

**Pat Dellin**

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**From:** Kim Shultz  
**Sent:** Monday, May 23, 2005 11:28 AM  
**To:** Karena Pushnik; Luis Mendez; Pat Dellin; Rachel Moriconi; Tegan Speiser  
**Subject:** Napa Officials look to revive transportation sales tax

**Napa Officials look to revive transportation sales tax**  
Proponents author ballot measure; obstacles remain  
Sunday, May 22, 2005

By KEVIN COURTNEY  
Register Staff Writer

Haunted by last year's failure to get a transportation sales tax on the ballot, the Napa County Transportation Planning Agency is proceeding cautiously toward a June 2006 vote.

Organizers are trying to devise an irresistible package of road, highway and transit projects that the public, wary special interest groups, the cities and Napa County can rally behind.

Last year's push for a half-cent sales tax fell apart when the Board of Supervisors decided that backers were rushing things despite concerns by agricultural, environmental and slow-growth groups, as well as some elected officials.

This time the Transportation Planning Agency is trying to do things differently. For nearly half a year, the agency has been actively courting former opponents.

Twenty of the county's 30 elected council members and supervisors have been part of study groups on how the sales tax vote should be put together, Mike Zdon, executive director of the Transportation Planning Agency, told board members Wednesday.

Using the services of a facilitator, the agency has been meeting individually with the Sierra Club, Get A Grip On Growth and the Napa County Farm Bureau – all groups that objected to the previous list of transportation projects.

On Wednesday, Zdon said these organizations had agreed on nine areas of "common interest," while discussion of the controversial plan to widen Jamieson Canyon Road/Highway 12 to four lanes continues.

Jamieson Canyon widening is the sales tax's biggest selling point as well as its biggest hurdle.

Polls and last year's ballot advisory measure on Jamieson Canyon showed strong support for widening, yet the project is highly controversial.

Because critics view a four-lane Jamieson Canyon as increasing growth pressures on Napa County, Zdon said the agency is ready to explore ways of reducing that threat.

Slow growth groups want the agency to advocate for the expansion of Highway 37 from Vallejo to Novato as a way of decreasing the importance of Jamieson Canyon for east-west traffic between Solano and Sonoma counties, Zdon said.

Critics would also like every Napa Valley city to adopt growth limits that only voters could change. For the unincorporated areas, they want the county to extend the expiration of Measure J protection of agricultural lands, Zdon said.

Genji Schmeder of the Sierra Club said Thursday that sales tax supporters were doing a better job of listening to critics, but much more had to be done.

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The agency continues to put too much emphasis on cars and widening highways than crafting long-term goals that look at other solutions, Schmeder said.

"Most of what they're trying to do is spend tomorrow's money to fix today's problems with yesterday's ideas," he said.

Carol Kunze, the local Sierra Club chair, said the agency needed to slow down. First create a new Strategic Transportation Plan for the county, then decide how a sales tax would support it, she said.

"They seem to be putting the cart before the horse in wanting to adopt a sales tax before updating the STP," Kunze said.

Napa Councilman Kevin Block said the agency had made progress in identifying things that it and its critics could agree upon.

"I don't think we have consensus yet," Block said. "I don't know if we will achieve consensus, but when the last measure went down, we agreed to try this process and listen to people's concerns."

Tightening land use controls may give some people greater comfort in supporting a tax to improve roads, highways and transit, he said.

The agency has committed \$107,000 to develop a list of projects that can win two-thirds voter approval at a sales tax election. Money to repair local roads and streets is a certainty. Also high on the discussion list are major Highway 29 and Jamieson Canyon improvements in the south county.

The agency will poll likely county voters in September. Public hearings will be held at the beginning and end of the summer. The first hearings are scheduled for Napa on June 20, American Canyon on June 21 and Calistoga on June 23.

A committee of city and county elected officials has recommended that the agency go for a 20-year, half cent sales tax that would raise \$300 million. A key requirement is that each jurisdiction get back the money it contributes.

Although a June, 2006 election is a year away, agency members on Thursday urged that sales tax not be rushed.

The list of projects funded by the sales tax would have to be put together by September so it can undergo environmental analysis in time for a spring election.

If any major problems crop up this summer, the agency may need to step back and rethink what it is doing, St. Helena Councilman Joe Potter said. A sales tax election could always be delayed until November 2006, he said.

The Napa Valley Unified School District may put a school bond on the June, 2006, ballot to build a high school in American Canyon. Election pros say it is OK for a school bond and a transportation sales tax to share the same ballot, Zdon said.

As a necessary step prior to calling a transportation sales tax election, agency members, representing the five city councils and the Board of Supervisors, had been scheduled Wednesday to consider the structure of a new transportation authority to administer revenues. This had been a contentious issue last year.

Under the new proposal, each city and the county would have two votes, with a four-fifths vote required to change the spending plan after voters approve it.

Block asked for a month's delay, saying he wanted to make sure this structure would be acceptable to the Napa City Council.

It could seem unfair that Napa, a city of 75,000 population, would have the same voting power as Calistoga, a city of 5,000, he said later.

Napa might feel more comfortable supporting equal representation on the authority after a transportation spending plan acceptable to the city is drafted, he said.

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