

# Transportation tax may be headed to ballot for third try

By Matthew Bunk

FAIRFIELD - For the third time in five years, a line is being drawn between those who want to raise taxes to pay for transportation improvements and others who want to keep taxes down and slow population growth.

If Solano Transportation Authority gets its way, the county's voters might be asked, once again, to support an initiative to raise the local sales tax to relieve congested roads and freeways.

Although the agency hasn't indicated whether it will support another ballot initiative - the last one was shot down by a narrow margin in November's general election - it recently started to lay the groundwork for such a plan. And on Tuesday, the agency, whose responsibilities include relieving traffic congestion and planning for future transportation needs took its case to the Solano County Board of Supervisors.

Solano Transportation Authority officials updated their goals during a recent retreat. Coming up with funding to satisfy future transportation needs was a focus, as was consolidating the transit services offered throughout the county, said Daryl Halls, the agency's executive director.

Halls briefed the supervisors on the agency's two-year, 42-item list of upcoming transportation projects and reiterated the challenges of completing them in light of a \$3.6 billion funding shortfall. He told them that the state's fiscal crises has "thrown our funding out of whack."

"It's not a pretty picture," Halls said as he described how the state would not be coming through with promised transportation funding for the third year in a row.

But instead of asking the supervisors to back another try for a transportation sales tax measure, Halls presented the board with a list of options to get a feel for what they would and wouldn't support. He is scheduled to return to the board next week for a formal recommendation from the supervisors.

Measure A, last year's unsuccessful attempt at transportation funding, needed at least two-thirds of the vote to pass and fell short by less than 3 percent. It would have raised roughly \$1.4 billion over 30 years with a half-cent county sales tax increase.

The business community got behind the measure with full force, but some local leaders - including supervisors Barbara Kondylis and Duane Kromm - were opposed. And support waned in the community of Benicia, where less than 60 percent of voters supported it.

Limiting this opposition will be key in the next go-round, Halls said.

"When you're going for a measure, you'll always have some opposition," he said. "The goal is to limit opposition without losing the support."

It's clear that any future measure will have to incorporate the needs of Benicia residents and break down the barriers that isolated key community leaders the last time, Halls said.

Kondylis, who remained cautious about the plan, said it's important for the Solano Transportation Authority to "meld its goals into the broader vision of the region."

"There has to be an interim way to move people faster," Kondylis said of the traffic congestion on the county's roadways. "Rather than wait 15 years for these projects to be completed."

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## Two strikes for local transportation tax

Solano voters have failed to pass two local transportation taxes in the past. The measures needed two-thirds, or almost 67 percent of the vote to become law:

November 2002: Measure E, which proposes a half-cent local transportation tax, fails with 60 percent of the vote.

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