



JUNE 11 2015

AGENDA ITEM # **16**

**RESULTS OF VOTER OPINION SURVEY REGARDING A POTENTIAL SUPPLEMENTAL TRANSPORTATION SALES TAX PROGRAM, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ACTION**

**Action Requested:** Review and discuss; authorize additional survey research

**Key Staff:** Brian Williams, Executive Director

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**Recommendation**

Review and discuss survey results, and authorize staff to execute a contract for additional survey research.

**Discussion**

In October 2013, the STA conducted a voter opinion survey to assess the willingness of Sacramento County voters to approve a supplemental transportation sales tax program. The survey results indicated that voter support for such a measure was well below the two-thirds margin that would be needed for approval. One significant take-away was that voters were mostly unaware of the STA and the existing Measure A sales tax program.

Your Board subsequently directed staff to conduct a community outreach program to inform the public about: 1) the substantial accomplishments of the Measure A sales tax program, and 2) the need to generate significant additional resources to maintain and expand the County's transportation infrastructure. A brief status report on this outreach effort—**SacramentoGO**—will be presented in **Item #15** of today's agenda.

Late last month, staff and consultants conducted a "tracking survey" to assess changes in voter perspectives and priorities on local transportation issues and funding since the October 2013 poll. Ultimately, the research objective was to determine if voters are now more willing to support a supplemental transportation sales tax initiative. Polling representatives conducted phone interviews with 800 "high-propensity" voters with representative sampling from the five larger cities and the unincorporated area. The statistical margin of error is +/- 3.5%.

Based on the initial "top-line" data, voter support for a supplemental half percent transportation sales tax measure has improved a few points in the past 18 months, but is still well below the two-thirds majority that would be required for passage. Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated preliminary support for the sample ballot label language, while 33% indicated that they would vote no. After the polling representatives read about a dozen supportive statements, the level of support stayed at 63%. After the polling representative read about a half-dozen opposition statements, support dropped to 57%. The implication is that undecided or "swing" voters will much more likely be persuaded by opposition arguments than supporting arguments.

The research team further analyzed the survey results to calculate a base of support/opposition. They determined that 53% of respondents consistently indicated (for the entire duration of the poll) that they would vote “yes” on a supplemental transportation sales tax measure. Thirty-two percent consistently indicated that they would vote “no.” To obtain two-thirds support would require that proponents capture almost all (>90%) of the remaining 15% “swing” voters. Our consulting team advises generally that a local sales tax initiative needs to start with a 60% base of support in order to reach the two-thirds approval threshold.

While Sacramento County voters seem disinclined to support a comprehensive half-percent transportation sales tax measure by the required two-thirds majority, the survey data suggest that they may be amenable to a smaller, shorter-term tax program oriented specifically at street and road maintenance. “Filling potholes and resurfacing local roadways” is a high or medium priority for 94% of the survey respondents, while 93% indicate a high or medium priority for “repairing deteriorating bridges.” In addition, 87% of respondents indicate that the statement “*It’s more cost effective to quickly repair roads rather than letting them deteriorate and paying twice as much to repair later,*” is a good (69) or fair (18) reason to support a sales tax increase.

Staff proposes to spend some additional resources to examine the prospects for a maintenance-only sales tax program. We seek authorization to execute a short-term contract with **Smith Watts & Company** for additional survey research. We would draft the contract language in coordination with STA General Counsel for an amount not to exceed \$30,000. The bulk of the funds would compensate the survey research firm, while the remainder is for consultation to interpret the results and prepare a future course of action. Staff will report back on this matter later this summer.

*Attachment*