

Con: Transit tax plan fails to address problems

By Brian Clapper, Monique Lopez & Dale Kelly Bankhead | 5:15 p.m. April 27, 2016



Vehicle exhaust is a major source of greenhouse gas emissions in the San Diego region. A new poll of voters in the county shows many residents want to see more local efforts to reduce pollutants connected to climate change. — *Howard Lipin*

San Diegans face two major threats to the health, safety and well-being of our region. The first is that our planet is galloping toward catastrophic climate change which poses a threat to every living thing. The second is rising economic inequality which undermines prosperity and stifles innovation. These crises are inextricably interrelated since we need both prosperity and innovation if we are to effectively combat climate change. Addressing these issues is fundamental to ensuring a high quality of life for generations to come.

The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) could use its \$204 billion transportation plan to address both, by creating high-quality local jobs and investing in reducing transportation emissions, the largest contributor to climate change in the region.

Unfortunately, the regressive sales tax measure that the SANDAG Board of Directors is proposing to put on the November 2016 ballot fails to address either crisis.

For another view, see: [Transit tax invests in region's future](http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/2016/apr/27/transportation-sandag-tax/)
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The National City Chamber of Commerce and the organizations in the Quality of Life Coalition are committed to moving San Diego forward to address climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, protect the quality of our air and waterways and responsibly use public dollars to bring good jobs, renewed opportunity and a better quality of life to San Diegans.

Transformative investment in our regional transportation network is an important step toward a sustainable future. But instead of engaging in rigorous discussions with the goal of designing and funding a plan to move San Diego forward, economically and environmentally, SANDAG has focused on a public-relations campaign that misleads the public.

SANDAG should acknowledge that their current plan focuses on freeways to increase car carrying capacity. Yet, the Texas A&M Transportation Institute found that traffic delays for auto commuters have worsened in the San Diego region despite the billions of dollars we've invested in freeway expansions.

Further, SANDAG should admit that this measure builds on a regional planning process that has already been a two-time loser in court. The courts have ruled that SANDAG's 2011 regional transportation plan does not provide a pathway to satisfactorily reduce greenhouse gas emissions and that SANDAG did not adequately inform the public and other decision makers about the plan's deficiencies.

Some will argue that "something is better than nothing." That's simply not true. The "something" SANDAG is proposing will force lower income San Diegans to subsidize use of our roads; will increase health inequities, especially in the southern part of the region; will harm our air, water and ecosystem; will increase traffic congestion in the long term; and does not ensure that we will create good, middle-class jobs for our young. We do not support a tax measure that builds on a flawed plan that will not bring San Diego into the 21st century. Catastrophic climate change means we have come to the decisive moment when scientific reality must trump politics. We are out of time for half measures.

Visionary leaders are investing in strengthening economic equality and protecting the health of communities by building transportation systems that seamlessly move students, workers, tourists and the elderly to their destinations. Meanwhile, SANDAG continues to plan for a San Diego where most people can't function without a car.

A more robust transit system would reduce traffic congestion, contribute to a healthier economy and would make our region more sustainable. But such a system cannot be built haphazardly, transit systems attract riders when they are an efficient alternative to single-occupancy vehicles. A transit system that does not cover most of the commute from home to work is unusable.

Transit systems are part of a strong economy because construction and operation of transit provides more and better jobs than putting the same money into freeway expansion. For example, Los Angeles' Measure R, is expected to create 100,000 construction careers for local residents, many of them in areas disproportionately impacted by air pollution.

This ballot measure is an opportunity to invest in a brighter future. A brighter future is worth increasing our sales tax. The current SANDAG plan falls far short of being a wise investment and does not merit voter support.

We urge SANDAG to abandon their current plan to place the sales tax measure on the November ballot and work with the community to develop a plan that protects the environmental, economic and physical health of our region.

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