

THEIR OPINIONS

Tax hikes for MTA must be stopped

Increases just throwing your good money after bad

By Peter Gordon, James E. Moore II and Thomas A. Rubin

A TONISHINGLY, transportation planners in Los Angeles are proposing new sales taxes to fund more rail transit projects. This is being proposed at the same time that a first-ever gubernatorial recall is in progress over the issue of a multibillion-dollar state budget shortfall.

With apologies to David Letterman, we list the Top 10 reasons to resist this idea.

No. 10: Angelenos are in no mood for more taxes. They still worry about how the state will balance its budget and escape junk-bond status. Many have given up and left.

No. 9: The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's record of spending money to expand transit use has been poor.

The agency today actually spends more money and serves fewer riders than in the past. Having added billions of dollars of transit capacity (mostly rail), it still has not reached the 1985 high-water mark for ridership. All of this while L.A. County has grown substantially since then, mainly due to low-income immigrants.

Spending so much only to achieve a drop in absolute ridership in a growing market is an astonishing feat.

No. 8: The MTA and its supporters love to spend money on big-bucks rail projects. These are costly and attract mainly bus riders, having very little impact on traffic, air quality or anything else.

No. 7: The MTA and its allies prefer to build downtown-focused rail projects. Yet, downtown L.A. is not where most of the region's job growth is expected. Downtown-focused rail has not reversed

and will not reverse powerful decentralization trends.

No. 6: On average, there are now more cars per household than drivers per household. Most people here, there and everywhere prefer personal freedom and personal automobility.

No. 5: Wasting money on rail diverts scarce resources from projects with better prospects.

If billions had not been spent on rail, each and every MTA route could now be served by express buses. To date, there are only a very small number of express buses in service in Los Angeles County, all of which are attractive to riders.

No. 4: By using sales tax revenues to serve more rail riders and fewer bus riders, the MTA not only hurts those who can least afford this kind of tough love, but forces them to pay a disproportionate amount of their income for the favor.

No. 3: Rail and traditional bus service are very old ideas, not suited for modern, dispersed metropolitan areas. If there are public funds to be spent, transit voucher programs should be expanded. The market would respond with more private shuttle services where peo-

ple want them most.

Clandestine taxis and jitneys, operating throughout the region, are the proof. Bring them in from the shadows. Legalize, inspect and sanction them.

No. 2: Throwing more money at an agency with a failed plan and a poor record of dealing with and accounting for huge sums of taxpayers' money only rewards bad policy and postpones reform and change.

And the **No. 1** reason not to vote for the L.A. County MTA sales-taxes hike is:

Just as with the last two dedicated sales taxes for the MTA, in 1980 and again in 1990, which were each supposed to assure adequate funding for their plans, this one will not be the last.

Tax hikes will be back.

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