

CLIMATE and ENERGY *Achievement*



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Unlocking the Grid: Los Angeles Votes for Transit

THE ACHIEVEMENT

In 2008, the economy was in a tailspin, gasoline prices skyrocketed and tumbled, and the Los Angeles-area environmental community had not organized around a transportation issue in years. Yet somehow, 67.93 percent of the voters in Los Angeles County approved Measure R—a half cent sales tax increase for transportation, at least two-thirds going to transit projects.

Measure R not only created a plan to transform Southern California's transportation system, it financed it. The average Los Angeles County resident will contribute about \$25 per year to pay for new transportation projects and accelerate those already in the pipeline. The \$40 billion generated over 30 years will cover the expansion of public transit including subway, light rail, and bus-way systems; traffic reductions; maintaining existing fares on public transit; and street improvements.

WHAT MADE THE DIFFERENCE?

A dynamic coalition of environmental, labor, and business groups developed a comprehensive proposal and waged a strong campaign. The effort was launched initially as the "Subway to the Sea" coalition, a project intended to create momentum for the Wilshire Subway. As the coalition explored possibilities, the focus shifted to a comprehensive plan that served the entire county and provided funding. Led by former Santa Monica Mayor Denny Zane, the Los Angeles County Transportation Funding Collaborative (now called Move LA) was launched with 34 organizations. The collaborative successfully held "It's Time to Move LA!," a conference designed to identify how to finance essential transportation investments in Los Angeles County.

Environmental, labor, and business groups engaged political leadership at the local, state, and national levels to ensure broad support and dissolve organized opposition. The group enlisted Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who had supported Subway to the Sea during his campaign, and County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who had once opposed tunneling to build subways. U.S. Representative Henry Waxman was persuaded to reconsider his earlier opposition—which had banned federal co-funding—to a subway along the

Wilshire corridor. Santa Monica City Councilwoman and then Metro Chair Pam O'Connor also played a key role. And, California Assemblymember Mike Feuer successfully carried legislation authorizing the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority to collect the tax if approved by voters.

THE IMPACT

In addition to public outcries to relieve congestion, local officials must reduce vehicle miles traveled and help meet global warming targets due to Senate Bill 375, also enacted in 2008. Measure R gives the County a head start by generating financial resources for transit alternatives in one of the most transit-poor major cities in the world. Climate and Energy panelist California Energy Commission Chair Karen Douglas

called the passage of Measure R "a funding mechanism to achieve the goals of SB 375—the critical link between transportation and land use planning with regard to climate change."

The first phases of work funded under Measure R are likely to include an extension of the Expo Line from Culver City to Santa Monica, an extension of the Gold Line from Pasadena to Azusa, and placement of a bus-way or light-rail line along Crenshaw Boulevard in South Los Angeles. The Expo Line extension to Santa Monica is likely to have the most profound impact on the area easing traffic in a key east-west corridor and giving thousands of commuters a convenient alternative. But the furthest-reaching impact may be the change in the mindset of

millions of residents. As more Angelenos find rail to be convenient and efficient, Measure R could launch a new trend toward transit-oriented development.

Leading Environmental and Transit Advocacy Groups Involved:

- Move LA (formerly Los Angeles County Transportation Funding Collaborative)
- American Lung Association of California
- Coalition for Clean Air
- Sierra Club
- The Transit Coalition
- Subway to the Sea Coalition
- Environment Now
- Several Business and Labor Groups

