

Bad Roads & Measure C Sales Tax

Why are the streets in such bad repair?

It may help to know that insufficient funding for street maintenance is a nationwide problem. Americans in general are opposed to raising taxes for road repair. Fresno County has bucked this trend to some extent. We are more fortunate than most because in 2006 Fresno County voters adopted a half-cent sales tax devoted to transportation matters – most counties have no such measure.

But our roadways are still in terrible condition. Why aren't Measure C Extension tax proceeds being used to fix them?

The Measure C Extension law that voters approved in 2006 consists of five major, complementary transportation programs in addition to a small administrative and planning component:

- Public transit throughout the county (24% of funding)
- Street maintenance, cyclist-pedestrian trails, ADA compliance (e.g., scooped curbs) (35%)
- Freeway interchanges, airports, enhancement of commute corridors (30%)
- Relocation of BNSF rail line and creation of cyclist-pedestrian trail through City of Fresno on the vacated BNSF right of way (and if rail line relocation is not possible, construction of underpasses and overpasses to relieve congestion) (6%)
- Transit-oriented development, old school bus replacement (3.5%)

All of these transportation-related programs aim to enhance the well being of Fresno County residents and the economy of the county. Because the tax proceeds are allocated to each program by law, they cannot be diverted from one program to

another without an arduous and highly public amendment process.

Amendment is possible, since fiduciary duties include responsibly reacting to conditions that have changed since voters approved the Measure C Extension. The agencies that exercise this fiduciary responsibility are the Fresno County Transportation Authority and the Fresno Council of Governments. A vigilant citizens' oversight committee monitors Measure C fund revenues and expenditures.

Since amendment of Measure C Extension is possible, why don't we amend it and spend more on road repair? At present, by law, a third of the Measure C Extension proceeds are spent on road maintenance. We cannot responsibly take funds away from transit, trails, vanpools, school-bus replacement (program categories designed to reduce air pollution), airports, and accommodations for the disabled – and attempts to divert such funds would be vigorously opposed. That leaves very little to divert to road repair. In other words, our transportation needs exceed the proceeds of the present small sales tax.

Our elected representatives are well aware of the street-repair problem. They know that bad roads cost residents a lot of money in auto repairs and tire replacement every year. They know that decent roads are needed not just for private and commercial vehicles – but also for fire trucks, police cars, ambulances, buses, vans for the disabled, cyclists, mail delivery. They know that cities with poor infrastructure have difficulty attracting businesses whose jobs and taxes boost the local economy.

The problem is funding. There aren't enough funds in the other Measure C programs to make a diversion attempt worthwhile -- and in any case, all of the programs working together are valuable to the well being of Fresno County's residents. The needed additional funds will have to come from the voters – and soon, because if we let the roads deteriorate further, the cost to restore them will be phenomenal.

Signed:

Measure C Extension
Citizen Oversight Committee

August 8, 2016

11:30am

Incorporates revisions of Mary Savala