

# SANDAG Inches Toward Earlier Funding For Public Transit

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Photo by Andrew Bowen

SANDAG board members discuss how to spend revenue from a potential sales tax increase on Feb. 12, 2016.

**KPBS** Radio News

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The San Diego Association of Governments is continuing its discussion of a half-cent sales tax expected on the November ballot. Some board members and activists are pushing for more commitment to funding public transit projects sooner.

Board members of the San Diego Association of Governments on Friday took steps toward committing to earlier funding for public transit and biking projects, as they discussed plans for a half-cent sales tax set for the November ballot.

Board members did not vote at the meeting but did discuss the [language in the ordinance](#) that voters would

be approving. The latest amendments to the ordinance include a guarantee that money for projects to encourage biking and walking be spent each year.

SANDAG has already finalized a general [expenditure plan](#) that would give 42 percent of the expected tax revenue to public transit, 30 percent to local infrastructure grants and 14 percent to highways. The rest of the money would fund open space preservation, biking and walking projects, administration and independent oversight.

The tax is expected to raise \$18.2 billion over 40 years. A coalition of environmental and labor organizations opposes the measure because it does not include a project labor agreement and it funds expansions of certain highways that go through low-income neighborhoods. Project labor agreements require contractors to operate under union rules and pay union wages.

"There are no longer one or two organizations that oppose freeway expansion publicly," said Monique Lopez, policy advocate for the Environmental Health Coalition. "There is a growing critical mass, and more and more people are becoming aware that this is not a path forward to a sustainable future for people and the planet."

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Colin Parent, policy advocate of the transit advocacy group Circulate San Diego, said he was encouraged by the board's discussion on Friday.

"I'm not sure that they're prioritizing transit over highways, but they are certainly contemplating bringing transit into earlier periods of their plans than they have in the past," he said. "And that's different than the prior versions of this ballot measure. That's also different than the [regional plan that they adopted in 2015](#)."

SANDAG staffers also presented [a list of "priority corridors"](#) that would be funded earlier than other projects. They include connectors on state Route 78, extra lanes to Interstate 5, adding tracks to the Coaster train and construction of the Purple Line trolley, which would run from San Ysidro to Kearny Mesa.

Board members discussed establishing a goal of completing most of the priority corridor projects within 15 years of the tax measure's passage. Parent said that was a step in the right direction, but that they should make the goal legally binding.

"There still ought to be some sort of formal commitment that the voters get to see about what kind of transit is going to be built and when," he said.

The tax increase would need the approval of two-thirds of voters in San Diego County to pass. Polling has suggested the tax would barely reach that threshold, and that any funded opposition could derail the measure.