien said.

For example, Oakdale respondents voiced concern with conditions of F, D and Second streets. Improvements on those roads are likely to be in an expenditure plan shopped to voters there.

People must understand the benefits to all and not get caught up in turf wars, Supervisor Vito Chiesa said.

A few speakers from the audience urged leaders to give priority to transit projects, including bringing ACE train service through the county.

“

A LOT OF PEOPLE IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD CAN'T AFFORD A CAR.

Wayne Bridegroom, pastor, Central Baptist Church, West Modesto

“Consider the transit needs of our most vulnerable people, as often they’re forgotten,” said Edgar Garibay of the Environmental Justice Project and Stanislaus Sustainable Communities Coalition. He said transit ridership has grown at twice the population rate in recent years.

Modesto Councilman Tony Madrigal agreed, saying trains decrease traffic on roads and reduce air pollution.

Modesto businessman Craig Lewis said 64 percent support at this point in the game is “by far the highest we’ve ever had,” compared to previous efforts. He helped spearhead the 2006 measure.

Survey results showed high support in the West Side cities of Newman and Patterson and the least enthusiasm in the eastern cities of Oakdale and Hughson. People living in unincorporated areas registered only 55.9 percent support – lower than in any city – while the county’s largest city by far, Modesto, came in about the middle of the pack with 65.4 percent support.

No one Wednesday mentioned the fate of Modesto’s Measure G, a general tax increase that leaders promised to spend on public safety. It needed majority support to pass Tuesday but got less than 44 percent.

StanCOG’s Dec. 16 and Jan. 20 meetings begin at 6 p.m. in the third-floor chamber at 1111 I St., Modesto.

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Sean Hansen

As long as this transportation tax proposed is NOT used for law enforcement and a good portion goes to low income & urbanized unincorporated communities for repaving roads, installation of sidewalks and public transportation; I will support this tax...

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Frank Damrell · Santa Clara University

The residents of our county needs to make a decision to help ourselves. This measure will have something for everyone but cannot realistically check all the boxes. It may or may not fix the Briggsmore overpass or provide sidewalks to unincorporated areas, but that shouldn't justify its defeat. It should win because it qualifies us for other \$\$\$ we otherwise wouldn't get from Sacramento, improves access that helps employers, benefits public transit and commuters, and fills pot holes somewhere. Just accepting our responsibility to each other and investing in our communities is a huge stride forward.

Like Reply Nov 9, 2015 9:11pm



Modesto Livin · Modesto, California

Everyone voting needs to read exactly what's in it before agreeing to it. Tricky wording is always well hid and it's important that we make sure the funding is going for exactly what they are stating. Remember, sales tax increase just failed, so this could easily be a back door to it.

Like Reply Nov 10, 2015 6:38am



Charlie Metcalf · Santa Monica College

So how about avoiding the mistake of Measure G? If you want this one to have a chance of passing spell out in writing exactly how the money is going to be spent!!!

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