

Transportation By Lauren Serrato

As cities throughout the region continue to be deemed some of the largest and fastest growing cities in the nation, transportation will play a vital role in that growth.

Transportation is more than a means of getting to and from a desired location. Transportation in the West Valley provides jobs and immense opportunities for the region to continue to experience economic development and a high quality of life. The state of our transportation has an impact on mobility as a resident, accessing vital services, jobs, entertainment, and much more.

The Prop 400 sales tax extension has been a hot topic in Maricopa County as it's set to expire in 2025 and fighting to make its way into the voter's ballot. If approved, the extension will fund transportation projects in Maricopa County for the next 20 years.

The plan will expand and complete the freeway network, relieving congestion through projects including new I-10 reliever freeway in the Southwest Valley (SR 30), completing a connector freeway to Pinal County in the southeast (SR 24), building the infrastructure needed at Loop 303/I-17 to support TSMC and its suppliers, building out the HOV network, and restoring the I-17 and pavement preservation regionwide.

Jodi Tas, Government Relations Director with the City of Surprise, defines Prop 400E as a performance-based multimodal plan that was built on feedback from the public, stakeholders, and local agencies through a data-driven analysis.

"There were over 100 organizations, associations, businesses and non-profits that endorsed the region's transportation investment plan," Tas said.

"This plan creates \$60 billion in net new economic activity, increases local business sales by \$4.5 billion per year, and will create or sustain nearly 32,000 jobs a year. It is critical to the success of this region and many of our newer businesses are relying on the passage of the plan to ensure their success."

Additionally, Avondale Mayor Ken Weise refers to the extension as the "next step" in the region's transportation planning efforts.

As the 20-year tax expires in less than 2 years, Weise said Valley mayors and transportation experts have spent the last 4 years building a cohesive and integrated plan that will expand the freeway system, roads, and transit.

"This plan has a significant impact on the west valley, where billions of dollars of investments are planned. These include a new freeway that will connect SR 85 in Buckeye to the I17 and relieve gridlock on the I10. Road projects in Surprise, Glendale, Peoria, Goodyear, and El Mirage, as well as other west valley cities, will improve traffic flow and help products manufactured in the west valley get to market, faster and easier," Weise said.

Prop 400 was one of the major issues discussed at WESTMARC's Annual Legislative Breakfast at Tolleson Union High School Performing Arts Center.

Representative Leezah Sun stated during the panel that Prop 400 is a high priority for her and her fellow representatives that also began their term in January.

“We come in strong, with strong convictions, knowing that we're not going to give up on Prop 400E,” she said.

“We really need to come together as a community. If you're with businesses and you're an entity, either be a lobbyist or an advocate, whatever the case may be, you need to reach out to your organizations, chambers and collaborate and rally for Prop 400E. Because I'll tell you this right now, it's out of our hands, it's in your hands.”

“I won't say there's no hope for Prop 400E,” Senator Frank Carroll said, responding to Tas's question about the future of the plan. “I'm in the West Valley. My view has always been to never have light rail out there. I want buses. I want roads. I want autonomous vehicles. And the opportunity was there.”

The statistics heavily support Prop 400E, according to Tas, as the extension would reduce stand-still traffic on our region's roads by 68%, cut afternoon traffic commutes by 1/3 and ensure 2050 commute times are shorter than commute times compared to Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Seattle.

WESTMARC strongly believes transportation investment equals economic vitality. Therefore, WESTMARC supports continued economic and job growth for the county and the West Valley. Sintra Hoffman, President and CEO, refers to Prop 400E as a “quality of life plan.”

“This is more than a transportation plan, it is an economic development plan, as well as a quality-of-life plan,” Weise mirrored. “Improved and expanded bus lines throughout the entire west valley will help people get to work, school, and help those who prefer transit over driving a car. Prop 400 continues the success of regional cooperation and will help drive the valley's economy.”