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CORRESPONDENCE

as of 2-1-2024

From: [Mike Swire](#)
To: [cacsecretary \[mailto:cacsecretary@smcta.com\]](mailto:cacsecretary@smcta.com); [Board \[mailto:Board@smcta.com\]](mailto:Board@smcta.com)
Subject: Re: MTC Board rejects funding for highway widenings through future transportation revenue measures
Date: Saturday, January 27, 2024 11:30:34 AM

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Dear Members of the SMCTA Board and CAC,

[Here is an article in the Mercury News](#) about the recent MTC discussion on the new regional transportation revenue measure and whether to fund highway widening vs. improving the state of existing highways, helping transit agencies avoid the looming fiscal cliff, and improving coordination between the area's 27 transit operators.

Mike Swire
(writing on my own behalf)

Bay Area transportation agency moves \$1 billion tax plan to Legislature



A Marin Transit bus makes a stop at the San Rafael Transit Center in San Rafael, Calif. on Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2024. (Alan Dep/Marin Independent Journal)



By [ADRIAN RODRIGUEZ](#) | arodriguez@marinij.com |

Marin Independent Journal

PUBLISHED: January 25, 2024 at 4:41 a.m. |

UPDATED: January 25, 2024 at 4:44 a.m.

As Bay Area planners advance a proposal for a new regional transportation revenue measure, environmental and transit advocates are urging officials to avoid a tax aimed at expanding freeways.

“Widening highways when your streets are falling apart is like planning an addition to your house when your roof is caving in,” said Warren Wells, policy and advocacy director for the Marin County Bicycle Coalition.

Wells was among more than 50 speakers who addressed the Metropolitan Transportation Commission ahead of its vote Wednesday to seek legislation in Sacramento to put the measure on the ballot as early as November 2026.

“Every dollar going into capacity expansion is a dollar not going into maintaining the roads that we already have, much less transit operations,” Wells said. “To be crystal clear, we support spending money on roads — the roads we have.”

The proposed measure is expected to net \$1 billion annually for transportation improvements. The commission hasn’t yet identified the revenue source of the potential measure, but the goal of the plan is to protect and enhance transit service by creating a climate-friendly, accessible and convenient service.

The measure is designed to make service faster, safer and easier to use. The plan would involve repairing local roads and making safety and access improvements for cyclists, pedestrians and wheelchair users.

Staff said polls show that voters would support a tax that would help streamline transit. To that end, staff is proposing that the potential legislation enable MTC to exercise greater authority in advancing coordination among the 27 transit operators serving the Bay Area.

Debate over whether the new tax should fund freeway expansion projects has been central throughout the development of the draft plan.

For discussion Wednesday, staff provided the commissioners with a report that proposed three options when it came to the eligibility of the funds to be used for highway expansion projects.

The first option suggested there would be no explicit limitation; the second proposed to limit expansion on managed lanes such as tolled, high-occupancy vehicle or transit-only lanes; and the third option would prohibit the use of revenue generated from this measure for freeway expansion.

Many of the commenters advocated for option three.

“We need more money for transit,” said David Watson, a Mountain View resident. “Don’t divert more money to widen freeways.”

Shane Weinstein, a member of ATU 1575, which represents 150 Golden Gate Transit workers, agreed.

“Golden Gate Transit, its bus operators and riders have been under constant threat of service cuts and job losses for far too long now,” Weinstein said. “There are many other sources of extra funding dedicated to capital projects. Commissioners, transit needs to be there for our most vulnerable, those that depend on bus service and that have no vehicle.”

Sonoma County Supervisor David Rabbitt, who serves as an MTC commissioner, said officials are still widening the Marin-Sonoma “Narrows” because the Highway 101 conditions were unsafe.

“Can you imagine if 80, 580 or 680 was a two-lane highway with left turn lanes, and driveways into it,”

he said referring to East Bay highways.

“I hate to say it, but people look at measures as ‘what’s in it for me?’” said Rabbitt, who also serves on the board of the Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit. “We need to find a sweet spot.”

Andrew Fremier, executive director of MTC, said that Bay Area transit operators are facing a fiscal cliff. Planners are strategizing ways to fund a \$700 million annual shortfall that is necessary to keep transit services up to existing levels.

“The primary goal is really tied to the operations hole that we anticipate,” Fremier said of the measure.

“I think it’s very important that the first principal is to try to keep the buses, the trains, the ferries running,” Fremier said. “That’s an operational hole that we don’t have a real good solution for in the future unless we get a measure passed.”

After the meeting, Mike Arnold, a Novato resident and economist, said he is skeptical.

“Voters ought to be very concerned that the MTC is seeking enormous power by putting the cart before the horse,” Arnold said. “It is seeking legislative authorization for unspecified taxing options, in all or an unspecified subset of the Bay Area nine-counties, for yet unspecified purposes, and for unspecified geographic funding distributions on November 2026 or later.”

MTC staff said the legislation would seek authorization for successive tax measures.

“We’ve heard some initial concerns from North Bay leaders about this draft proposal and I look forward

to bringing the Commission and local representatives together to have further conversations,” Senate President Designee Mike McGuire said in an email following the meeting. “It’s still early in the process and there’s a lot more work to do.”

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Marin County Supervisor Stephanie Moulton-Peters also serves on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission said this is an early action by the MTC board to initiate the legislative process.

MTC’s vote sponsors what’s called a “spot” bill, authored by Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat from San Francisco. The bill will be used to seek authorization from the Legislature in each of the nine Bay Area counties. The first opportunity to amend Wiener’s Senate Bill 925 will be in mid-February.

“The measure would prioritize funding for transit and reforms to improve service to riders and greater coordination and accountability of transit providers,” Moulton-Peters said.

“The funding priorities and funding mechanisms will

be further defined over the coming months, with opportunities for the public to shape these priorities,” she said. “This is the beginning of the process to provide funding support to create a world-class transit system for the Bay Area. “

On Fri, Jan 26, 2024 at 11:17 AM Mike Swire <mswire91@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Members of the SMCTA Board and CAC,

Thank you for your service to the people of SM County. I wanted to forward you this article on transportation funding in the Bay Area.

This week, the [MTC Legislative Committee, headed by SMC Supervisor David Canepa, rejected staff's proposal to include highway widenings](#) in MTC's planned regional transportation revenue measure. Almost 50 members of the public attended and commented in opposition to the staff's widening proposal. These included SM County residents, environmental and transportation organizations, transit labor unions, housing groups, and others.

It is obvious that there is a lot of community passion around highway widenings and this merits further discussion by SMCTA.

Mike Swire
CAC Member
(speaking as an individual)

[FREEWAY WIDENINGS](#)

MTC Backs Off Highway Widening After Outpouring of Community Opposition

It was a clear signal that Bay Area voters want transformational investments in safe, reliable, and

accessible transportation for all, not status quo proposals that reflect outdated thinking at odds with our region's climate and equity values.

6:37 PM PST on January 25, 2024



Photo by [Caltrans](#) of their latest widening project, the 101 'express lanes'

By
Zack Deutsch-Gross

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The evening before the January 24, 2024, hearing to finalize language for a regional transit funding measure, we got an unwelcome surprise. The Metropolitan Transportation

Commission's staff report on the measure, which aims to raise revenue to improve public transit and active transportation, added new language recommending funds be used to add freeway capacity as well.

Fortunately, [TransForm and our allies](#) were able to activate our lists, and with the help of our supporters and partners, turned out over 50 people to speak out in support of public transit, walking, and biking and in opposition to using any of the new funds for highway projects.

Here's how it unfolded.

Funding new freeway lanes

TransForm, as part of the Voices for Public Transportation (VPT) coalition, has been working for over five years to advance a regional transportation measure that prioritizes transformative investment in transit operations, walking, and biking.

After working with MTC staff to build consensus throughout the Bay Area on the regional measure concept — including ensuring a focus on public transit operations — we found out in January that MTC was planning to include highway widening in its regional transportation measure concept. Knowing that this would undermine public transit investments, climate goals, and voter support for the measure, we sprang into action, working with partners to mobilize [over 20 groups to sign onto a letter opposing highway widening](#).

However, on the eve of the final hearing to approve the measure concept on January 24th, MTC released a [staff report that supported highway widening as long as they were managed lanes](#) — lanes that are tolled or otherwise restricted in terms of vehicle occupancy, such as high-occupancy vehicle lanes or transit-only lanes.

A groundswell of public pressure

As soon as we saw the staff report, we mobilized. With less than an hour to go before the MTC meeting started, we emailed our supporters, asking them to attend the meeting on Zoom and speak out against using regional measure funds to add freeway capacity.

More than 50 people gave public comment on the measure, many more than usually attend MTC meetings. Almost every speaker asked the commission not to follow the suggestion of the staff report.

In the end, MTC approved the [concept and vision](#) for the regional transportation funding measure without the staff recommendation to support freeway widening. This was a major victory for advocates who have been [working with the commission](#) to craft the best possible language for the enabling legislation. VPT was instrumental in defeating this last-minute change.

The proposed measure aims to advance a climate-friendly Bay Area transportation system that is safe, accessible, and convenient for all. This includes preserving and enhancing

public transit service; making transit faster, safer, and easier to use; repairing local streets and roads; and improving mobility and access for all people, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and scooter and wheelchair users.

A version of this post first ran on the [TransForm blog](#).