



SONOMA GROUP

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Date February 6, 2020

Susan Gorin, Chair,
Sonoma County Transportation Authority
411 King Street
Santa Rosa, CA 95404

VIA EMAIL

Re: Renewal of the 1/4-cent Transportation Sales Tax

Dear Chair Gorin:

Congratulations on your new role leading the SCTA/RCPA. Shoulder-to-shoulder with many of our sister organizations here in Sonoma County, the Sierra Club agrees that the SCTA Board should make climate stabilization and equity the guiding principles for renewal of the “Measure M” Transportation Sales Tax.

Our vision is for zero traffic fatalities and a less auto-centric Sonoma County in which the transportation sector is no longer the largest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. Because we are already on the front-lines of a declared Climate Emergency, and because a regressive sales tax burdens most those least able to afford it, any replacement to Measure M should prioritize expanded free transit services, quick-build bike/pedestrian improvements, demand-pricing, and other cost-effective measures proven to reduce automobile dependency.

We know there is a long list of city and county transportation plans and projects, and we are aware of the importance of “self-help” funding in attracting State and Federal funding to make many of them achievable.

Here are our recommendations regarding project categories that have the greatest environmental and fiscal benefits:

1 — Prioritize implementation of more convenient bus routes and schedules, especially for our workforce, aging population, and tourists. We urge greatly increased funding for all of the bus operators, especially Sonoma County Transit, to significantly expand service. Rather than adding new parking at tourist destinations such as the coast and wineries, provide shuttle services similar to that serving Muir Woods. Free parking permits could be made available for users with a demonstrated

inability to pay. Coordinate bus and SMART train schedules to make it easy for people to leave cars at home.

2 — Accelerate the development of class 1 and class 4 routes for cyclists, including structures to cross the 101 freeway at many locations, and wider sidewalks without gaps. Walking and cycling are the most environmentally beneficial means of transportation, and are far more healthy than driving.

3 — Incentivize the adoption of electric vehicles, bicycles, scooters, etc. not only at the point of purchase, but by making streets very safe for pedestrians, cyclists, and micro-transportation users.

4 — While it is important to repair potholes, the cost to maintain the extensive road system in Sonoma County dwarfs the funding available from a 1/4 cent sales tax. For life-safety, environmental, and fiscal reasons further public road widening or road building must be constrained. The existing public road network needs to be adapted to serve a growing population, and per capita vehicle miles traveled must be steadily reduced. Therefore we recommend the local funding ratio for Local Streets Projects be maintained at the current 1:1 ratio, unless these projects will include dedicated Class 1 or Class 4 multiuse pathways for safer active transportation.

Finally, it seems that the effort to produce a “strawman” proposal for funding of projects to be initiated two or three decades in the future has proven to be very difficult. Within the next ten years, autonomous vehicles, shared micro-mobility, and increased access to “big data” are likely to have significant impacts on transportation and life-styles in Sonoma County. We suggest that any ballot measure should clearly specify the projects and plans to be funded in its first decade, and describe the priority-setting and planning processes for the remaining years that the tax is in effect.

Thank you for taking on the important leadership tasks that set the course of transportation in Sonoma County for decades to come. If you have questions or need further information about our recommendations, please contact Tom Conlon at 933-8805, tconlon@geopraxis.com. We look forward to further developments regarding this matter.

Cordially,

Sierra Club, Sonoma Group Executive Committee

Tom Conlon, Suzanne Doyle, Joni Goshorn, Shirley Johnson, Theresa Ryan, and Richard Sachen (Chair)

cc: *SCTA Directors*
Suzanne Smith, Executive Director