

Nov. 8, 2010

Guest Editorial
Visalia Times-Delta

Measure R: Serving rural Tulare County

Tulare County offers the diversity of urban areas with charming downtowns, shopping and dining as well as open spaces, rural communities and breathtaking mountains.

Ours is truly a rural county, with over 3,000 miles of roads. Some of these roads are used only by the residents of our very small, unincorporated communities, while others play a critical role in getting our agricultural products to market.

Keeping these roads maintained and managing pothole repair is a daunting task – one that was nearly impossible because of budget constraints. Today, however, thanks to Measure R, our county roads are in better shape and we are making progress.

The voters of Tulare County passed Measure R in 2006, authorizing a one-half cent sales tax to support road improvements and repair, transit, bike transportation and other projects that will help clean our air.

A portion of the funds generated is set aside for Tulare County's community roads, and the Resource Management Agency (RMA) staff is responsible for allocating funds and overseeing the work.

Since the first Measure R funds were received in 2007, Tulare County has been able to improve nearly 98 miles of roads in as many as 27 different communities, such as Earlimart, Pixley, Orosi, Ivanhoe, Cutler, Ducor, Allensworth and Richgrove.

Tulare County residents may be surprised to learn that there are more than 48 communities in our county, each of which has need for road maintenance and potholes to repair.

While Measure R provides much-needed funding to repair these roads, much more is needed to address a decades-old backlog. As a result, RMA staff works hard to balance factors in considering roads for repair, such as community needs, traffic volume, whether the road connects small communities to the larger cities, the role the road plays in distribution of perishable agricultural commodities, the size of the pothole and the severity of the need.

In some communities, Town Councils and Community Service Districts provide information on needed repairs, while others rely upon organizations such as the United Way to make requests known. RMA staff has also visited communities to meet with residents regarding their needs and priorities.

Individuals are also invited to contact RMA directly by calling staff at 624-7000 or filing a request through the website, tcmeasurer.com. The plan of work for 2011 is now being developed, and community input is welcomed.

It is important to RMA that residents of our unincorporated and rural communities know they have a voice. While fiscal realities prevent us from satisfying every request and meeting every need, we work hard to set proper priorities and stretch the budget as much as possible.

Measure R has made a huge difference, making possible major road improvements such as Road 80, Avenue 416 and the Santa Fe overcrossing on State Route 198 as well as bike lanes, new bus routes, upgraded traffic signals, sidewalks and more.

Upcoming projects include improvements to Road 108, connecting Visalia and Dinuba, the widening of Betty Drive at State Route 99, railroad crossings in Tulare, a signal installation and road widening at Avenue 416 in Dinuba, the widening of Scranton and Indiana in Porterville and more.

Having Measure R in place as a source for local matching funds, has also meant that Tulare County can successfully compete for state and federal funding. This "leveraging" of Measure R funds has meant the Tulare County Association of Governments has been able to keep projects on track that otherwise could have been derailed by today's challenging economy.

Thank you to the people of Tulare County for having the vision to support Measure R. It is helping us keep Tulare County on the move.

Tom Barcellos
Chairman, Citizens Oversight Committee