

OP-ED

Measure R Provides Healthy Alternative

By Dave Harrald

As a member and past chairman of the Measure R Citizens' Oversight Committee, I would like to let everyone know about the great work that is happening in Tulare County as a result of Measure R. Our committee meets quarterly and our purpose is to inform the public about Measure R and ensure that funds are spent as promised to the public. For those of us who drive to work or run errands each day, it's easy to tell that Measure R is improving our roads as we were promised. But I'd like to point out that it's also doing a lot more.

Fourteen percent of Measure R funding is set aside for transit, bike,

pedestrian and environmental projects. This funding category aims to link regional bike systems, provide increased transit service and invest in environmental mitigation.

In the past three years, many transit improvements have been made and I'm excited to report that development work is happening now on what will be the first regional trail project funded by Measure R. It's called the Santa Fe Trail Connection and this 15-mile trail will preserve the existing railroad corridor and link the downtown areas of Tulare and Visalia – a first for our county. Tulare County, the City of Visalia, the City of Tulare and TCAG have all partnered on the connection from Prosperity Avenue to Avenue 272.

It's an exciting project and we hope to see you at the workshop on it later this year. Look for details on that public meeting as they are announced at TCMeasureR.com.

This funding category has also allowed agencies to make tremendous improvements to our transit services

throughout Tulare County as a result of Measure R. This funding has allowed Visalia Transit to expand its Route 7 to include areas in north Visalia, purchase two buses and increase its operating hours to 6:30 p.m. on Sundays. It has also allowed Dinuba Transit to join up with Reedley for a direct route between the two cities. Measure R funding has also helped the City of Tulare add a route to serve the city's new high school and work with the City of Visalia to offer more frequent roundtrip service between the two cities using an express route. The City of Porterville has used Measure R funds to purchase a CNG bus and offset the costs of a new bus route in northeastern Porterville.

Last year, the Measure R Expenditure Plan was amended with unanimous support from all city councils in Tulare County to allow this 14 percent funding category to include \$3 million for a Rail Right-of-Way Preservation Fund. The fund was created in case the dollars are needed to preserve rail right-of-way, a

key factor in economic development. Currently, Measure R funds have not been authorized for this use and none will be until all other avenues have been exhausted.

It's important for us on the Citizens' Oversight Committee to make sure everyone knows our role on the committee. A big part of our role is providing input on Measure R implementation and advising the Tulare County Transportation Authority if and when the expenditure plan needs to be reviewed to ensure that the funds are being maximized.

We invite you to join us at our next Citizens' Oversight Committee meeting at 12 p.m. on Nov. 9 at the Tulare County Administration Building in Visalia. We also encourage anyone who would like to contact members of our committee to do so through the Tulare County Association of Governments at 624-7274. For more information, visit TCMeasureR.com.

Dave Harrald is Measure R Citizens' Oversight Committee member and past chairman.