

## Pasadena Star News

### SoPas reverses stance on 710 Freeway extension bill

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SOUTH PASADENA - After years fighting a proposed freeway extension, South Pasadena City Council members have reversed course, voting to support a state bill that authorizes the MTA to seek private financing for a 4.5-mile tunnel extension for the 710 Freeway.

Only last month, the council voted to oppose SB 1350, calling it "troublesome" and "poor public policy" in a letter to the state Legislature. The city has, for decades, fought against an above-ground extension of the freeway through South Pasadena.

City leaders changed their minds when the bill's sponsor, Sen. Gil Cedillo, D-Los Angeles, proposed new language that would recommend that the above-ground route be eliminated from consideration. The amendments also recommend that hundreds of state-owned homes along the route be sold.

The fact that the bill has a lot of support in the Legislature and is likely to pass was a major factor in the council's decision, said Councilman Mike Ten.

"It's to Sen. Cedillo's credit that he came back with some amendments that we could support," said Ten. "It's better to be on the winning side than the losing side."

At a special meeting Monday night, South Pasadena City Council members voted 4-1 to reverse their stance against the bill. Although the city's June letter denounced Cedillo's bill, it also voiced the city's desire to work with the senator to improve his legislation.

Mayor Philip Putnam said that his vote was about getting the best deal for South Pasadena, not supporting the project. In fact, in a closed-session item at Monday's meeting, the City Council met with their attorneys to talk about possible legal action against the tunnel project.

Most local legislators are advocates of the project, but Assemblyman Anthony Portantino, D-Pasadena, is one of the main lawmakers in opposition.

Councilman Richard Schneider, who was the lone vote against the measure, said he believed the language was not strong enough and does not guarantee that an above-ground option will never again be pursued.

He added that supporting the legislation makes it appear that the city supports the tunnel project.

"I don't think that the council members who voted for this do support the tunnel project," said Schneider. "I think the idea is that the bill is going to pass anyway so that we should try to get something out of it. And I don't think that is a good attitude."

Although proposed, amendments to the Cedillo's legislation have also not yet been formally added to the bill, a concern for Schneider. Also, he added, the tunnel project has the potential to add traffic and construction to neighboring cities like Pasadena and La Cañada Flintridge.

"I don't think it is right for us to abandon our allies in this fight," said Schneider.

For decades, the battle over completing the 710 project has been fought between area cities with competing interests.

Cities near the foothills have opposed the extension because they want to keep traffic levels low on the Foothill (210) Freeway, while cities adjacent to the San Bernardino (10) Freeway, like Alhambra and San Gabriel, favor the extension because they have to cope with increased street traffic because of the unfinished gap in the freeway.

South Pasadena, which was in the path of the proposed above-ground 710 extension route, has always sided with the cities to the north.

Councilman Ten said that the city is not endorsing the tunnel project and still has no position on whether it should be completed.

The project had stalled until April, when a local government organization floated the idea of finding a private company to finance a tunnel under the Pasadena area to complete the 4.5-mile gap.