

Staff Report

To: SCTA Board of Directors **Meeting Date:** 5/26/20
From: Suzanne Smith, Executive Director **Item Number:** 4.1.1
Subject: GoSonoma – November 2020 transportation sales tax ballot measure

Consent Item: ☐ **Regular Item:** ☒ **Action Item:** ☒ **Report:** ☐

Issue

Shall the SCTA Board approve the GoSonoma Expenditure Plan and conduct the first reading of Ordinance No. 5?

Recommendation

Consider adopting the GoSonoma Expenditure Plan and Ordinance No.5. Direct staff to perform outreach to the nine city councils and County Board of Supervisors seeking their support for GoSonoma.

Advisory Committee Recommendation

The Countywide Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, Transit Technical Advisory Committee and Citizens Advisory Committee have reviewed the GoSonoma Expenditure Plan.

Alternatives Considered

A CTP-based version of the Expenditure Plan was developed after a draft Expenditure Plan format was emailed to all of the advisory groups on March 16 with blanks left in the four program categories. A prior strawman proposal was discussed by Advisory Committees and the SCTA ad hoc Committee and Board in January, February and March. The GoSonoma Expenditure Plan was discussed in April and May by the SCTA Board and ad hoc committee. Final edits are proposed from the ad hoc committee in the version being considered at the 5/26/2020 Special Board meeting

A matrix of public comments has been developed and responses to comments will be provided at the Board meeting. Comments received after the 5/11/2020 Board meeting are summarized at the end of this staff report.

Executive Summary

The Measure M ¼-cent transportation sales tax will expire in 2024. In order to maintain our status as a self-help county and deliver critical transportation projects, the SCTA is considering a sales tax extension for the November 2020 ballot. The GoSonoma Expenditure Plan is based on the Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) with the identified needs derived from project submittals from public works departments, transit agencies and the SCTA/RCPA.

Policy Impacts / Nexus to Agency Goals

The SCTA currently manages a ¼-cent sales tax dedicated to a multi-modal expenditure plan known as Measure M. The GoSonoma Expenditure Plan maintains the ¼-cent tax for an additional 20 years, eliminates

the Highway 101 and SMART programs, and re-structures the program categories to address roadway, bus and bicycle and pedestrian needs.

If voters do not renew Measure M by 2024, the SCTA and its member jurisdictions will no longer have a local funding source to leverage State and federal dollars for transportation projects. By putting a measure on the ballot in 2020, the SCTA will be able to plan for new projects and fund new projects sooner. This is particularly important in creating jobs to support economic recovery.

Financial Implications

Is there a fiscal impact to this item? Yes ☒ No ☐

Is there funding in the current budget? Yes ☐ No ☒

The funding source(s) to be used are: The cost of the election may need funds if the measure is unsuccessful. If voters approve the measure, the new measure funds can pay the election costs.

Background

The SCTA Board has been discussing when and how to ask voters to continue support for a local tax for transportation. In March 2019, then Chair Landman formed the Measure M ad hoc committee to help focus the approach. Members of the ad hoc are Chair Susan Gorin and Directors Bagby, Gurney, Landman, Rabbitt and Rogers.

On July 9, 2019, the SCTA issued a call for projects for the *Comprehensive Transportation Plan 2050* asking project sponsors to identify and rank their 10 highest priority projects for consideration in a new tax measure; as well as submit and rank up to 5 transit projects. The result was just over \$3B in requests ranging from bike safety projects to interchanges across Highway 101 to SMART extension to Cloverdale with increased service.

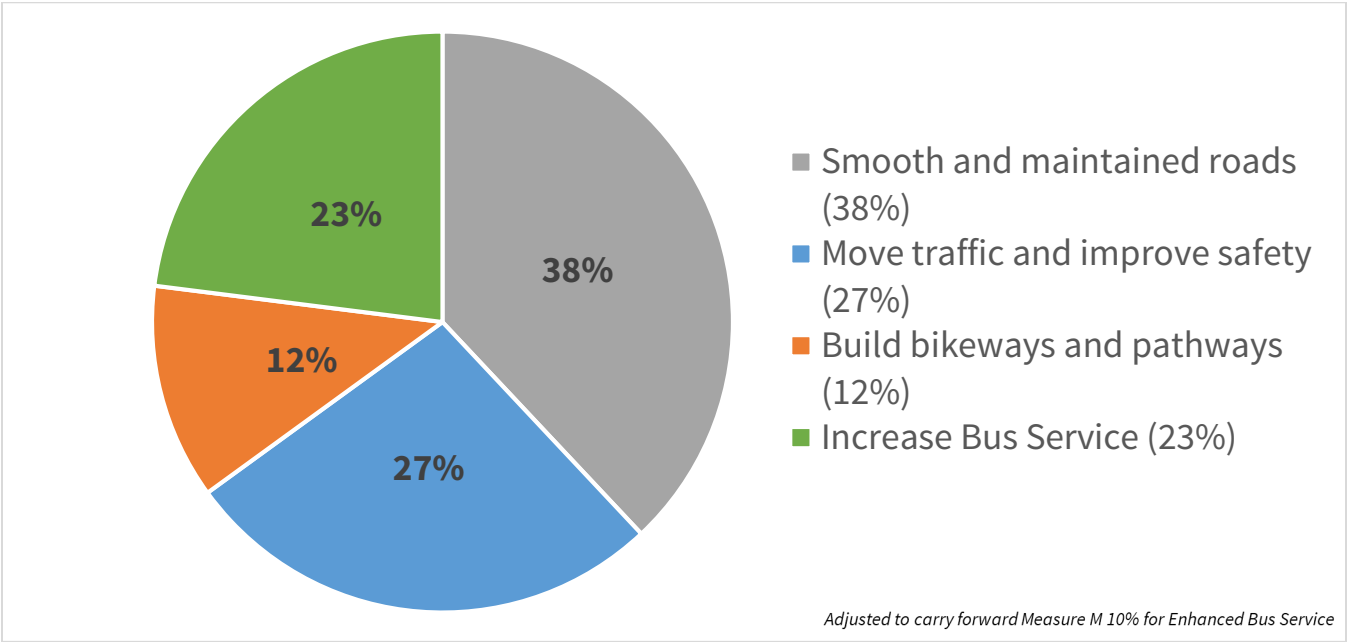


Figure 1 – CTP Measure Priorities by Category (Dollars in Millions)

In the early fall of 2019, the SCTA hired Muelrath Public Affairs and EMC to help guide and perform an initial poll. EMC conducted the first round of polling in September by surveying 600 likely 2020 voters. The results were positive for a ¼-cent and less optimistic for a ½-cent.

There was very solid support for a ¼-cent with 73% and good support for a ½-cent with 67%. However, when presented with an opposition statement, the support drops to 64% and 58% respectively. After adding in “lean support,” the numbers go to 66% and 59%.

Highlights of the polling include:

- 64% of respondents rate maintaining local streets and roads as a high priority
- 61% say climate change is a high priority
- A super majority support a modern transportation network (69%) and value high-quality local roads (73%) even it requires a tax increase
- People indicated support for the following in order:
 - Repair potholes – 83%
 - Reduce traffic congestion on local roads and highways – 76%
 - Make local roads and highways safer – 75%
 - Improve evacuation and emergency road access – 74%
 - Enhance transportation for seniors, veterans and people with disabilities – 73%
 - Make walking and biking safer – 71%
 - Reduce GHG emissions – 69%

Following the poll, the ad hoc committee reviewed the project lists submitted by each jurisdiction and deliberated on a possible structure for the measure. The ad hoc proposed a strawman that was structured with two “buckets” of project types reflecting the importance of:

- a. Improving the backbone of the transportation system across all modes of road maintenance, active transportation and bus service, and
- b. Connecting communities through infrastructure projects, both big and small, that help people move safely and reliably wherever they need to go.

The SCTA advisory committees reviewed the strawman proposal in late January and early February. In February and March, the Board took public comment and deliberated on the strawman. The direction to staff was to drop the proposed structure, simplify the content and provide greater detail on the overall expenditure plan. The DRAFT Expenditure Plan GoSonoma was developed to include four programs in two categories. Staff has analyzed the CTP projects submitted as the highest priorities for the new measure and divided them into these categories and then applied the program percentage of the total need:

A. Fix roads, fill potholes, improve traffic – 65%	
Smooth & maintained roads	38%
Move traffic & improve safety	27%
B. Improve alternatives to cars, fight climate change – 35%	
Increase bus service, affordability, & first/last mile connections	23%
Build bikeways & pathways	12%

The cost of elements of the roadway projects that directly benefit bicycle and pedestrians can be quantified at approximately 25%; the result is an estimated 50/50 split between roads and alternatives.

Advancing the ballot measure in 2020 will allow Sonoma to:

- Keep our status as a self-help county.
- Keep us eligible for regional, State and federal funds and allows us to leverage those funds. Without it, we won't be competitive.
- Allows us to start on new projects now – this will help with economic recovery and job creation. From inception to completion transportation project take years if not decades to deliver. Planners and engineers need reliable known funding sources to develop and implement projects that will meet our transportation needs.
- Help all modes of transportation.
- Continue the work we have been doing for another 20 years and is not a new tax. We have a proven track record.
- Cost effectively support transportation – if you spend \$25,000 a year on taxable goods (not groceries, rent, insurance, etc.), this measure will cost you \$62/year or \$5/month.
- Protect funds for transportation. These funds cannot be taken away by the State or any other entity. Can only be changed by the voters.

Benefits of GoSonoma include:

- Provides \$10M each year directly to each city and the County to pave roads.
- More than triples the amount of local funding for bike and pedestrian projects.
- More than doubles the amount of local money going to local bus service.
- Dedicates 3% to first/last mile connections for transit and travel demand programs to get people out of single occupant cars.
- Dedicates 2% to fare free programs for groups like students and seniors. This will serve an immediate benefit and can serve as a match to regional and State programs that will grow the program.
- Identifies priority projects in each city and the County that improve traffic flow and safety. Will help get those projects shovel ready and provide local match to leverage outside funding.
- Urges use of technology to ensure reliability and safety; not just infrastructure fixes.
- Encourages jurisdictions to prioritize climate change fighting projects and help meet State and local GHG requirements.

A countywide poll was conducted for another topic the first week in May and included a question asking about support for the GoSonoma ballot question. The result from 600 respondents was 76% support; margin of error is 4%.

Summary of fine tuning comments received following 5/11/20 SCTA Board meeting:

- Smooth Roads category – concern about language which seems to award additional authority to the determining agency regarding contractor's means and methods
- Move Traffic category – too vague, not enough certainty funds will fix roads; if GHG/VMT is primary criteria will lose support
- Move Traffic category – Priority should be given to projects that reduce GHG
- Move Traffic category – Four overall assessment criteria (how quickly built, create jobs, reduce GHG, geographic equity) – reorder to make GHG first item on list

- Move Traffic category – 5% vs 18% vs 22% for non-auto elements - clarify or remove
- Move Traffic category – Role of CAC, and other committees - clarify or remove
- Bus Service category – Add more eligible recipients for fare free
- Bus Service category – Add "commute routes between communities" in Transit section
- Bus Service category – Add detail on community benefit programs in Transit section
- Bikeway category – Remove road improvement language in Bike section
- Bikeway category – Add "maximize separation between bikes and cars" to Bike section criteria
- Implementation section – Add “Go Sonoma is designed to prioritize projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and boost the ability of jurisdictions to get climate fighting projects funded and meet those objectives for the state.”
- Implementation section – Add “The Strategic Plan will include the evaluation criteria for prioritization of projects to meet all four goals of the Comprehensive Transportation Plan.”

Schedule of Next Steps	Target Completion Date
Advisory committee and stakeholder input	March/April 2020
SCTA Board Initial Draft Expenditure Plan	April 13, 2020
SCTA Board Final Draft of Expenditure Plan	May 26, 2020
Cities and County Presentations	June 2020
Poll #2	June/July 2020
SCTA final approval of Expenditure Plan	July 13, 2020
Board of Supervisors places on the ballot	Aug 4, 2020

Supporting Documents

Resolution waiving reading of Ordinance No. 5

Ordinance No. 5

GoSonoma Expenditure Plan