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Transportation Officials Praise Proposition 1B

By [Deena Chalabi](#), September 28, 2006 09:21 AM

A parade of local transportation officials praised a state senate committee Wednesday for putting a record \$20 million bond measure on the Nov. 7 ballot that would upgrade freeways, expand public transit and boost transportation safety throughout the Bay Area and the state.

The groups, speaking at an Oakland hearing of the Senate Transportation and Housing Committee, said Proposition 1B, the so-called Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality and Port Security Act, would reverse California's long-term neglect of roads and transportation systems if passed by a majority of voters.

"We won't be able to reverse (the situation) overnight but it can change and Proposition 1B will give us a fighting chance at that change," said Scott Haggerty, Alameda County supervisor and member of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Proposition 1B is part of the strategic growth plan, a \$37 billion infrastructure package that includes bonds to fund improvements to housing, education and flood prevention. The transportation bond measure also includes money for earthquake retrofitting and air quality improvement.

The bond is needed for many reasons, said Will Kempton, director of the California Department of Transportation, citing that total vehicles and vehicle miles continue to increase. Kempton said the aim was to cut traffic congestion in the next 10 years.

While supporters of 1B reason that the bond is a necessary down payment for the future, opponents argue that there should be other ways of funding the improvements.

The goal should be "to get the transportation system we deserve without the debt we dread," said George Passantino, a senior fellow at the Reason Foundation.

The Bay Area could get more than \$2 billion of the overall bond money, but will have to compete for many of the programs with the rest of the state, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

"This bond is not a Christmas tree," said Sen. Alan Lowenthal, chairman of the State Senate Committee. "There are not lots of specific projects picked by particular people. It is about overall state objectives."

The proposed bond money will be especially important for BART, said Lynette Sweet, vice president of the BART board of directors. BART stands to get \$246 million, that it would use for earthquake safety, new cars, station renovations and expanding the system, she said.

Proposition 1B would also be a boon to business, said James Wunderman, CEO and President of the Bay Area Council. Less traffic means greater mobility for freight, and better quality of life for Bay Area workers.

"If competitive regions of the world have one thing in common, it's that they are investing in infrastructure," he said.