

## CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Posted on Fri, Nov. 10, 2006

### **Prop. 1B a treasure chest and a Pandora's box both**

By Kiley Russell  
CONTRA COSTA TIMES

Now that voters have approved the largest transportation bond measure in California history, the dirty work begins: figuring out how to spend \$19.5 billion.

The stakes are as big as the potential payday for local governments, which have been plotting for months how to spend the money if Proposition 1B passed.

It did, with 61 percent of the vote, and now the fight is on.

The difficulty is ensuring that the state's 90-pound weaklings -- communities that don't normally benefit from the state's largess -- aren't brutalized by bigger cities that have the muscle to get what they want from Sacramento.

"The whole package is about a tidal wave of resources coming into the state that we really haven't seen since the 1960s," said Judith Bell, president of PolicyLink, a national nonprofit research group based in Oakland. "There is this huge question about who's going to benefit."

"Where is this money going to be spent?" Bell asked. "How are we going to ensure this is going to be equitable and all the communities in the state benefit?"

The bond will raise \$11.3 billion for construction projects to ease traffic congestion, \$4 billion for public transportation, \$3.2 billion for projects to improve air quality and speed the movement of goods through ports and along highway and rail systems and \$1.5 billion on transportation security.

It will be parceled out in two ways.

Twenty percent of the bond will be funneled through the California Transportation Commission via existing formulas that take into account factors such as a region's population and the size of its transportation systems.

The rest will be doled out through competitive grants for items such as congestion relief, public transit and port security projects. Regional transportation agencies such as the Bay Area's Metropolitan Transportation Commission and Caltrans will put together a list of projects and programs to submit to the state commission, which will then decide who gets what.

Over the next decade, the nine-county Bay Area stands to gain \$4.5 billion in new funding from Prop. 1B and \$3.4 billion from Prop. 1A, which more reliably locks in transportation spending from the state's 6 percent sales tax on gasoline.

While the dollars seem huge now, it's only a fraction of what the state needs to prepare for the anticipated 50 million people who will live here 20 years from now. So the bare-knuckle fight for money is likely to be to begin soon.

The trick, says PolicyLink's Bell, is to bring as many people as possible into the process while not moving so fast that under-represented inner-city and rural areas get left out.

"Communities with fewer resources need more time and help in working through the application process," Bell said. "Not every community can line up with the same speed and the same expertise."

She's also worried that in the rush to distribute the \$19.5 billion, the state will lose sight of how well the dollars are spent.

To guard against waste and fraud, the money will be included in an annual report from the governor's office. Also, said Paul Hefner, spokesman for the bond campaign, the state controller can investigate state and local agencies if it appears the money is being misused.

Still, Hefner said, the bulk of the responsibility lies with local planners and elected officials.

"We created a pool of dollars to invest in transportation that will be directed, by and large, by local need and local decision makers," he said. "We did not do, 'Here's what Sacramento sees for your transportation future.'"

Not everyone thinks general obligation bonds should be used to pay for long-term transportation projects, however.

Stuart Cohen, executive director of the Transportation and Land Use Coalition, thinks the state can fund projects more equitably and avoid the expensive and unpredictable political process inherent to bond elections by making transportation pay for itself.

By raising fees on shipping companies, the state could pay for port security and improving trucking corridors. By hiking the vehicle license fee and linking the gas tax to inflation, the state could pay for highways, local streets and public transit.

"A lot of this (bond) money is going to go very quickly," Cohen said. "It's a 10-year program but a lot of it is back-filling programs that are already funded. The public still needs to understand that they're going to be asked to support more transportation measures."

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