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TRANSPORTATION

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Placer voters rejected a tax hike for roads last fall. Can we try again, officials ask

BY TONY BIZJAK
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When Placer County tried to raise sales taxes last fall for freeway expansions in the booming suburbs of Roseville and Rocklin, voters in the more rural parts of the county defeated the measure.

Now, some Placer officials say they want to try a transportation tax again, this time with a more focused battle plan.

Placer County Transportation Planning Agency officials propose dividing the county into three taxing districts, then moving forward with a vote in a south county district that likely would cover Roseville, Rocklin, Lincoln and unincorporated west Placer County. The spending focus would be on reducing congestion on Highway 65 and building a new Interstate 80 interchange.

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Planning agency executive director Celia McAdam said the idea stems from the fact that Measure M last November won heavy support in urban areas of south Placer, where drivers are confronted with daily bottlenecks. The half-cent sales tax measure got 72 percent support in Lincoln and 69 percent in both Roseville

Voters in Auburn, Foresthill, Colfax, Tahoe City and other mountain areas also generally supported the measure, which would have given each community some funding for projects. But support in the foothills and mountains was typically under 60 percent, pulling the “yes” vote below the necessary two-thirds threshold for passage. Overall, the countywide vote was 64 percent yes.

“If you’re in Foresthill, what do you care about widening Highway 65?” McAdam said. “But if you are in south Placer, Highway 65 is your lifeblood.”

That corridor has become so crowded that some drivers are diverting to surface streets to avoid it. Meanwhile, several major housing developments are in the planning stages in the vast area west of Roseville and south of Highway 65, adding to the future vehicle load in the area. Developers of those projects will have to pay substantial transportation impact fees, but Placer officials say that isn’t nearly enough for the upgrades they feel their system needs.

The effort is in its early stages. Placer officials would need state legislation to create new taxing districts. No state lawmaker has yet signed on to sponsor a bill, however, leaving PCTPA officials shopping statewide for legislative help this summer.

A second district would cover the foothills and western mountain slope. The third district already exists, having been formed in the 1990s on the eastern side of the Sierra crest. Nine areas around California have made a similar move, mostly in the 1990s, according to a consultant’s analysis.

The idea has divided the PCTPA board. Roseville Mayor Susan Rohan supports it. But at least one member has come out in opposition, county Supervisor Kirk Uhler, who represents parts of Roseville, including a selection of the Highway 65 corridor at the Galleria shopping mall.

Uhler, who supported Measure M last fall, pointed out that the state recently voted to increase vehicle fees and raise the gas tax to create more transportation funding statewide.

“I don’t believe we can justify to the voters that they need to yet again increase the tax after having the state do it for them,” Uhler said. He said the time may come in a half-dozen or so years to go back to voters, when, as he suspects, the state does not provide adequate funding.

But McAdam said the state funds will be nowhere near adequate for the work she says is already overdue. And Rohan said she wants to give south county residents another shot at a thumbs up or down on a funding stream they voted for last fall.

“We have a very desirable part of the region that doesn’t have the transportation that it needs,” Rohan said. “We need to keep looking for viable options ... to give people options to decide how they want to live in their communities.”

The county hopes to do a \$450 million remake of the 80/65 interchange, and to expand Highway 65 from the Galleria Boulevard/Stanford Ranch Road area to Lincoln Boulevard, McAdam said. Funds also could go toward increasing Capitol Corridor train service to and from Sacramento.

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Jon Bromenschenkel

18 minutes ago

Isn't 80 a federal hwy and 65 a state hwy? Why is placer on the hook?

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Brian Fletcher

43 minutes ago

Sorry Placer County, Moonbeam robbed us first. Go ask him and De leon for some money to build new roads for suburbia. We can't even get a single pothole fixed on the Foresthill road!

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Rick Pappas

2 hours ago

I'm just thinking out loud here... Perhaps so much reliance on the one main artery, Hwy 65 in this case is more of a problem than a solution. Perhaps looking at what could be done with all of the asphalt resources surrounding Hwy. 65 could provide a less costly and longer lasting solution. Think "system".

Looking ahead one of two things is likely to happen. The first would be that we make improvements to our existing arteries which are then outgrown as our metro area expands. The second may be that pilot-less vehicles become something that is a service rather than something that sits in your garage. If that service picks up you and a couple of others for the morning and afternoon commutes...well, problem solved. If you call your service and ask it to pick up your groceries and laundry just before it picks your kids up from school, trips and traffic congestion during rush hour are avoided.

What I'm suggesting is that we be careful about taxing ourselves into a major redo of what could prove to be a temporary solution when a technological solution which will allow us to make personal choices that will provide a remedy is on the near horizon.

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Shubear Gund

3 hours ago

how about extending light rail and adding more public transportation?

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Richard Hartley

10 hours ago

Potentially controversial suggestion here, snowflakes turn away....why not use the tax money already in the system for it's intended purpose? Like, instead of diverting it to help ill eagles and stuff. There's enough money in the bank for core govt responsibilities, fact.

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Gregory Jones

12 hours ago

Give people options about how they want to live? I would think that people chose their options when establishing their homes.

Somehow, Growth became the mantra --- and those who complained about losing their chosen options were ridiculed, mocked, belittled, and ignored under the vile label of nimby's.

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Tony Lafferty

14 hours ago

I have always looked at HWY65 as poor planning and modeling of traffic congestion by Caltrans and then allowing developer fees to build too much to meet the initial design. Shame on the state, charge those that live there and move there and the developers not the rest of the county. Don't make everyone else pay for your mistake.

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