

Pasadena Star News

OUR VIEW

Questions for the MTA

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A bill earmarked to become a November ballot measure that would charge county residents an additional half-cent sales tax for future transportation projects could be approved today by the MTA board.

But we agree with Supervisor Mike Antonovich and other San Gabriel Valley legislators that it should not be adopted in its current form.

As we've said before, the San Gabriel Valley accounts for about 19 percent of the current population of the county, and provides an equal amount of the existing transportation-dedicated sales tax revenues. That same share of money from any additional half-cent tax should flow into our valley - guaranteed.

When first introduced, the bill was heavily weighted to Los Angeles and Westside projects, so one can understand our skepticism. Although most are valid light-rail projects, the slighting of our valley and of the Gateway Cities (Whittier, Norwalk, Santa Fe Springs, Pico Rivera, etc.) quickly became an equity issue. Simply put, we deserve our fair share.

Recently, the legislature has added language for San Gabriel Valley projects - call it a sweetening of the pot. But they did not go far enough. We'll withhold our endorsement until after today's meeting, after Antonovich's amendments are considered.

In some ways, the evolution of the half-cent sales tax idea and the attached projects has been deceptive. For example, the first version spoke of funding the Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension but only to

"Irwindale." Local legislators Anthony Portantino, D-La Ca ada Flintridge and Ed Hernandez, D-West Covina, got the L.A. legislators to change that to read "Azusa-Citrus." But that is just phase one of the extension, and the bill kept the funding at a paltry \$328 million. Now, the bill's Gold Line Foothill extension funding has doubled to \$735 million and lists the project terminus as "Claremont."

Let's be clear, we're happy to see the bill language moving in the right direction. But this is a negotiation tactic commonly used in management-labor talks in which the first figure put on the table is known by all parties to be unreasonable. Then, when language is added and amounts increase, it looks as if concessions are being made but both sides are just becoming reasonable.

We like Antonovich's answer to this chess game. The Gold Line route is ready to be built to Montclair (with San Bernardino County approval). The MTA should approve language that pays for the entire \$1.4 billion extension. Period.

Getting back to the equity issue, the legislators added that \$780 million of the sales tax pie would pay for the proposed Long Beach (710) Freeway tunnel. That's a lot of money for a project whose feasibility has not yet been determined. If that tunnel, more than a pie-in-the-sky proposal (pie in the ground?) never gets built, which region of the county gets the \$780 million? The bill is silent on that question.

These are questions that need answers. And we hope the San Gabriel Valley representatives on the MTA will come home with a bill/ballot measure that is fair and one that will garner voter support.