

# *A rocky road looms in debate on transit tax*

By The Editorial Board, The Pasadena Star-News

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Los Angeles County transportation officials are betting that voters dislike traffic so much they are willing to approve a permanent 1 percent sales tax to fund the biggest expansion of mass transit in the nation.

Last week, Metropolitan Transit Authority CEO Phil Washington released a revised plan to build out the region's maturing yet woefully incomplete subway, bus and rail system.

"If we don't fix it, we'll be eaten alive by congestion," Washington said. It was an early indication that Metro will sell this plan as one aimed at congestion relief, even though traffic is unlikely to ease anytime soon.

Already, some are unhappy with it.

State Sen. Tony Mendoza, D-Cerritos, who is pushing a bill to expand the Metro board to include more representation from suburban cities, thinks the plan falls short. Mendoza thinks it even backpedals on promises made to voters in 2008, when a half-cent sales tax was approved under Measure R — the half-cent tax that would be permanently extended under the current plan for a November 2016 ballot measure.

A plan this broad is always unlikely to make everyone happy. The question is whether it would be worth the price.

Dubbed the Los Angeles County Traffic Improvement Plan, the ambitious strategy adds more than a dozen rail lines and extensions crisscrossing the county from Artesia to Torrance to Santa Fe Springs.

The most audacious project would be a rail tunnel through the Sepulveda Pass — estimated to cost at least \$8 billion — that would connect the San Fernando Valley to the Westside, bypassing the freeways.

Other rail lines would push all the way into Claremont and cut through to Whittier. Large swaths of the county previously reachable only by road would be linked by rail.

In Los Angeles, a car-culture capital, that is revolutionary — dozens of miles of transit.

But the projects proposed for some areas of the county, like the region Mendoza represents, have completion dates long after what was promised by Measure R, most notably a rail project from Artesia to the Union Station in downtown Los Angeles. And some cities see the Sepulveda Pass project gobbling up all the funds.

Whether you like the plan may depend on where you live and work. It will also depend on whether these new connections can take you where you want to go faster than your car. And maybe even on how old you are. Some of us won't live to see the ribbon-cutting on some new transit lines.

The recent, Measure R-funded extensions to Azusa and Santa Monica offer previews of what a better-linked system looks like and might sell voters on the new initiative colloquially known as Measure R2.

But if you are a driver spending time behind a sea of red lights, this plan would not alleviate your traffic woes anytime soon. In fact, in the interim it could make them worse as construction for new lines shuts down main arteries.

This plan is not a short-term fix but a long-term, ambitious effort to set in motion one of the country's biggest transit expansions in decades.

On June 23, the Metro board of directors will be asked to approve the plan for the ballot. If they do, then on Nov. 8 voters will get their say.

There is a lot of room for debate.