

Toll Increase Would Condemn Bay Area To Gridlock

It's easy to vote No on the proposed \$3.00 increase in bridge tolls called Regional Measure 3 (RM3): Why would you vote to increase tolls by 60%?

The measure is aimed at desperate commuters, claiming it will "reduce traffic." Those claims, however, are false. Nothing in RM3 is going to change the trend toward gridlock.

The sponsor of the measure, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), decides on our region's transportation priorities. Traffic conditions in the Bay Area have steadily worsened over the last few decades, despite the many billions of dollars spent by MTC. If MTC knew how to cut traffic, it would have done so by now. Slogans like "We must do something" ignore this. Doing the same things that haven't worked before won't help now.

The ballot arguments supporting Regional Measure 3 (RM3) admit that traffic is heading towards gridlock: "This is our chance to reduce traffic BEFORE it brings [your] County to a standstill." MTC has zero documentation or history demonstrating it can make good on promises to reduce traffic.

MTC's own projections for 2040 show a million more cars, with total driving increasing by 21% and congestion delays increasing by 44%. Despite investing many more billions in transit projects, the same percentage as now is projected to drive alone. This is what RM3 will actually do.

The region's funding of BART extensions, while politically popular, has done nothing to reduce solo driving. Total regional transit ridership has actually gone down since 1982! This is shocking, after strong population growth and the many billions of dollars spent on BART.

High tech businesses are big funders of the campaign for the measure, led by their lobbyists the Bay Area Council, Silicon Valley Leadership Group and SPUR. Are Silicon Valley businesses trying to stick the public with the cost of transporting their workers? In smarter areas of the country like Portland, businesses pay employment taxes that fund regional transportation.

Santa Clara County had plans in the 1970s and 1990's to build an extensive light rail network. In a decision with painful consequences today, that money was used instead to build expressways. These expressways and one BART line cannot possibly equal the capacity light rail would have provided for convenient trips all over the county.

The root cause of traffic congestion is the excessive percentage of solo drivers. Traffic is horrible now because MTC and the Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) have continuously spent our resources to facilitate solo driving rather than transit. Toll lanes, for example, enable solo drivers to pay to use HOV lanes. That can't possibly work long-term--there simply isn't enough physical space to accommodate the millions of vehicles seeking to travel at the same time.

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The only way to avoid gridlock is a substantial shift of travel choices from driving alone to shared travel. Improving mobility is going to require attractive alternatives, including picking up a passenger using a smartphone app (enabling use of free-flowing HOV lanes), a dense network of convenient bus lines, and protected bike lanes.

Other parts of the country are taking a different approach to the challenges of traffic. On our website OccupyMTC.org, we show how Seattle's voters approved a comprehensive bus network and achieved a major shift away from solo driving. Bay Area residents could make a similar choice to have a brighter future. However, unless you vote No on Regional Measure 3, MTC and VTA will persist with their failed strategies.

Voters should reject Regional Measure 3, and demand instead a plan that invests in facilities for large numbers of commuters to conveniently travel by shared rides, bikes and transit.