

Measure C gaps spur questions

Supporters say some indefiniteness leaves flexibility to fund unforeseen projects.

By Russell Clemings, The Fresno Bee, Sunday, October 20, 2002

A generation ago, the Fresno area's transportation needs were easy to see.

Traffic congestion was getting worse as a growing population overwhelmed an antiquated street grid. But planners had a list of improvement proposals -- including a freeway system that had mostly languished since the 1950s. And they had a proposal to pay for them -- the half-cent sales tax known as Measure C.

Voters readily endorsed that measure in November 1986 as 57.5% voted yes. Now, the long-awaited freeways are mostly open. Miles of lesser highways and other arteries have been built, widened and improved.

But the area's population is still growing. So is traffic, with total vehicle mileage rising even faster than population. The Census Bureau says average commute times rose from 19 to 22 minutes between 1990 and 2000. And now, it's not nearly as clear what -- if anything -- should be done about it.

On Nov. 5, Fresno County voters will be asked to extend the half-cent Measure C tax for 30 years, until 2037. But unlike before, when the freeway projects led the ticket, this time Measure C backers point to a less dramatic agenda featuring hundreds of street and highway improvements and other projects -- many of which they can't even describe yet.

How badly the money is needed is a subject of no little debate. The Measure C extension spending plan, released in May, contains a list of improvements to be funded with the tax in its first decade. But almost all of them also appeared in a previous plan, issued four months earlier. And that earlier plan said the projects most likely could be built with existing state and federal funding, although on a slower schedule.

In other words, says former Fresno City Manager Jeff Reid, a member of the "No on Measure C" coalition, planners are trying to sell voters on the Measure C extension by saying it would build road projects for which they may already have enough money from other sources.

"They should show us how they're going to spend the money they already have before asking us for new money," argues Reid, a former undersecretary of the state Business, Transportation and Housing Agency. "If they want to justify more money, let them justify it with a new list of projects."

Reid's opposition isn't the only hurdle facing the Measure C extension, which would collect \$2.8 billion over 30 years. Environmental advocates complain that the measure shortchanges public transit. And a 1991 state Supreme Court decision means that it will need two-thirds approval instead of a simple majority for passage.

Local transportation planners respond to Reid's criticism by saying that Measure C is designed to provide a sure source of funding -- the expected state and federal funding may never come through, they argue -- for projects now planned as well as projects yet to be envisioned.

"The reason it was left undefined was to provide more flexibility," said Barbara Goodwin, executive director of the Council of Fresno County Governments, the region's chief transportation planning agency.

Citing projections that Fresno County will grow from its current population of about 800,000 to 1,582,000 in 2037, when the extension would expire, Goodwin says:

"What we're proposing is a source of revenue to deal with that population growth and the associated ... growth" in traffic miles.

How most of that money would be spent is far from certain. Planners have only a handful of major projects on the drawing boards, such as a new Highway 65 at the foot of the Sierra, a new San Joaquin River bridge at roughly Copper Avenue, and improvements to ease congestion on the central stretch of Herndon Avenue. None has been fully endorsed by elected officials.

The sweeping mass transit system that environmentalists yearn for is barely on the radar; Measure C contains only the promise of \$1 million to \$2 million for a study. And with few exceptions, the street and highway projects listed in the Measure C plan also were listed last January in the county's Regional Transportation Plan -- the one that said they most likely could be done with existing state and federal funds.

Beyond that, Measure C earmarks its \$93 million annual yield for broad categories of spending.

Whether Measure C money is ever spent on projects as ambitious as the previous measure's freeways will be up to the local agencies that control the funding -- principally the Fresno County Transportation Authority, a seven-member panel of supervisors, city council members and one public member.

Herndon Avenue is an example of the type of project that the authority might be asked to fund at some future date. Widening that key artery from two and four lanes to six from Freeway 99 to Palm Avenue and from Cedar Avenue to Tollhouse Road has long been a priority. It is among the projects listed in both the January plan and the plan for Measure C. One way or another, it is likely to be funded.

But by itself, the widening is not likely to be enough to keep ahead of rising traffic levels, especially in the congested six-lane segment that has already been built between Palm and Cedar avenues.

A study done two years ago by the Council of Governments projects that traffic on that busiest section of Herndon will rise approximately from 70,000 vehicles per day to 110,000 by 2020. A crosstown rush-hour drive on Herndon is projected to take 45 minutes in 2020, compared with 25 minutes today.

To deal with that crush of traffic, the study proposed several options, the most ambitious being a \$180 million combination of underground freeways and elevated flyovers to ease drivers through the worst of the congestion between Palm and First avenues.

Without Measure C, Goodwin says, a project that ambitious is unlikely to happen.

The same is true, Goodwin said, for solutions that may be proposed someday for other congestion hot spots, such as Freeway 99 from McKinley Avenue southeast through downtown Fresno and Shaw Avenue in Clovis. "Believe me, there are a lot of projects" that could be funded with Measure C, Goodwin said.

But Reid, who represented the San Joaquin Valley Taxpayers Association on the committee that wrote the Measure C extension plan but ultimately voted against it, argues that the measure's backers should not ask voters to write a blank check for undefined future projects.

"People want to know what they're going to buy, what they're going to get," Reid said.

For substantially different reasons, environmental advocates joined Reid's group in voting against the Measure C plan. Sierra Club representative Kevin Hall said many of the dissenters argued

that more money should be set aside for rapid transit -- one-third of the total, instead of 13% as the Measure C plan provides.

Goodwin answers Hall by pointing to Measure C's proposed rapid-transit study, and says that the measure's spending plan includes enough flexibility for officials to use Measure C money for whatever system the study may suggest. But Hall argues the study could have been done with existing funding sources, and that the results could have been presented to voters as part of the Measure C plan.

Hall even has his own vision of what a rapid-transit system would look like for the Fresno/Clovis metropolitan area -- north-south lines on Blackstone and Willow avenues, and east-west lines on Kings Canyon Road and Herndon, Bullard or Shaw avenues. They would use rubber-tired trolleys at first, until ridership rises enough to warrant investing in a fixed-rail system.

"There is no vision" in local transportation planning, Hall said. "We have a land-use vision with the general plan and the much-heralded Landscape of Choice, but we have no transportation vision."

In less than three weeks, the county's voters will be asked to pass judgment on the Measure C extension and thereby shape the region's future transportation planning. Its prospects appear uncertain. A recent poll for the Fresno Chamber of Commerce said that 60% of voters favored it, but almost 67% is needed for passage.

Traffic congestion remains an issue for area residents, although perhaps not to the extent it was in 1986. But opinions are divided on whether Measure C is the only way to deal with the problem.

Cheryl Farmer, a cashier for a downtown business, lives in northwest Fresno and sees a need for transportation improvements on her commute. For example, she said, something needs to be done about chronic rush-hour backups on westbound Freeway 180 at its junction with Freeway 99.

Sipping coffee at a sidewalk table, she indicated that she trusts elected officials to spend Measure C money wisely for needs such as those: "They need to keep this money flowing or they're not going to have any more."

But a few steps away, Ron Wiley, who said he works in law enforcement, took a more skeptical view. Even if the need can be demonstrated, he's convinced that other funds could be used to address it.

"If it's going to be used for highways and roads, we already pay gasoline taxes for that," he said. "If those funds were used appropriately, there wouldn't be a need for any more."

[Letter to the Editor, Fresno Bee](#)

It's about freedom

By Juli Padilla
Fresno
(Published Monday, October 21, 2002)

Richard S. Curry (letter Oct. 16) must not understand our oil situation, or be aware that the United States only receives 16% of our oil from the Middle East. The rest we get from Venezuela, Canada, Mexico and domestic sources, plus small amounts from other countries in Central and South America.

We are all aware that eventually fossil fuels (like the dinosaurs) will run out. Then we will have to find an alternative fuel source.

While we have the freedom to drive gas-guzzling SUVs, we have a responsibility to future generations to come up with better, cheaper, cleaner fuels and more efficient vehicles.

Until the United States stops its dependency on foreign oil, we will be held hostage by any fanatic who has oil. To me that's not freedom.

How long will we keep our heads buried in the Middle Eastern sand, before we realize that we have the ability to fuel ourselves?

If Mr. Curry wants to send himself, his children or his grandchildren to die for oil, I guess he has that freedom. Me, I would rather walk three blocks to the store. That's my 16%, and my freedom.

[Merced Sun-Star editorial, October 18, 2002](#)

Dennis Cardoza for Congress

The 18th Congressional District suffered a major loss 18 months ago when the Gary Condit-Chandra Levy story broke. Condit, our representative since 1989, found himself in the eye of a storm, and we, his constituents, suffered because of it. For all intents and purposes, we lost our representation in the House of Representatives.

On Nov. 5, we will re-establish our representation in Washington. We will elect a new congressman who we hope shares our concerns and who will fight for our best interests on the national stage.

The candidates are state Sen. Dick Monteith, R-Modesto, and Assemblyman Dennis Cardoza, D-Merced.

Who should be selected to represent us and fight for us in Washington? We think Cardoza is clearly the best choice.

We arrived at that conclusion because, in our judgment, Cardoza seems to have a better grasp of issues and seems more likely to be an active player in the high-powered game of policy formation in Washington.

Don't get us wrong. Monteith is no slouch, and his character and integrity are politically bulletproof. He also has a top-flight staff. But his approach to policy formation seems to rely on hooking up with what he calls "like-minded people." When asked why he should be elected, he said that sending him off to Washington would "close the circle" of California's members of Congress.

That's all well and good, we suppose, but the fact of the matter is that in real life, the true test of a politician's skill comes from dealing with adversaries. A closed circle of political cronies hardly sounds like consensus building, a leadership quality the Central Valley has been without in Congress since Condit became a lame duck. With the coming of Merced's new University of California campus, we'll need all the political acumen we can muster. In this case, like-mindedness sounds dangerously like close-mindedness.

Monteith also has a gift for saying things that seem to make sense but that really don't. An example: "It takes a heap of living to see what's important." It sounds nice, but it's not necessarily true. Age, in fact, has nothing to do with knowing what is important and unimportant. We also sometimes get the impression that Monteith has not done his homework on important issues and isn't sure what needs to be done to solve some of the problems facing the district.

Take air pollution in the Central Valley, for example. He says in one breath that the problem needs to be addressed, but then says we need to "understand that this is the Valley and we've

always had air pollution." He also makes constant reference to "get away from junk science." What does that mean? We're not sure.

Take growth in the Central Valley, for another example. He indicates an awareness of the rural to urban shift, and then he says "a balance" must be found. It sounds nice, but what does it mean? We're not sure.

When asked about the health care crisis, he offers two comments. He says doctors and hospitals need "adequate" reimbursement, and he says people need to pay something when they receive treatment. We suggest that the health care crisis is incredibly more complicated than Monteith's remarks suggest.

Why should people vote for him? The reasons, in the order he presents them, are: He would be a member of the Republican majority in the House. He would be considered for an appointment to the Committee on Agriculture. And he would "close the circle" of politicians from California.

We now come to Cardoza.

It is no secret, we suppose, that we have not agreed with Cardoza's stands on some issues during the most recent legislative session. And yet, we have to admit that his approach and much of what he has to say make a great deal of sense. Furthermore, he did get things accomplished for the Central Valley during his six years in the Assembly.

The contrast between Monteith and Cardoza is striking. Their public personas are on opposite sides of the political coin. Monteith comes across like a favorite uncle, while Cardoza comes across like a distant cousin – you don't really warm up to him until the third or fourth visit.

Cardoza seems to be a combination of policy wonk and political mechanic, by his own admission. He's detail-oriented, and he says he likes to craft policy by finding balance and building coalitions. He also says he likes to challenge leadership from within. But, he adds, he can play rebel politics if necessary in order to get what he wants.

He helped form the Moderate Democratic Caucus in the legislature, too, and that gives us a hint of what we might expect from him in Washington. When you carefully analyze his voting record, it would be difficult to brand him a liberal.

He doesn't like labels, he says, but he's comfortable with being characterized as a moderate-to-conservative Democrat. He also says there's virtually no difference in philosophy between him and Condit, and if elected, he said, he may join the Blue Dog Democrats, but probably not for the first six months in office.

Insofar as issues are concerned, Cardoza would like to see the federal budget balanced (there are a lot of "tough choices" to be made, he says). He believes farm subsidies are needed in the face of foreign competition and the lack of tariffs. He supports the resolution authorizing President Bush to use force against Iraq. He opposes school vouchers, which, he says, take resources away from public education. And he's against the inheritance tax, which, he says, has broken up a lot of family farms.

In summary, the question we must ask ourselves is: Who would serve the 18th Congressional District best? Monteith or Cardoza? Monteith would undoubtedly be a faithful party player, which would please the Republican Party to no end, while Cardoza would be the thinker and the policy maker, without wild liberal tendencies.

Dennis Cardoza is without question the better candidate. He deserves your vote on Nov. 5.

[Letter to the Editor, Modesto Bee, October 19, 2002](#)

Proud of his heritage

Dennis Cardoza has always proudly proclaimed his Portuguese background. At the same time he has worked hard to support and promote the activities of others who celebrate and proclaim their heritage. If elected, Dennis Cardoza will work cooperatively with all groups that reflect and promote the interest of his constituents.

We should evaluate him on his record and on his stand on the issues that face valley residents -- **air pollution**, education, economic development and agriculture -- not on what others say about his ethnic background.

SUSAN WALSH

Merced