

Measure R: A look back at an amazing 5 years

By David Harrald
Citizens Oversight Committee

Measure R is the Miracle Measure, the initiative that brought statewide attention to Tulare County.

The concept was developed, the campaign launched and the funds raised in a blindly fast period of time, and the voters of Tulare County hit and surpassed the tough two-thirds requirement with a 67.2% approval rating.

The measure was passed in November 2006, with the half-cent sales tax actually in place starting in January 2007. With the completion of a full 5 years, we thought it appropriate to analyze where we are, against where we thought we could be.

The result is an impressive scorecard.

Many projects have been completed or begun in the first 5 years that were scheduled for the first 15 years of the initiative.

Major regional projects already completed thanks to R include Mooney Boulevard and the Santa Fe and Ben Maddox/Highway 198 bridge improvements in Visalia.

Projects under way significantly ahead of schedule include Riggin Avenue and the Betty Drive projects near Visalia Industrial Park, the Cartmill railroad grade separation in Tulare, and the widening of Road 80 between Visalia and Dinuba.

Also under way are Scranton/Indiana improvements in Porterville, Road 108 in Tulare and improvements to Avenue 416 in Dinuba.

With these projects under way, and more to soon break ground, this spring will see more transportation projects under construction than ever before in Tulare County's history – all thanks to Measure R.

- The final phase of Road 80 improvements will begin;
- The Plaza Drive/Highway 198 interchange will break ground;
- Improvements to the Avenue 416 bridge over the Kings River will begin 10 years earlier than anticipated.

Later in the year, we will see work begin on the Bardsley grade separation at Highway 99 in Tulare. Also on the horizon are improvements to Highway 65, Highway 190, Highway 216 (Houston Avenue) and interchanges on Highway 99 at Betty Drive and Cartmill Avenue.

Key to the success of Measure R is the ability within the initiative to advance projects that are shovel-ready as funding becomes available. The Expenditure Plan approved by the voters remains very much the guiding document, and no projects have been added to the approved list. However, as local agencies secured their own funding, projects were advanced in order to maximize available funding.

Many of the projects would not have been possible in the foreseeable future without Measure R. The ability to leverage Measure R funding with state and federal funding opportunities continues to be the successful strategy for delivering projects.

Measure R has also made possible the current and planned improvements to Highway 99 through Tulare County. Because we have transportation funds available through Measure R, Caltrans was able to commit state funds to improving this essential corridor. Without Measure R, the corridor that feeds that nation would continue to crumble.

While the big projects capture much of the public's attention, Measure R has also enhanced our quality of life through expansions of our transit systems and the creation of bicycle and pedestrian trails. More than \$7 million in R funds have been invested in a variety of clean air projects.

Residents of Tulare County are now able to travel by bus later in the evening and on weekends, thanks to Measure R. We can now enjoy more bike trails for recreation and commuting, and school children have access to safe after-school activities thanks to the LOOP bus. Signals synchronized with Measure R funding keep traffic flowing more smoothly, which reduces idling and helps clean our air.

What will the future hold? Please watch for announcements of upcoming forums and your chance to participate in the development of the next 5-year expenditure plan for Measure R. The standards will be the same, as staff members examine traffic counts, accident data, planned developments and a variety of technical criteria. The goal for the next 5 years also remains unchanged – a safe, multi-modal transportation network.

Tulare County's transportation network is truly undergoing a "miraculous" transformation, thanks to Measure R. For all who entrusted us with your yes vote, we again say thank you.

(David Harrald was an active member of the Yes on Measure R campaign in 2006 and later served as the chairman of the Citizens Oversight Committee. He remains on that committee, as a representative of Tulare County.)