

Q&A

RECOMMENDATION FOR LOCAL OPTION FUNDING FOR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

What is the Coalition for Regional Public Transportation?

The Coalition is composed of business leaders and local officials from the Treasure Valley.

What is the Coalition's objective?

The Coalition's objective is to develop a recommendation available to any regional public transportation authority in the state to fund public transportation. The Coalition will continue to work with the leadership of Valley Regional Transit to enlist support from companies, business leaders, chambers of commerce, legislators, interested citizens, statewide organizations and community organizations to achieve passage of state legislation.

Why did the Coalition take on this important challenge?

Community leaders know that to sustain and enhance economic development opportunities, a sustainable transportation system is critical. The Treasure Valley is experiencing rapid growth. The April 2006 Ada and Canyon county population estimate (560,000) is approaching the current projections for 2010.

What do the projections indicate for the future?

Current trends indicate that the population of Ada and Canyon counties will exceed one million people by the year 2030. Without significant investments in the transportation system, including public transportation, this area will not be able to keep up with the transportation needs. In addition, air quality continues to be a concern with business leaders and residents.

How can public transportation help?

The public transportation system planned for the region reduces projected increases in vehicle miles traveled and vehicle emissions. In order for the region to continue enjoying growth and prosperity and maintain a viable transportation system, alternatives to the single occupant vehicle have to be developed and supported.

Is there a plan for regional public transportation in the Treasure Valley?

Valley Regional Transit and the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) have developed the regional public transportation plan. The plan includes various levels and types of service designed to expand transportation choices into a fully integrated transportation system.

How is public transportation funded now?

The limited transit service available today in Ada and Canyon counties is supported by voluntary local contributions from the local jurisdictions that receive services. These local contributions are

matched with limited federal funds. The current funding structure is not stable and does not provide adequate resources to implement effective service levels.

What funding source did the Coalition conclude would be the best option for public transportation in the region?

The proposed funding legislation is a revision of the existing regional public transportation authority (RPTA) code. Upon voter approval in an election held within the jurisdictional boundaries of the RPTA (Ada and Canyon counties), a local option sales tax would be used for financing, constructing, operating and maintaining public transportation systems where there is an adopted public transportation plan [Chapter 21, Title 40, Idaho Code].

Would the local option authority apply to any service other than public transportation?

The funds raised under the local option authority of a RPTA could only be used for "Public Transportation Systems" which would include systems and services designed to transport customers on local and regional routes, including buses, vanpools, demand response services, rail, rail corridor, park and ride and so forth, which are compatible with adopted state, regional or local transportation plans [Section 40-2103].

How would the local option funding be approved?

The local option sales tax could only be on the ballot in November of an even numbered year to assure a high voter turnout. Approval would be by simple majority [Section 40-2111].

What are the limits on how much sales tax could be levied in a referendum?

The legislation would authorize not more than 0.5 percent tax in the initial election. The local RPTA will decide the tax rate in the initial election in an amount necessary to support adopted plans and budgets. In subsequent elections, the maximum tax could not exceed 0.75 percent [Section 40-2112].

Would the sales tax ever sunset?

The sales tax sunsets after 20 years unless it is reauthorized by voter approval. Reauthorization in a general election may be considered two (2) years prior to the sunset date. The sales tax collections will continue until any outstanding bonded indebtedness is retired [Section 40-2112].

How would the bond provisions in the legislation work?

The RPTA, upon 2/3rds voter approval, may issue bonds for purposes of financing its public transportation infrastructure. A 2/3rds super majority is required by the Idaho Constitution and is patterned after typical Idaho bond statutes [Section 40-2114 through 40-2118].

How are the sales taxes collected?

Sales taxes are collected through the State Tax Commission and distributed back to the regional transportation authority [Section 40-2113].