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# SANDAG REJECTS CALLS TO DELAY FREEWAY EXPANSIONS

## Some alternative-to-driving proponents want funding to go toward transit projects

By [Chris Nichols \(/staff/chris-nichols/\)](#) 5:08 A.M. NOV. 23, 2014 PRINT

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SAN DIEGO — Despite a chorus of requests to change San Diego County's transportation priorities, regional leaders on Friday rejected the idea of a "transit first" approach that seeks to delay billions of dollars in freeway expansion projects.

Members of the San Diego Association of Governments Board of Directors, who prioritize and fund the area's transportation network, said they are open to studying how much it would cost to build more rail, bus, bicycle and pedestrian projects sooner. But, board members said, they won't consider the larger step of swapping funds from long-planned projects such as the Interstate 5 widening to advance regional transit.

"The board was very clear that we're not interested in delaying any of the freeway projects," Lesa Heebner, deputy mayor of Solana Beach and a SANDAG board member said at the agency's meeting in downtown San Diego. "We cannot take freeway money and built transit with that."

Numerous health, community and transit advocates urged the board to go beyond studying how to accelerate transit in the region.

The groups asked that a formal "transit first" scenario that delays freeway projects be considered as SANDAG develops its long-range transportation plan for the next four decades. Advocates said the drastic change is necessary to reduce the pollution, asthma and greenhouse gases linked to San Diego County's car-dominated transportation network.

Such requests have become louder and more frequent at SANDAG meetings in recent years.

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The board declined to take action on the long-standing “transit first” request, which calls for completing several decades’ worth of transit improvements in just 10 years. Instead, SANDAG will proceed with what it calls the balanced approach of expanding roads, highways, bike lanes and transit all at once.

“We really feel you can do better,” said Kathleen Ferrier of Circulate San Diego, which pushes for alternatives to driving, speaking before the board.

“The approved package of transportation projects falls short of what our region needs to generate a healthy economy and population,” she added in a news release.

SANDAG is expected to vote on its long-range plan by October. The agency makes a major update to these plans, which set aside hundreds of billions of dollars in future revenue, every four years.

While county voters a decade ago approved an extension of TransNet, a sales tax measure that listed numerous freeway widening projects as priorities, some say times and values have changed.

“TransNet was passed back in 2004. That was before Superstorm Sandy, before the focus on climate change,” said Monique Lopez, a policy advocate with the National City-based Environmental Health Coalition, in an interview this week. “We live in a world now where other things are priorities and are at the forefront of the way we want to live.”

Jerome Stocks, a former SANDAG board chairman and former Encinitas councilman, said requests for replacing freeway projects with transit may be growing, but that doesn’t mean SANDAG’s board is prepared to make a radical shift.

Even if the board voted for such a change, there’s no practical way to complete decades’ worth of transit projects in a 10-year span when planning alone can take 10 years or more per project, he said.

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