



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Statement on Proposed Measure R Extension

This Thursday, Metro's Board of Directors will vote on whether to support a permanent extension of the half-cent Measure R sales tax increase passed by Los Angeles County voters in 2008.

I fully supported Measure R in 2008. Indeed, when I served in the State Senate, I supported and voted for AB 2321, the original legislation that enabled Measure R to be placed on the ballot. As chairman of the African-American Voter Registration, Education and Participation project, I endorsed, organized and campaigned vigorously for its passage.

Since then, the tax increment has been a vital component of funding important transportation projects in the County. However, Measure R was based on a carefully forged regional consensus. Our compact with voters requires Measure R to sunset in 27 years, in 2039, and any proposed alteration of that timetable should be based on overwhelming evidence of urgent need in the public interest.

What matters here are urgent?

Why are we in such haste to alter our compact?

What is the rationale for attempting to establish sales tax in perpetuity during a time of such economic uncertainty?

Why now?

Moreover, the November ballot is full to overflowing, possibly the worst conditions upon which to ask voters to again tax themselves. There is some polling data that suggests strong support for a Measure R extension, but I am unconvinced that such is the case. I've seen numerous polls over my decades in politics, and I know they must be carefully designed to accurately gauge opinion, rather than promote a position.

Metro's staff says it needs the extension to build 30 years' worth of transportation projects in 10 years, but I have serious reservations. Clearly more projects can be built if Metro has more money — but even when it has funds, Metro has struggled to execute its projects.

I do hope — and expect — Los Angeles voters will continue to back sound transportation investments. They supported Measure R in 2008, and if a stronger case can be made for lifting the 2039 sunset, perhaps they can be persuaded to sacrifice again.

But that compelling case has yet to be presented.

So again, my question remains, "Why now?"

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