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Q&A - LOCAL OPTION TRANSIT FUNDING

What is the Coalition for Public Transportation?

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

What is the Coalition's objective?

The Coalition's objective is to develop a recommendation for the local funding necessary to support transit in the region. 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 and community organizations to achieve passage of state legislation.

Why did the Coalition take on this important challenge?

With our rapid growth, community leaders know that to sustain and enhance economic development opportunities a sustainable transportation system is critical. The Treasure Valley is experienced explosive growth. The April 2006 Ada and Canyon counties population estimate (560,000) is approaching the current projections for population in 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 our transportation system, including public transportation, we 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 and are currently sharing 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 transit funded now?

The limited transit service available in Ada and Canyon today is supported by voluntary local contributions from the local jurisdictions that receive services. These local contributions which match 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, to levy a local option sales tax for the

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purposes of 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 other 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 transit funding be approved?

The sales tax referendum can only be on the ballot in November on even year elections to assure a high voter turnout and would pass with a 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 in the initial referendum. The tax would be imposed in amounts necessary to support adopted plans and budgets. The maximum tax authorized would 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 2/3 voter approval, may issue bonds, for purposes of financing its public transportation infrastructure. The 2/3 voter approval is required by the Idaho Constitution and are 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].