

## PUBLIC FORUM

# Critics try to derail anti-subway measure

For today's Public Forum, readers were asked to comment on Proposition A in Los Angeles County, which would bar the use of local sales taxes earmarked for public transit to pay for future subway construction projects.

Southern California Transit Advocates, a nonprofit community-based organization, opposes Proposition A, the anti-subway measure sponsored by county Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky.

We consider it premature to forswear ever extending the Red Line when two-thirds of it is still under construction. Gridlock is only going to get worse, and this option could, in a few limited circumstances, be the only means of having our rail network reach the most populated portions of the county.

Many of the measure's provisions — citizen oversight committee, annual audit — are gimmicks that have no bite. Instead of sham reforms that do nothing, what is needed to really reform the MTA is for the legislature to finally abolish the current MTA board of directors. The board is the true heart of darkness afflicting the agency. Where does Yaroslavsky, who sits on the board, stand on that issue?

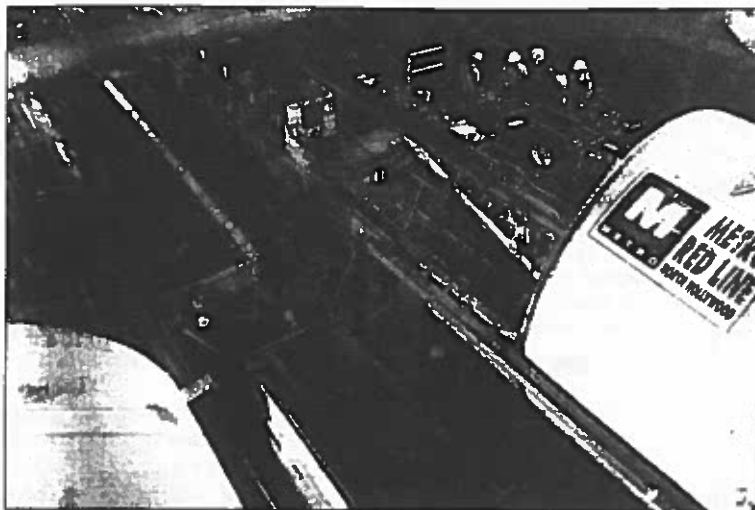
— Dana Gebbard  
President  
Southern California Transit Advocates  
Los Angeles

Proposition A is more symbol than substance. The MTA does not have the resources to continue building subways under any circumstances, but Proposition A does little to preclude it from trying. There is nothing in the ballot language to preclude the MTA from issuing subway construction bonds against other revenue sources currently used to operate buses, and then using sales tax revenues to pay for bus operations instead of financing subway construction.

Furthermore, Proposition A creates the impression that subway construction is the core threat to transit service in Los Angeles. Curtailing subway projects will not solve the MTA's problems. Light rail and commuter rail services are also a huge waste. Rail is the MTA's core problem, regardless of whether the track runs through a tunnel or down a street.

While Proposition A sends an important symbolic message, Los Angeles' transportation problems will not be solved merely by political gestures. If the MTA is serious about improving service by separating transit vehicles and autos, then the agency should construct bus ways. Bus ways are cheaper to build, offer more flexible service and have higher carrying capacity than rail lines.

— James Moore  
Associate professor  
University of Southern California  
*Moore's letter also was signed by Tom Rubin, an Oakland consultant; Peter Gordon, a professor at USC; and Bob*



The North Hollywood line, shown under construction, might be the MTA's last. Daily News

### The Nov. 3 election

#### PUBLIC FORUM TOPIC

Voters will go to the polls Nov. 3 to elect members of Congress, a new governor and other constitutional officers, members of the Legislature, some local officers and decide the fate of state and local ballot measures.

For the Public Forum for Saturday, Oct. 31, the Daily News invites readers to submit their views on the election. What are the most important races on the ballot — and why? What are the most important ballot measures — and why? What's at stake? Should the Monica Lewinsky affair influence the way people vote?

Letters on this subject must reach the Daily News no later than Wednesday, Oct. 28.

This could mean two things: There never will be rail along Burbank-Chandler, or the line will end at Hazeltine Avenue, creating a large gap between the Red Line and the Burbank-Chandler line.

— Chris Ledermuller  
Los Angeles

I would like to take a completely different tact — cancel the original Proposition A.

No more taxes, and forget the citizens' advisory and oversight committee. But I do want the annual audit; better, an audit twice a year.

Privatize the MTA. Sell it for many billions, or just let the buyer take over the \$7 billion MTA debt. Imagine the big reductions in our taxes; an efficient system; no bureaucrats, probably reduced fares; no committees; and much more.

— Charles Dusheck

the bus service and works down the debt load.

The passage of Proposition A leaves the Valley in a real quandary. The subway system will terminate in Studio City and North Hollywood, and congest those neighborhoods with overflowing Park and Ride lots.

Even with an above-ground future east-west Valley alignment, it will take nearly a mile of tunneling to turn west and transition to the surface. Creating a new mode like light rail or bus way would force transfers and permanently cripple the ridership by nearly a third.

Like other cities in the early construction, today's boondoggle will be regarded tomorrow as the best thing we have ever done. Proposition A is disgraceful because it is such an easy cheap shot at this point of our transit history.

— Roger Christensen  
Sherman Oaks

The planned subway to East Los Angeles would serve 28 percent of the population that uses public transportation in the Los Angeles area. Like the rest of the subway system, it is planned for an area that cannot be better served by buses or light rail because of its heavy surface traffic density.

It is unreasonable and unfair to tell this large percentage of the population that it can never have a subway. The possibility needs to remain open, and we need to continue to search for ways to provide it.

— Katie Moore  
Los Angeles

The Los Angeles-Orange County region now ranks as the second most densely developed area in the United States. Only New York-New Jersey takes the dubious distinction as ranking first.

The MTA needs to build more extensions into the Eastside and the

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— James Moore  
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Moore's letter also was signed by Tom Rubin, an Oakland consultant; Peter Gordon, a professor at USC; and Bob Poole, president of the Los Angeles-based Reason Foundation.

It is ironic that the ballot issue in 1980, which began the Metro Rail project, carried the same designation as Zev Yaroslavsky's proposition to try to undo part of it. The original Proposition A created sales tax revenue to finance the construction of an extensive rail network, including subways where other forms of rail would not be feasible.

The new proposition wants to remove subways as an option forever and ever, and in the process remove from consideration many corridors that need rail service, but not be able to support the infrastructure for other types of rail.

The MTA board has already, on its own, halted all rail construction beyond the completion of the Red Line to North Hollywood, until such time as the agency's financial health permits it to seek funding for further rail lines.

Why, should that happy day ever happen, should the hands of whoever is sitting in those directors' chairs be tied from exploring all options?

However convenient it is to point the finger of blame at the MTA for all the problems of Metro Rail, it must be remembered that it inherited these projects when the state merged the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission and the Rapid Transit District.

If the MTA has made mistakes in trying to manage this project, the roots of those mistakes are in the history of the LACTC. Now that the MTA is trying to better manage this project, it should have access to every means of rail construction possible.

— Kimberleigh Richards  
Van Nuys

San Fernando Valley residents must realize that if they vote for Proposition A, any rail line on the Burbank-Chandler right of way might be in jeopardy.

In North Hollywood, the Robbins Law forbids any rail line on Burbank-Chandler from operating at-grade. Elevated rail is out of the question. This law conflicts with the restrictions imposed by Proposition A.

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Privatize the MTA. Sell it for many billions, or just let the buyer take over the \$7 billion MTA debt. Imagine the big reductions in our taxes; an efficient system; no bureaucrats, probably reduced fares; no committees; and much more.

— Charles Dusheck  
Chatsworth

We, the Valley Village Homeowners Association, support Proposition A.

The current subway costs \$300 million per mile, while light rail costs \$40 million per mile. Bus ways, which our association recommends, would cost \$10 million to \$15 million per mile.

The Valley would be well-served with a network of buses, which would connect to the subway in the Valley, going from east to west as well as north to south.

The Valley has contributed over \$1 billion in local sales tax funds toward mass transportation and has nothing to show for it.

The waste and corruption of the MTA is an open secret. Enough. Let's get the North Hollywood line finished. Get more buses on the streets of the Valley. Let's stop the waste and let's support Proposition A. We must send a strong message to the MTA.

— Lori Dinkin  
President  
Valley Village  
Homeowners Association

Zev Yaroslavsky's Proposition A is an opportunistic political slam dunk that saves not one penny of tax money and does nothing for MTA reform. It creates a bean-counting citizen's oversight committee that audits what's already been audited and has no real power.

This is a proposition written by a potent MTA board member not interested in giving up control, looking for a hook in a future mayoral campaign, and known for ignoring the MTA's current Citizen's Advisory Council.

The MTA is already being reformed very effectively by CEO and corporate turnaround artist Julian Burke. Even some of the MTA's harshest critics concede that Burke is putting the agency on the right track, and all the players seem to understand that after the North Hollywood station opens, the agency needs to take a break in big construction projects until it tweaks up

the large percentage of the population that it can never have a subway. The possibility needs to remain open, and we need to continue to search for ways to provide it.

— Katie Moore  
Los Angeles

The Los Angeles-Orange County region now ranks as the second most densely developed area in the United States. Only New York-New Jersey takes the dubious distinction as ranking first.

The MTA needs to build more extensions into the Eastside and the Westside, which are already urbanized and experiencing gridlock from high-rise office buildings, apartments and condominiums. Adding more buses on streets and highways that already are over capacity is impractical.

What is needed instead are critical subway extensions to most efficiently serve the dense populations. The Red Line subway is clean, efficient and safe. It carries 36,000 riders daily. The subway was unaffected by the 1994 Northridge Earthquake. But many surface streets and freeways in the San Fernando Valley, and one segment of the Santa Monica Freeway, were severely damaged.

Exasperated with increasing street and freeway congestion in metropolitan areas, L.A. County voters approved Proposition A. It raised local sales tax by one-half cent. The money is used for development and construction of rail systems.

In 1990, the Los Angeles County electorate also passed Proposition C. This measure generates approximately \$400 million annually.

The MTA is to be commended for fulfilling the wishes of the electorate. Voters must not allow one supervisor, Zev Yaroslavsky, to derail badly needed subway extensions.

— Frank L. Bettger  
Los Angeles

## How to write to us

We welcome letters on all issues of public concern. All are subject to editing and condensation, and they can be published only with the writer's true name. Only the writer's home community, rather than full address, will be published. Letters must include the writer's complete home address and daytime telephone number for verification purposes.

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