

Op-Ed

Measure R: Tulare County's Saving Grace

By David Harrald

Back in 2006, the citizens of Tulare County passed Measure R to generate a projected \$652 million over 30 years to our area for transportation projects. Almost three years later, the 1/2-cent sales tax revenue has exceeded our expectations.

With this funding, we've been able to accomplish things we never could have afforded in the past. Even now, amid uncertain economic times, Measure R funds continue to allow us to repair and improve our roads, enhance transit services countywide, expand our network of bike trails and improve our environment.

I would like to take this opportunity to give everyone a current look at what Measure R has done for us since its passage. Keep in mind that in the next five years, over \$400 million of construction projects are planned and many of those projects wouldn't be completed without Measure R funds.

Since July 2007, our cities and our county have spent \$15.7 million in Measure R local program funding to pay for everything from pothole repair to road rehabilitation to freeway interchange improvements. This funding makes up 35 percent of Measure R expenditures. This money has been spent by each individual city and the county of Tulare based on the needs of their communities.

For instance, the city of Dinuba had not been able to do a citywide street maintenance project in years. With Measure R local program funds, the city of Dinuba combined its Measure R funding with other sources and completed a \$6.5 million citywide street improvement project in just one year. The city of Exeter sealed and protected more than 700,000 square feet of its roads from aging and the environment – more than it normally would have been able to do on its own. The city of Lindsay used its Measure R funding to resurface downtown streets, do intersection improvements and resurface Tulare Road, a heavily used road in need of

repair.

Late last year, we saw the first use of Measure R funds for regional projects – projects that provide for the movement of goods, services and people throughout Tulare County. This regional funding makes up 50 percent of Measure R revenue. Since Measure R was implemented, \$3.5 million has been spent to fund regional projects including the widening of Road 80 just north of Visalia, the Avenue 416/Road 56 signal project just west of Dinuba and the Santa Fe/SR-198 overcrossing. By the end of the year, we'll also see work begin on a regional project in Porterville: the widening of Scranton and Indiana.

These are projects that will help everyone in Tulare County, not just those people who live in the immediate area.

In the next five years, we'll see \$120 million go to regional projects funded by Measure R, which will include work on the widening of Road 108 to four lanes within the city of Tulare, the widening of Avenue 416 from Road 56 to Road 80, the widening of Betty Drive to four lanes from Highway 99 to Road 80, and the widening of Caldwell Avenue. Again, without Measure R, these roads would most likely continue to deteriorate as transportation budgets become more limited in this economy. Further, the city of Tulare and the county of Tulare have leveraged Measure R funding through matching funds of state money for a total of \$30 million in funding for railroad overcrossings/grade separations in the city of Tulare.

Measure R has also helped us improve our network of bike paths in Tulare County. Fourteen percent of Measure R's budget goes to transit, bike and environmental improvements. To date, we've spent \$1.1 million on bike projects. Much of the work in this category is not yet complete, but agencies are actively working to complete projects such as bike and trail improvements. For example, with Measure R funding, the city of Visalia has hired a consultant to do design improvements to Packwood