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Op-Ed To build more and faster, Metro needs a no-sunset sales tax



An Expo Line train pulls into the Santa Monica station on Monday morning, May 23, as commuters get accustomed to the new route. (Los Angeles Times)

By **Eric Garcetti**

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Traffic-fatigued Los Angeles County residents have long envied the cohesive transit available in the Bay Area and Washington, D.C. But these systems offer warning signs too: There have been lines closed, fires and even fatalities on Washington's Metro due to years of poor maintenance. Bay Area Rapid Transit has been hit by delays and damaged train cars and now needs a ballot measure to pass just so it can repair its aging stations.

Here in Los Angeles County, as we continue expanding the Metro system, we don't want to wind up like those other systems, which found the funds to build lines — but not to maintain them. Metro needs a dedicated source of operating revenue to keep our trains moving.

That is a key reason why I will vote today as a member of the Metro Board of Directors to place the Los Angeles Traffic Improvement Plan on the November ballot — funded by a “no sunset” transportation sales tax.

Since Metro broke ground on the Blue Line more than 30 years ago, progress has been slow and steady toward adding bus and rail options to reduce traffic gridlock. Line by line and project by project, Metro has expanded service so that it now connects Chatsworth to Chinatown, Culver City to Canoga Park, and South Pasadena to Santa Monica. Today, Metro delivers 1.4 million rides a day. With the recent completion of the Expo Line and the Foothill Gold Line extension — and soon the Crenshaw Line to LAX — we’ll continue to see ridership grow.

Still, our roads remain some of the most congested in the nation. The average county resident loses 80 hours a year stuck in traffic. That doesn’t just hurt our quality of life, it dampens our economy, stifles productivity and poisons our air. The county is expected to grow by 2 million people in the next 20 years; congestion will only get worse if we don’t knit together the transportation system our region so desperately needs.

In March, the Metro Board announced an ambitious spending plan funded by a tax measure limited to 40 years. It would provide \$120 billion in new funding to expand our rail and bus network, redefining commutes for residents in every corner of the region. New lines would connect Van Nuys to LAX, San Fernando to the South Bay, and Claremont to Culver City. The plan would pay for street repaving and pothole filling across the county’s 88 cities. It would create thousands of local jobs, pay for critical earthquake retrofitting and invest in much needed freeway projects to unclog bottlenecks. And it would contain the strongest oversight of any Metro measure to date, to make sure every taxpayer dollar is protected and well spent.

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By removing the 40-year sunset date, Metro can accelerate nine projects by a total of 42 years — while also reducing project costs.

To tackle our traffic crisis head on, we must trade slow and steady for bold and decisive. We must create a truly complete system that serves the needs of all commuters today, but also anticipates the riders of

tomorrow. We have to make sure high school and university students can get to class on time, and that our growing senior and disabled populations have access to affordable fares.

And we must put adequate funding in place to ensure our transit system remains functional for generations to come.

During the 20th century, Southern California paved the way for the rest of the nation by adopting a freeway-based transportation system. In the 21st century, with more people living, working, visiting and studying here than ever before, we again have a chance to lead the way. We can create a new transportation system that integrates public transit lines, freeways and local streets to get all of us where we want to go, when we want to get there, however we choose to move.

Eric Garcetti is the mayor of Los Angeles and second vice chair of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board of Directors.

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