

Subject: [Fwd: More Transportation info]

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Subject: More Transportation info

Date: Tue, 16 Dec 2003 01:58:29 +0000 (GMT)

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Panel wants to change tax mix for road plan

*By Beth Silver, TACOMA Herald, Washington State
For The Herald Saturday, December 13, 2003*

TACOMA -- Regional transportation planners say they will push the state Legislature to change the mix of taxes proposed to pay for the biggest road improvement plan ever planned for a **public vote** in Washington.

After hearing from pollsters and focus groups, members of the Regional Transportation Investment District said Thursday they feared that asking voters to raise the sales tax would doom the \$14.1 billion plan. It was the least popular among the choices of sales and gas taxes, the motor vehicle excise tax, vehicle license fees and tolls, they were told.

But a sales-tax increase of up to half a cent is the primary means by which the Legislature said the regional group could raise money for the 15-year plan to improve highways, bridges, freight and rail lines in the Puget Sound area.

Pierce County Council member Calvin Goings said if the Legislature fails to change the tax structure to raise more money from a gas tax increase or user fees, he thinks the regional board should desert the transportation plan altogether.

"What's the point?" Goings said during a break in a board meeting at the Port of Tacoma. "We can keep trying to put lipstick on this pig, but it's still just a pig with lipstick."

Attempts last year at the Legislature to add a higher gas tax failed.

State Rep. Ed Murray, D-Seattle, chairman of the House Transportation Committee, said he will promote changing the transportation tax mix. Since the regional transportation plan has gained a higher profile in the past year, he said he thinks the Legislature will be more likely to pass something when it meets in January.

"We need to give them more resources, because the sales tax is just not a winner," Murray said.

In addition to changing the tax structure, Goings said he would like lawmakers to allow the board to ask voters to put some of the money into Sound Transit.

The issue of whether to add Sound Transit to the list of transportation improvements in Pierce, King and Snohomish counties has divided board members for months. Some believe adding the controversial transit agency to the ballot measure could hurt its chances. Others say it's the only way Seattle voters will approve the plan.

The seven-member executive board was supposed to have approved a draft list of projects by Thursday, but likely won't agree to the package until at least January.

They will get some help. A group that includes representatives from Microsoft Corp. and the Boeing Co. plans to meet Jan. 8 to come up with a tax package it thinks the regional board should submit to voters.

The business, labor and environmental leaders have been meeting since last summer and paid for the latest poll that showed voters' distaste for raising the sales tax.

Board members said they are likely to delay putting the measure before voters until 2005 instead of placing it on the November 2004 ballot as initially planned.

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