

**The Self-Help Program:
A Better Way to Deliver Local Transportation Projects**

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Years of neglect have left California's physical infrastructure in poor condition. The deterioration is especially evident when we look at the States' transportation network. Highway surfaces need repair, facilities must be retrofitted to withstand earthquakes, and thoroughfares are clogged, costing Californians time and money and eroding the quality of life.

In recent years, the State has begun to increase the rate of investment in its transportation network. The success of transportation improvement programs, however, requires more than money. Success also depends on having effective project delivery systems – the methods used to fund, design and construct specific projects. When delivery systems lack flexibility and control, projects can become stalled, costs can exceed budgeted amounts, and the needs of residents who will use the new facilities can get overlooked. Clearly, the people of California have a powerful interest in reducing the time and lowering the cost of getting transportation projects built.

“Self-help” programs funded with voter-approved sales taxes for transportation help counties satisfy both requirements for an effective transportation program: adequate funding and effective project delivery systems. To better understand the counties' experience with these programs, we interviewed transportation officials from ten self-help counties, as well as a transportation official from one county that would like to participate in the self-help program, and current or former state officials knowledgeable about the programs. Our interviews produced the following points of agreement:

1. Because self-help counties are able to exercise control over locally raised transportation funds, they have considerably more influence over how transportation projects are delivered for the benefit of their residents. This, in turn, enables residents to hold county officials accountable for results.
2. With more influence over delivery, self-help counties can adopt those project delivery mechanisms that will be most effective in meeting the needs of their residents.
3. One project delivery mechanism used by self-help counties relies on private engineering and management consultants to deliver transportation projects. There is widespread agreement among transportation officials, including officials in counties that rely primarily on Caltrans for project delivery, that the ability to use private consultants is

extremely valuable. Use of private consultants enables counties to maintain project momentum and speed-up project delivery when Caltrans is resource-constrained. In addition, having the flexibility to use private consultants adds a healthy element of competition to the delivery process that encourages Caltrans to be more responsive to county preferences and to be more budget-sensitive.

4. The benefits that self-help counties realize from using private consultants to deliver transportation projects take three main forms.
 - a. Use of consultants greatly speeds up project delivery, conferring benefits on motorists (less congestion), consumers (lower prices), and taxpayers (cost-savings).
 - b. Consultants appear to be much more responsive to the needs and priorities of county agencies because their continued retention depends entirely on their performance.
 - c. Consultants have been found to be more cost-effective, because they are more attuned to staying within project budgets, and they do not have to be paid when their services are not needed.

All participants in our survey agree that having the flexibility to use private engineering and management consultants has resulted in more transportation projects being delivered on time and within budget. If other public agencies had as much flexibility with project delivery as the self-help counties, that would enable them to realize more of these benefits as well.

II. INTRODUCTION

A broad consensus has emerged that years of neglect have left California's physical infrastructure in poor condition. The deterioration is especially evident when we look at the States' transportation network. Highway surfaces need repair, facilities must be retrofitted to withstand earthquakes, and thoroughfares are clogged, costing individual time and consumer's money.

In recent years, the State has begun to increase the rate of investment in its transportation network. The most visible sign of the increase is Proposition 1B on the statewide November 2006 ballot. This measure, which won more than 60 percent of the vote, will provide \$19.9 billion for new transportation, over and above the amounts made available for transportation from the gas tax and State sales tax. This measure also allowed counties to use, or "accelerate," transportation funds four years in advance.

A. **The Importance of Project Delivery**

The success of transportation improvement programs requires more than money. It also depends on effective project delivery systems. Without such systems, projects can become stalled, costs can exceed budgeted amounts, and the preferences of those who will use the new facilities can get overlooked. Clearly, the people in California have a powerful interest in the systems used to deliver transportation facilities.

B. **The Self-Help Program**

This report evaluates the performance of one approach taken to accelerate and improve the transportation facilities' delivery process. This approach is commonly referred to as the county "self-help" program.

Pursuant to State law, California's 58 counties may seek voter approval for a special sales tax that raises money for county transportation programs. The counties that have been successful in launching self-help programs enjoy two sets of advantages in meeting their residents' transportation needs that are not available to other counties. First, they have more money available to fund transportation projects. With more money to spend, counties can undertake more projects and larger projects. Second, self-help

counties have more control over how their transportation projects are designed and delivered, and are less dependent on the California Department of Transportation (“Caltrans”). Because they have more control, self-help counties have more flexibility in how they develop their transportation facilities than other counties.

Currently, there are 19 self-help counties in California.¹

C. Purpose of this Study

At the request of the American Council of Engineering Companies of California (“ACEC California”)² and the California Taxpayers Association (“Caltax”) LECG conducted a survey of self-help counties to determine their experience in utilizing the increased flexibility offered by the self-help program in developing their transportation facilities. This survey is particularly timely, given the increased funding for transportation projects and the importance of identifying cost-effective systems for delivering these projects.

LECG conducted this survey through a series of in-person and telephone interviews with county transportation directors and others familiar with self-help counties’ transportation programs. We are solely responsible for the findings and conclusions in this report.

¹ See **Table 1** for a list of these counties.

² Prior to July 1, 2008, ACEC California was known as “Consulting Engineers and Land Surveyors of California” (“CELSOC”).

D. Principal Findings

Among those transportation officials we interviewed, there was a widespread agreement that the self-help program has improved the delivery of transportation projects in three important ways:

- (a) Self-help counties are able to use their enhanced flexibility to complete projects more quickly, which means that the public receives the benefits of improved transportation facilities sooner than they would if delivery depended solely on Caltrans and its employees.
- (b) Self-help counties are able to adopt more cost-effective methods for developing transportation facilities, thereby enabling them to stretch transportation dollars and deliver more projects for the benefit of their residents.
- (c) Because the self-help program gives counties more control over project design and delivery, counties are able to provide transportation facilities that are more responsive to local needs.

III. THE SELF-HELP PROGRAM

A. Background

Prior to 1976, California counties generally were dependent on Caltrans to design, fund, and oversee the construction of transportation facilities such as highways and interchanges. In 1976, the California Legislature enacted AB 1246, the County Transportation Commissions Act (authored by Assemblyman Walter Ingalls), which provided an alternative approach to the development of needed facilities. The legislation gave four counties – Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino – the opportunity to levy a half-cent sales tax for transportation purposes. Los Angeles County was the first county to utilize this authority, levying a permanent half-cent sales tax for transportation in 1980.³

In about 1984, this alternative approach was made available to all 58 of California's counties.⁴

The potential role of counties in developing transportation facilities was strengthened in 1998, when the Legislature approved Senate Bill 45, which allows county transportation authorities to control 75% of transportation funds coming from the state. SB45 allows counties to leverage more funds for transportation projects.

B. Counties Participating in the Self-Help Program

Today, 19 California counties have a self-help transportation program, as shown in **Table 1**.⁵

³ Introduction to the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, p. 4 (http://www.metro.net/about_us/library/Introduction%20to%20the%20LACMTA.pdf)

⁴ "Self-Help Counties - California's Transportation Success Story," by Carl Guardino, Cal-Tax Digest, July 1999 (<http://www.caltax.org/MEMBER/digest/jul99/jul99-2.htm>)

⁵ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

Table 1 Self-Help Counties in California			
1	Alameda	11	San Bernardino
2	Contra Costa	12	San Diego
3	Fresno	13	San Francisco
4	Imperial	14	San Joaquin
5	Los Angeles	15	San Mateo
6	Madera	16	Santa Barbara
7	Marin	17	Santa Clara
8	Orange	18	Sonoma
9	Riverside	19	Tulare
10	Sacramento		

Fourteen of these counties have sought voter approval of their self-help programs at least twice – once to establish the program, and a second time to review funding for the program. As a result, voters in these 13 counties have been able to hold the in-county transportation agency accountable for the agency’s performance in using the funds raised by the self-help tax.⁶

IV. METHODOLOGY

We selected eleven counties (ten “self-help” counties and one “wannabe self-help” county) to survey for purposes of this report. **Table 2** lists the ten self-help counties, and shows when the programs were approved and renewed. **Table 3** shows the amount raised by the self-help tax as of December 31, 2006.

⁶ This is not the case for Sonoma County, where the county transportation agency did not have a track record at the time voter approval for the sales tax add-on was sought.

Table 2						
Self-Help Programs in Select Counties						
	County	Program Name	Year of Vote	Voter Approval	Year of Enactment	Year of Expiration
1	Alameda ⁷	Measure B	1986	56.5%	1987	2002
			1998	58.6%	Not Approved	
		Measure B	2000	81.5%	2002	2022
2	Contra Costa ⁸		1986	47%	Not Approved	
		Measure C	1988	58%	1989	2009
		Measure J	2004	71%	2009	2034
3	Los Angeles ⁹	Proposition A	1980	54%	1980	Perpetuity
		Proposition C	1990	52%	1990	Perpetuity
4	Orange ¹⁰		1984	30%	Not Approved	
			1989	47%	Not Approved	
		Measure M	1990	55%	1991	2011
		Measure M	2006	69%	2011	2041
5	Riverside ¹¹	Measure A	1989	79%	1989	2009
		Measure A	2002	69%	2009	2039
6	Sacramento ¹²		1988	< 50%	Not Approved	
		Measure A	1988	57.03%	1988	2009
		Measure A	2004	75%	2009	2039
7	San Bernardino ¹³		1987	< 50%	Not Approved	
		Measure I	1989	60%	1989	2009
		Measure I	2004	80%	2010	2040
8	San Diego ¹⁴	TransNet	1987	53%	1998	2008
		TransNet	2004	67%	2008	2048
9	Santa Clara ¹⁵	Measure A	1984	56%	1984	Expired
			1992	54%	Not Approved	
		Measure A	1996	77%	1996	2006
		Measure B	1996	52%	1996	2006
		Measure A	2000	70%	2006	2036
10	Sonoma ¹⁶		1990	< 50%	Not Approved	
			1998	47%	Not Approved	
			2000	59%	Not Approved	
			2000	60%	Not Approved	
		Measure M	2004	67%	2005	2025

⁷ Alameda County Transportation Authority and Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority (<http://www.acta2002.com/>).

⁸ Contra Costa County Transportation Authority (<http://www.ccta.net/about/>).

⁹ Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) (http://www.metro.net/about_us/finance/propositions.htm).

¹⁰ Orange County Transportation Authority (<http://www.octa.net/>).

¹¹ Riverside County Transportation Commission (<http://www.rctc.org/>).

¹² Sacramento Transportation Authority (<http://www.sacta.org/>).

¹³ San Bernardino Associated Governments (<http://www.sanbag.ca.gov/>).

¹⁴ San Diego Association of Governments (<http://www.sandag.cog.ca.us/>).

¹⁵ Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (<http://www.vta.org/>).

¹⁶ Sonoma County Transportation Authority (<http://www.sctainfo.org/>).

Table 3				
Program Funds Received in Select Counties				
	County	Program Name	Year of Vote	Tax Fund Raised as of 12/31/2006
1	Alameda	Measure B	1998	
		Measure B	2000	\$1,400,000,000
2	Contra Costa	Measure C	1988	\$920,734,000
		Measure J	2004	
3	Los Angeles	Proposition A	1980	\$17,100,000,000
		Proposition C	1990	
4	Orange	Measure M	1990	\$2,800,000,000
		Measure M	2006	
5	Riverside	Measure A	1989	\$1,333,000,000
		Measure A	2002	
6	Sacramento	Measure A	1988	\$1,257,473,684
		Measure A	2004	
7	San Bernardino	Measure I	1989	\$1,350,000,000
		Measure I	2004	
8	San Diego	TransNet	1987	\$2,766,911,996
		TransNet	2004	
9	Santa Clara	Measure A	1984	\$1,100,000,000
		Measure A	1996	\$1,300,000,000
		Measure B	1996	
		Measure A	2000	\$117,000,000
10	Sonoma	Measure M	2004	\$28,989,004

Our reasons for selecting these counties are threefold. First, the selected counties reflect geographical diversity. Five are from Northern California (six including Monterey), three are from Southern California, and two are from the Inland Empire. The counties also encompass urban, suburban, and some rural communities.

Second, the eleven counties are home to a large percentage of Californians, and encompass approximately 71 percent of the State’s population, as shown in **Table 4**.¹⁷

Table 4		
2000 Population Estimate of Select Counties		
	2000 Population	% of California
California	33,871,648	100.0%
Alameda County	1,443,741	4.3%
Contra Costa County	948,816	2.8%
Los Angeles County	9,519,338	28.1%
Monterey County	401,762	1.2%
Orange County	2,846,289	8.4%
Riverside County	1,545,387	4.6%
Sacramento County	1,223,499	3.6%
San Bernardino County	1,709,434	5.0%
San Diego County	2,813,833	8.3%
Santa Clara County	1,682,585	5.0%
Sonoma County	458,614	1.4%
Select Counties	24,593,298	72.6%

Third, all but one (two including Monterey)of these counties have sought voter approval for extensions of the self-help sales taxes, thereby providing local voters with an opportunity to hold transportation officials accountable for the effectiveness with which they spent local funds.

For each county, we identified a transportation official – usually the county transportation director – who is knowledgeable about the self-help program. We then contacted the official by e-mail and arranged a telephone or face-to-face interview. In addition, we spoke with several individuals who are knowledgeable about the self-help programs, including Will Kempton (Director, Department of Transportation). The

¹⁷ Census 2000 - California - County (http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/GCTTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=04000US06&-_box_head_nbr=GCT-PH1&-ds_name=DEC_2000_SF1_U&-format=ST-2).

individuals that we interviewed in the course of our study are listed in **Appendix A**, and we extend to them our thanks for their participation.

In conducting the interviews with county transportation officials, we used a questionnaire that we developed and tested. A copy of the questionnaire appears as **Appendix B**.

In compiling the results of our interviews, we attempted to differentiate the benefits that counties derived from *increased transportation funding* from the benefits they derived from *increased flexibility in the development and delivery of their transportation facilities*. The focus of this study is on the benefits that accrue from increased flexibility. Increased funding is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition to secure these benefits.

V. FINDINGS

In this part, we summarize the results of our interviews, by county. Each section is divided into two parts:

- (a) A brief summary of the county’s self-help program, and
- (b) A discussion of the benefits that the county attributes to the increased flexibility available to participants in the self-help program.

A. Alameda County

1. Alameda County’s Self-Help Program

Alameda County’s half-cent transportation sales tax, titled Measure B, first appeared on the 1986 ballot and received 56.5% voter approval.¹⁸ The 1986 Measure B generated over \$1 billion in funds “for transit, special transit operations for seniors and people with disabilities, and local street maintenance funds for every city and the County.”¹⁹ Most of the self-help sales tax funds under the 1986 Measure (68%) were allocated to capital transportation projects. The remaining funds were allocated to local transportation, transit operations, and special transportation (e.g. seniors and people with disabilities).²⁰

The 1986 Measure B sales tax was scheduled to expire in March of 2002, but in November 2000, voters renewed the tax, with 81.5% voting in favor of renewal.²¹ The 2000 renewal is expected to generate over \$3 billion before the tax expires in March 2022.²² Sixty percent of these funds are allocated to operations, maintenance and improvements to essential transportation services and facilities, such as mass transit, including express buses and transit center development funds, local streets and roads improvements, bicycle and pedestrian safety improvements, and special transportation for

¹⁸ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

¹⁹ Alameda County Transportation Authority – Measure B Background (<http://www.acta2002.com/glance.html>)

²⁰ Alameda County Transportation Authority – Measure B Background (<http://www.acta2002.com/glance.html>)

²¹ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

seniors and people with disabilities. The remaining 40% of the tax is devoted to capital projects.²³ The Alameda County Transportation Authority manages the expenditure of sales tax funds.

According to an official from Alameda County, to gain voter approval for the renewal of the sales tax, the county presented the voters with a list of projects and programs that the county had already delivered successfully using 1986 Measure B funds, as well as a list of the projects and programs that would not be delivered if the self-help program was allowed to lapse. The official credits the lists with increasing support for the program from 60 percent to 81 percent.

Table 5A provides a list of transportation projects successfully completed under the 1986 and 2000 Measure B sales tax measures:²⁴

Table 5A		
Successful Projects Delivered/Scheduled in Alameda County		
Year of Vote	Program Name	Project
1986	Measure B	1 BART to Dublin/Pleasanton
		2 Highway 13/24 Interchange
		3 I-580/680 Interchange
		4 Mission Boulevard Improvements - Fremont
		5 Mission Boulevard Improvements - Hayward
		6 Mission Boulevard Improvements - Union City
		7 Port of Oakland/Airport Roadway
		8 Route 84 in Livermore
		9 San Leandro Improvements
2000	Measure B	10 BART Fruitvale Transit Village
		11 Newark Local Streets
		12 Oakland Local Streets & Roads
		13 Telegraph/International/E. 14 th Rapid Bus
		14 Vasco Road Utility Relocation

²² Alameda County Transportation Authority – Funding Source (<http://www.acta2002.com/funding.html>).

²³ Alameda County Transportation Authority – Funding Source (<http://www.acta2002.com/funding.html>).

²⁴ Alameda County Transportation Authority – Projects (<http://www.acta2002.com/projects.html>).

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

In the 2007/2008 Measure B Strategic Plan, the Bay Area Program Management Group highlighted the benefits that the county's self-help program has provided to Alameda County residents:

“Since its inception, the Authority has been delivering on the 1986 promise to improve the quality of the transportation system in Alameda County. Delivery of the Measure B Program has involved numerous contracts with professional service consultants and construction contractors, agreements between stakeholder agencies such as Caltrans and BART, coordination among non-agency stakeholders such as community groups and parties directly impacted by the expenditures of Measure B funds, and working out the countless details related to a one-billion dollar program and large-scale transportation projects... The benefits of Measure B continue to be realized every day by the users of Alameda County's vast transportation network.”²⁵

As this excerpt makes clear, use of professional service consultants has been an important component of Alameda's self-help program.

The county has used consultants extensively for the design of projects. These consultants have enabled the County to accelerate the delivery of transportation facilities to county residents, thereby giving residents access to improved transportation more quickly. The County believes that Caltrans did not have the staffing resources needed to deliver projects in the Measure B transportation plan. Even if Caltrans had been willing and able to staff up, it could not have done so in time to deliver the projects.

According to the official in Alameda County, using consultants to deliver these projects sped up the design and construction process. In fact, the County has had such success using consultants in engineering that it has decided to use consultants for purposes extending beyond engineering (to auditing, for example).

²⁵ “Measure B 2007/2008 Strategic Plan,” by Bay Area Program Management Group on behalf of Alameda County Transportation Authority, p. 1.

As an example of the benefits derived from its self-help program, the County official states that the County was able to reach the construction stage of the Interstate 238 project four years ahead of schedule. This time-savings was made possible, in part, by the early design process completed by private consultants.

The official cites another project where use of consultants has sped-up project delivery. Initially, Caltrans proposed to oversee the project design. The County, however, was concerned that Caltrans did not have the available resources needed to deliver the project because it was concurrently designing and constructing a large retrofit project for the Bay Bridge.

According to the official, the key benefits of the self-help program stem from local control of transportation projects, increased funding, and consultant creativity. The County transportation authority believes that because it is closer to local transportation issues than the State, it can ensure that available funds are used for projects with the highest priority to County residents (rather than projects with the highest priority to Caltrans). The self-help program also allows the County to keep transportation improvements moving forward because the program gives the County the flexibility to move funds to projects as needed. Without this ability, project delivery would be slowed, to the detriment of local motorists.

The official from Alameda County explained that the County “would be a mess” if it did not have access to private consultants through the self-help program. She maintained that many of the projects that the County successfully delivered would not have been delivered absent the self-help program.

B. Contra Costa County

1. Contra Costa County's Self-Help Program

In 1986, voters failed to approve a half-cent transportation sales tax that appeared on the Contra Costa County ballot.²⁶ In 1988, however, when given a second chance voters approved a half-cent self-help sales tax, titled Measure C, with 58% voting “yes”.²⁷ The 1988 Measure C “was estimated to generate over \$1 billion over 20 years for a BART extension, freeway improvements, better bus service, enhanced bicycle facilities and more transportation options for senior citizens and people with disabilities.”²⁸

Prior to the enactment of the self-help program, Contra Costa County received funding for interstate highways, but needed additional funding for state and local roads. The approval of Measure C dedicated 20 to 25% of the funds received from the sales tax for local streets and roads. The Contra Costa Transportation Authority, which manages expenditure of the county's sales tax funds, addresses the needs of “sub-counties,” or the local areas within Contra Costa County, in selecting projects to deliver and allocates some of the funds received to each sub-county for those projects.

Transportation officials believe that Contra Costa voters approved Measure C because they feared that key projects listed on the ballot would not be delivered without the self-help program. Some of the key projects presented to the voters on the 1988 ballot include those shown in **Table 5B**.²⁹

Measure C was scheduled to expire in 2009, but in 2004 voters approved Measure J, a continuation of the half-cent sales tax, with 71% voting “yes.”³⁰ Measure J is expected to “provide approximately \$2.5 billion for countywide and local transportation

²⁶ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>). The measure received 47% approval.

²⁷ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

²⁸ Contra Costa Transportation Authority – 1988 Measure C (<http://www.ccta.net/about/measurec.shtml>)

²⁹ Contra Costa County Transportation Authority – Projects (<http://www.ccta.net/roads/project/>)

³⁰ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

projects and programs through the year 2034.”³¹ Some of the key projects that will use the 2004 Measure J funds include those shown in **Table 5B**.³²

Table 5B		
Successful Projects Delivered/Scheduled in Contra Costa County		
Year of Vote	Program Name	Project
1988	Measure C	1 Route 4 West
		2 Route 4 East
		3 B.A.R.T. Extension to East County
2004	Measure J	4 Caldecott Tunnel
		Local Streets and Roads Repairs and
		5 Upgrades
		6 B.A.R.T. Extension to East County

The Caldecott Tunnel project is a major project involving the coordinated efforts of the Contra Costa County Transportation Authority, Caltrans, and an outside consulting firm, Parsons Transportation. Pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding agreement entered into by the Authority and Caltrans, Caltrans leads the Executive Steering Committee for the project, while consultants hired by the authority lead the design portion of the tunnel, and Caltrans leads the design of the roadway approach to the tunnel.

The Route 4 East project is another example of a project characterized as a partnership between the Authority, Caltrans, and an outside consulting firm, Nolte. On this project, Caltrans is responsible for right-of-way and hydraulics.

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

The Contra Costa Transportation Authority and their outside consultants are both time- and budget-driven organizations. Local officials believe that the flexibility available to self-help counties has allowed them to deliver projects more quickly and at

³¹ <http://www.ccta.net/about/measurej.shtml>

³² Contra Costa County Transportation Authority – Projects (<http://www.ccta.net/roads/project/>)

lower cost than would have been the case if the county were dependent on Caltrans for design and management. These officials believe that their ability to use consultants has been a major contributor to the Authority's success.

The County uses consultants at all stages of project development – initial project study, environmental reviews, design, and project management. The County has found that consultants are extremely responsive to County priorities. This is not surprising given the fact that consultants can be replaced if their performance is deemed unsatisfactory.

Transportation officials believe that the use of consultants has allowed them to significantly accelerate project delivery, thereby making the benefits of improved transportation facilities available to County residents sooner. Although the County has not attempted to quantify these benefits, they clearly are significant, given the congestion that residents would be experiencing absent the projects completed under the self-help program.

In addition, County transportation officials, maintain that use of consultants has reduced the cost of project delivery. Part of the savings stems from more rapid project delivery, which reduces the effects of inflation on project budgets. A significant portion of the savings, however, reflects the County's ability to hold consultants accountable for holding down costs. Consultants are experienced in dealing with budget-driven clients, and understand the importance of cutting costs without sacrificing quality in obtaining repeat business.

C. Los Angeles County

1. Los Angeles County's Self-Help Program

Los Angeles County is the only county in California that has established a transit-focused sales tax program in perpetuity (with no expiration date). The County has two retail sales taxes that provide funds for transportation. One of the taxes funds transit-

related operations (Proposition A), and the other funds capital projects (Proposition C).³³ In 1996, Metropolitan Transportation Authority (“Metro”) merged with the Transit District and, the combined organization has focused mostly on public transportation, roadway repairs, and railways.

In 1980, voters approved a half-cent sales transportation tax, titled Proposition A, with a 54% “yes” vote. This tax is in perpetuity.³⁴ The Proposition A funds are allocated to transit-only programs and are not project-specific, with 35% allocated for rail transit, 25% allocated for Metro, 5% for administration, and the remaining 35% for discretionary purposes, primarily to fund bus services provided by Metro and 16 other municipal bus operators within the County.³⁵

In 1990, voters approved an additional half-cent sales tax, titled Proposition C, with 52% approval, which is also in perpetuity.³⁶ The Proposition C program allocates 20% of funds to transportation purposes, 40% for construction and operation of the bus transit and rail system, 5% to expand rail and bus security, 10% for commuter rail, construction of transit centers, park and ride lots and freeway bus stops, and the remaining 25% of funds for transit-related improvements to freeways and state highways.³⁷

Table 5C shows the proceeds of the taxes authorized by Propositions A and C, by year.

³³ Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) (http://www.metro.net/about_us/finance/propositions.htm).

³⁴ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

³⁵ Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) (http://www.metro.net/about_us/finance/propositions.htm).

³⁶ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

³⁷ Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) (http://www.metro.net/about_us/finance/propositions.htm).

Table 5C Proceeds from Los Angeles County's Self-Help Taxes		
Fiscal Year	Proposition A Sales Tax Receipts	Proposition C Sales Tax Receipts
1994	\$360,021	\$355,094
1995	384,139	384,029
1996	402,981	408,491
1997	411,529	411,224
1998	438,321	441,929
1999	449,054	452,232
2000	504,353	505,949
2001	528,299	528,432
2002	525,980	525,876
2003	548,287	548,264

The Los Angeles Transportation Authority manages the Proposition A and C sales tax funds. The Authority's responsibilities include: (1) the operation of bus and rail, (2) the construction of rail, and (3) regional maintenance.

The sales tax programs have allowed the County to build a commuter rail system of over 100 miles, including 96 stops. The County has expanded the bus program over about 5 to 7 years with more than 500 buses operating during peak hours, using the largest fleet of natural gas buses. The County has widened existing right-of-ways, and in the process, added more carpool lanes. The County has also applied \$2.5 billion to signal efficiency and street improvements.

The Authority has delivered a series of other transportation improvements to County through the sales tax programs, some of which are listed in **Table 5D**:

Table 5D		
Successful Projects Delivered/Scheduled in Los Angeles County		
Year of Vote	Program Name	Project
1980 & 1990	Propositions A & C	1 Expansion Commuter Rail System (Metrolink)
		2 Expansion Bus Program
		3 Widening of Existing Right-of-Ways
		4 Addition of HOV Lanes
		5 Signal Efficiency and Street Improvements
		6 Interstate 405 Carpool Lane (Sepulveda Pass)
		7 Interstate 5 (Orange County)
		8 Interstate 405 (West L.A.)
		9 Interstate 10 (East)
		10 Interstate 5 (Northern)

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

According to the Los Angeles County transportation official, the County primarily contracts with Caltrans. It does so primarily for two reasons. First, the county is so large and has so many projects in the pipeline that contract management could become overburdening. By contracting with Caltrans, the county has fewer contracts to oversee. Secondly, the Los Angeles self-help programs are unique in that they exist in perpetuity and focus primarily on transit issues, as opposed to a focus on large-scale capital projects like many of the other self-help county programs.

The official maintains that consultants contribute additional flexibility in terms of providing support on projects for which Caltrans lacks the necessary resources. Thus, consultants allow the county to accelerate the delivery of transportation projects, thereby enabling county residents to obtain the benefits yielded by those projects more quickly, and at a lower cost. For this reason, the county tends to use the flexibility of the self-help program to hire consultants for time-sensitive projects that require quick completion and a large amount of resources.

For example, the Authority contracted with consultants for a design-build project which had an urgent deadline for delivery. The project included the addition of a northbound carpool lane to Interstate 405 (Sepulveda Pass – West L.A.). Consultants were able to successfully deliver the project quickly. Another example of a project that used consultants is Metrolink, the County’s commuter rail system. This project was delivered exceptionally fast from the time of conception to delivery (approximately two years).

D. Orange County

1. Orange County’s Self-Help Program

In 1990, Orange County voters approved a half-cent transportation sales tax, titled Measure M, with 55% of the electorate voting “yes”.³⁸ Measure M is a 20-year program (scheduled to expire in 2011) for specific Orange County transportation improvement projects in three major areas: 1) freeways, 2) streets and roads, and 3) transit. The measure is expected to generate nearly \$4.2 billion worth of transportation improvements.³⁹

In 2006, 69% of voters approved the renewal of Measure M, extending it for another 30 years, to expire in 2041.⁴⁰ The renewed Measure M is expected to generate \$11.8 billion.⁴¹ The county’s self-help program is designed to “reduce traffic congestion, strengthen our [Orange County’s] economy and improve our quality of life by upgrading key freeways, fixing major freeway interchanges, maintaining streets and roads, synchronizing traffic signals countywide, building a visionary rail transit system, and protecting our environment from the oily street runoff that pollutes Orange County beaches.”⁴²

³⁸ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

³⁹ Orange County Transportation Authority – Measure M (http://www.octa.net/measure_m.aspx).

⁴⁰ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁴¹ Orange County Transportation Authority – Measure M (<http://www.octa.net/m2overview1.aspx>).

⁴² Orange County Transportation Authority – Measure M (<http://www.octa.net/m2overview1.aspx>). 43% of the Measure M funds are allocated to freeways, 32% of the funds were allocated to streets and roads, and 25% of the funds were allocated to transit.

The Transportation Authority has delivered a series of transportation improvements to County through the self-help program, some of which are listed in **Table 5E.**⁴³

In Orange County, the improvement of the freeway system is a high priority. For example, the widening of Interstate 5 was a key project delivered under the first Measure M.

Table 5E			
Successful Projects Delivered/Scheduled in Orange County			
Year of Vote	Program Name		Project
1990	Measure M	1	New Lanes Interstate 5 (Santa Ana)
		2	New Lanes State Route 55 (Costa Mesa)
		3	New Lanes State Route 91 (Riverside)
		4	Widening “El Toro Y” (I-405/I-5)
		5	Commuter Rail Service Launch (Metrolink)
		6	Built New Stations (Metrolink)
		7	Bus Discounts (Seniors/Disabled)
		8	Widening & Street Repair
2006	Measure M	9	State Route 91 (Riverside/Artesia Freeway)
		10	Interstate 5 (South County)
		11	Interstate 405 (Irvine/Los Angeles)
		12	State Route 55 (Costa Mesa)
		13	Orange Crush Interchange (I-5/SR-57/SR-22)
		14	I-5/SR-55 Intersection
		15	Widening & Street Repair
		16	Rail Transit
		17	Bus Service

The Orange County Transportation Authority, which manages the self-help program, described the benefits that the program has provided to County residents as follows:

⁴³ Orange County Transportation Authority - Measure M (http://www.octa.net/m_default.aspx).

“Measure M promised voters that the funds would be spent only as the voter-approved Measure M plan stated. OCTA has kept that promise. Measure M projects have been completed on time and on budget.”⁴⁴

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

The self-help program has provided Orange County with considerable flexibility in maintaining local transportation facilities. The official from Orange County explained that the main benefit of the self-help program is the ability of the county to control its own destiny.

The County has primarily relied upon the private sector, or consultants, for the design of projects. Doing so has speed-up project delivery and led to additional cost savings. Heavy demands on the Caltrans workforce, slows delivery of projects. For this reason, Orange County uses consultants do a lot of the early work for projects, including design and environmental. Caltrans is very much involved in the design stage of the projects, and provides feedback to the consultants. Caltrans also provides oversight on the projects and completes the construction. According to the County official, use of consultants has allowed the county to avoid some of the limitations on the delivery of projects that existed when the county relied solely on Caltrans.

The county official advised us that the Orange County Transportation Authority has been able to deliver all transportation projects on time and ahead of schedule. In fact, the County originally scheduled the delivery of the projects under Measure M in twenty years, and it was able to deliver all but one of these projects in ten years. Quick delivery has resulted in additional cost savings, allowing the County to deliver additional projects beyond those originally planned. Measure M has been a “very, very successful program.”

The County official explained that absent the self-help program, projects would be delivered much more slowly, which would have resulted in increased costs due to

⁴⁴ Orange County Transportation Authority – Measure M (http://www.octa.net/measure_m.aspx).

inflation. The program has given the County the ability to respond more quickly to transportation needs, such as roadway maintenance, to the benefit of local motorists.

The success of the first Measure M self-help program led to a significant increase in voter support for the program when it was proposed for renewal. When the Measure was presented to the voters in 1990, it garnered 55 percent approval, after failing to receive a majority vote on three previous occasions. In 2006, the renewal of Measure M received more than a two-thirds “yes” vote. The success of the first Measure M built confidence in the ability of the program management, consultants, and Caltrans to deliver projects successfully.

E. Riverside County

1. Riverside County’s Self-Help Program

In 1989, voters approved a half-cent transportation sales tax, titled Measure A, with 78.9% approval.⁴⁵ Measure A has generated approximately \$870 million in sales tax revenue to-date, and is expected to generate an additional \$1 billion before it is scheduled to expire in 2009.⁴⁶ Transportation funds are allocated to major highway projects and to local street and road improvements in each of three districts: Western Riverside County, the Coachella Valley, and Palo Verde, in proportion to the amount that each area contributes.⁴⁷

In 2002, 69% of voters approved the continuation of Measure A until 2039, which is expected to result in \$4.6 billion in funds.⁴⁸ The renewal program has added categories of allocations for fund expenditures to the allocation of funds in the original measure.

The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), which manages the self-help sales tax funds, has overseen the Riverside County Integrated Project, which includes \$153 million for habitat conservation and economic development. The project

⁴⁵ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁴⁶ Riverside County Transportation Commission – Measure A (<http://www.rctc.org/measurea.asp>).

⁴⁷ Riverside County Transportation Commission – Measure A (<http://www.rctc.org/measurea.asp>).

⁴⁸ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

includes the purchase of conservation land for the multiple species habitat conservation plan and additional funds to spend on transit, commuter rail, and new corridors.

The RCTC currently has approximately 45 staff members who serve as managers of the capital projects. Some of the projects completed under the self-help measures are shown in **Table 5F**.⁴⁹ For the widening of State Routes 60 and 74, Caltrans provided oversight for the project, but the other projects typically relied upon the Transportation Commission for oversight. The Transportation Commission uses Bechtel as support staff, particularly for the highway program. For each transportation project, the Riverside County Transportation Commission submits an RFP and contractors respond with proposals.

⁴⁹ Riverside County Transportation Commission – Projects (<http://www.rctc.org/projects.asp>).

Table 5F		
Successful Projects Delivered/Scheduled in Riverside County		
Year of Vote	Program Name	Project
1989	Measure A	1 State Route 60
		2 State Route 60/Interstate 215
		3 State Route 74
		4 State Route 79
		5 State Route 86
		6 State Route 91
		7 State Route 111
		8 Local Interchanges
		9 Call Boxes
		10 Metrolink
		11 Coachella Valley Arterials
2002	Measure A	12 State Route 91
		13 State Route 91/Interstate 15 Interchange
		14 State Route 91/71 Interchange
		15 State Route 71
		16 State Route 60
		17 State Route 79
		18 Interstate 215
		19 Interstate 15
		20 Interstate 10
		21 Interstate 10/State Route 60 Interchange
		22 Western Riverside County Delivery Plan
		23 Interstate 10
		24 Interstate 15
		25 Interstate 215
		26 Coachella Valley Arterials

The Commission typically contracts with Caltrans for the construction of projects, although it has used consultants on three projects.

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

According to the Transportation Commission official, the self-help program has provided the county with flexibility in delivering projects, making it less dependent on the State. Without this flexibility, these projects might not have been delivered.

F. Sacramento County

1. Sacramento County's Self-Help Program

In 1988, voters approved Measure A, a half-cent transportation sales tax, with a 57% “yes” vote.⁵⁰ The tax is scheduled to expire in 2009. An official of the Sacramento Transportation Authority advised us that voters approved Measure A because they felt there was not a reliable, consistent pool of money for transportation improvements and operations. The proceeds of Measure A “are used to fund a comprehensive program of roadway and transit improvements,” specifically, “highway, street, and road construction; highway, street, and road maintenance; bus and light rail capital and operations; improved transportation services for elderly and handicapped persons; and transportation-related air quality programs.”⁵¹ In 2004, 75% of voters approved the renewal of Measure A, which is scheduled to begin in 2009 and continue for 30 years until 2039.⁵²

The Authority, which manages the self-help program, consists of four staff members. The Transportation Authority serves as more of an accountant, budget, and fund allocation organization for the Measure A funds. The Transportation Authority is not directly involved in most of the transportation projects, but local jurisdictions within the County have the authority to implement local projects using the sales tax proceeds.

For the completion of larger scale projects, local jurisdictions collaborate with each other and Caltrans to plan and deliver the projects. There have been 200 projects completed under Measure A since it began in 1989, with estimated total costs of approximately \$780 million. These projects include both smaller and larger projects, such as freeway interchange projects. See **Table 5G** for some examples of projects that have been delivered and scheduled in Sacramento County.⁵³ Measure A is expected to deliver approximately 30 projects from now until the renewal date in 2009. Costs of these projects are estimated from \$120 million, up to \$900 million.

⁵⁰ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁵¹ http://www.sacta.org/p_measurea.html

⁵² Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

Table 5G
Successful Projects Delivered/Scheduled in Sacramento County

Year of Vote	Program Name	Type of Project	
1988 & 2004	Measure A	1	Road Widening
		2	Road Construction/Reconstruction
		3	Corridor Enhancement
		4	Traffic Signals/Computerized Signals
		5	Intersection Improvement
		6	Bicycle & Pedestrian Facilities
		7	Maintenance
		8	Elderly/Disabled Transportation
		9	Interchanges & Grade Separations
		10	Bridge Replacement/Repair
		11	Left-turn Lanes
		12	Travel Demand Management
		13	Public Transit

The Sacramento Transportation Authority has decided to use bonds to accelerate the Measure A funds. The Transportation Authority has found that it is more cost effective to use funds earlier, rather than wait for the funds to flow into the budget. An example of a project recently completed using accelerated Measure A funds is a new crossing in Folsom, which was delivered 10 years ahead of schedule. The project funds were made available through a fund swap of approximately \$40.4 million with the regional transit authority. The regional transit authority will use the future sales tax revenue from Measure A for a light rail extension.

Caltrans stepped up early and was involved in transportation projects at the passage of Measure A. Caltrans is used primarily in smaller projects, such as highways and highway crossings, consultants are used for larger projects, which include almost all of the Sacramento County transportation projects.

⁵³ Sacramento Transportation Authority - County Transportation Expenditure Plan 2007/2008

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

The self-help program has provided the County with the ability to control transportation projects and the flexibility to deliver them swiftly. The Authority official believes that the County has had success contracting with both Caltrans and consultants for transportation projects.

G. San Bernardino County

1. San Bernardino County's Self-Help Program

In 1987, San Bernardino County placed a self-help measure on the ballot, but the measure failed to receive enough votes for approval.⁵⁴ In 1989, another self-help measure appeared on the ballot, titled Measure I, and was approved by 60% of the voters.⁵⁵ The 1989 Measure I provides for a 30-year program, and is scheduled to expire in 2009. In 2004, voters approved a continuation of Measure I for another 30 years, with 80% voting “yes”.⁵⁶ Most of the funds received through the self-help program flow directly to the cities in San Bernardino County, and a small amount of the funding is directed towards regional projects.

Some of the key projects delivered under the self-help program are shown in **Table 5H**. Overall, the projects have remained within budget. The construction of 210 is a good example of a project that would not have been completed absent the funds provided by the self-help program. For the 210 project, design and construction were contracted out to consultants. For the widening of 10, Caltrans was used mostly.

(<http://www.sacta.org/pdf/CTEP/2007CTEP.pdf>).

⁵⁴ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁵⁵ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁵⁶ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

Table 5H		
Successful Projects Delivered/Scheduled in San Bernardino County		
Year of Vote	Program Name	Project
1989 & 2004	Measure I	1 Urban area capital projects (45% of funds allocation) 2 Construction of 71 3 Construction of 210 4 Construction of 215 5 Major Expansion of 215 6 Widening of lanes (including addition of HOV lanes)

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

The San Bernardino County official believes that using consultants in transportation projects provides more flexibility allowing the county to move projects forward when Caltrans is resource-constrained

H. San Diego County

1. San Diego County's Self-Help Program

In April 1988, voters passed a half-cent transportation sales tax titled TransNet, scheduled to expire in 2008, with 53% approval.⁵⁷ TransNet has been “instrumental in expanding the transportation system, reducing traffic congestion, and bringing critical transit projects to life.”⁵⁸ One-third of the \$3.3 billion in tax funds yielded by TransNet were allocated for freeway projects, with transit and local streets and roads each receiving one-third as well. There has been almost no new freeway construction completed; instead, the County has been expanding capacity on existing right-of-ways.

⁵⁷ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁵⁸ <http://www.sandag.org/index.asp?projectid=255&fuseaction=projects.detail>

In November 2004, voters approved a 40-year extension (scheduled to expire in 2048) of the TransNet program, with 67% approval.⁵⁹ The funds from the renewal measure have been accelerated by issuing bonds to deliver “early action” projects. The TransNet program is expected to generate \$14 billion for public transit, highway, and local street and road improvements.

Caltrans is heavily integrated in the TransNet self-help program. Almost all of the transportation projects in San Diego County are contracted to Caltrans, with consultants supplementing Caltrans on some of the projects. Recently, the County has had to rely on consultants more because Caltrans has been resource constrained. Nevertheless, the County prefers to use Caltrans for projects, due to an established relationship between the two organizations. The San Diego Association of Governments and Caltrans began working together in 1988. San Diego County is the only county in its Metropolitan Planning Organization, which makes reaching consensus easier.

It appears that SANDAG’s ability to use consultants under the self-help program has encouraged consultants to be more creative and efficient, as a means to retain its share of the business. A County official maintains that contractors are chosen based on performance. The past three Corridor Directors (which could be described as project managers for large projects) were appointed through a competitive process, and all three directors happened to be from Caltrans.⁶⁰

For the State Route 125 (Sweetwater) project, the preliminary design, environmental review, and the final design were all completed using consultants because Caltrans did not have the resources available for the completion of this project. Since mid-2005, the amount of work completed by consultants on the transportation projects in San Diego County has ramped up because the County has had a large number of projects

⁵⁹ Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁶⁰ SANDAG also chooses to contract with Caltrans for economic reasons. Caltrans oversees transportation projects regardless of Caltrans’ involvement in the plan and design of the projects, so there is efficiency gained through Caltrans’ serving in simultaneous roles

scheduled for delivery. In the past nine months the County completed five projects, each over \$50 million in costs.

The Mission Valley East Trolley extension, one of the more recently completed transit projects, cost approximately \$0.5 billion and was completed almost exclusively by consultants, with Caltrans serving in both oversight and inspection roles. The county saved over \$1 million on this project. For other projects that have been delivered or scheduled under the TransNet self-help program, see **Table 5I**.⁶¹

⁶¹ San Diego Association of Governments
(http://www.sandag.org/uploads/publicationid/publicationid_1354_7904.pdf)

Table 5I
Successful Projects Delivered or Scheduled in San Diego County

Year of Vote	Program Name	Key Project
1987 & 2004	TransNet	1 SR 54 (I-805 to Briarwood) – 1996
		2 Poway Road/Scripps-Poway Parkway - 1991/1997
		3 SR 76 West (Foussat to Jeffries Ranch Road) – 1999
		4 SR 56 - 2003/2004
		5 SR 125 Sweetwater – 2003
		6 SR 125 Fanita – 2003
		7 SR 52 (I-15 to SR 125) – 1998
		8 SR 78 (I-5 to I-15) - 1992/2006
		9 Trolley extended from El Cajon to Santee – 1995
		10 COASTER commuter rail from Oceanside to downtown San Diego – 1995
		11 Trolley from downtown San Diego to Old Town – 1996
		12 Mission Valley East Trolley extension – 2005
		13 SR 54 “ Gap” and “Connector” – 2007
		14 SR 52 auxiliary lanes – 2007
		15 SPRINTER rail line from Oceanside to Escondido – 2008
		16 Discount transit passes for seniors, riders with disabilities, and youth
		17 Maintenance, repair, and construction of local roads
		18 Local street widening and traffic signals at busy intersections
		19 Special transportation services for seniors and persons with disabilities
		20 Bicycle and pedestrian improvements

The TransNet program also uses a sophisticated program tracking system (Dashboard). The system was originally proposed by Caltrans employees for use by the department, but the employees faced resistance from within the department, and in the end the department did not adopt the system. Subsequently, these employees moved to SANDAG, where they were able to create the program tracking system.

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

The TransNet self-help program has provided San Diego County with the flexibility to use consultants to “fill in the gap” on projects that Caltrans does not have sufficient resources to deliver. The SANDAG officials described their ability to contract with both consultants and Caltrans as “the best of both worlds.” They maintain that the ability to draw upon the pool of resources results in the best possible outcome.

The County officials explained that consultants have broad knowledge and experience and Caltrans has specific skills to contribute to transportation projects. The San Diego County officials have realized cost-savings, by having consultants “on-call.” When, due to budgetary limitations, hiring freezes, and other impediments beyond the department’s control, the county is able to maintain project momentum by using consultants.

I. Santa Clara County

1. Santa Clara’s Self-Help Program

In 1984, Santa Clara was the first county to place a self-help tax, Measure A, on the ballot, and the measure passed with 52% approval.⁶² The 1984 Measure A, went into effect in 1985, and remained in effect until April 1995. The tax was focused primarily on delivering funds for roadway improvements because there were no local funds set aside for transportation improvement projects. The 1984 Measure A program supported expenditures of \$1 to \$1.2 billion.

In 1996, voters approved two renewal measures – Measure A (77% “yes” vote) and Measure B (52%) both of which expired in 2006.⁶³ Measure B was a county general sales tax measure and Measure A provided a list of specific transportation projects to be

⁶² Los Angeles County approved a half-cent transportation tax in 1980, but since that program is transit focused, Santa Clara County is often considered the first county in California to approve a self-help program. See also, Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁶³ Los Angeles County approved a half-cent transportation tax in 1980, but since that program is transit focused, Santa Clara County is often considered the first county in California to approve a self-help program. See also, Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

financed with Measure B funds. The Measure A and B program provided funds for transportation until 2005. Under Measure A and B, SSCTA became the service entity to provide oversight for transportation projects. In 1996, there was a court challenge to the Measure A and B program, but the program was upheld. The 1996 Measure A and B program resulted in \$1.6 to \$1.7 billion for 11 highway projects.

In 2000, Santa Clara County voters renewed the half-cent transportation sales tax (Measure A) which was earmarked for specific public transit capital improvement projects and operations, such as BART. The measure received a 70.3% “yes” vote.⁶⁴ Measure A took effect in 2006 and will expire in 2036. It is expected to generate \$2 billion over 30 years and provide “a balanced transportation system consisting of transit, roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian improvements.”⁶⁵

The Santa Clara County Traffic Authority⁶⁶, which manages the County’s self-help program, began as a department created by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors in 1972 to oversee the region’s transportation system. Until 1995, SSCTA’s primary responsibility was the development, operation, and maintenance of the bus and light rail system within the county. The SSCTA then focused on highway (50%) and transit (50%) issues. At the height of the Santa Clara self-help program, the SSCTA included 6 staff members: an executive director, two management directors, finance director, and two secretaries.

Santa Clara County uses consultants on most projects, as opposed to using Caltrans. Many of the other nineteen self-help counties follow this model, particularly Contra Costa, Fresno, Riverside, and San Bernardino counties. Under this model the county retains an engineering consultant to:

⁶⁴ Los Angeles County approved a half-cent transportation tax in 1980, but since that program is transit focused, Santa Clara County is often considered the first county in California to approve a self-help program. See also, Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁶⁵ <http://www.vta.org/projects/measureafacts.html>

⁶⁶ The authority is currently named Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA).

- (a) schedule the critical path,
- (b) manage the scope of the project,
- (c) handle cash flow issues,
- (d) advise regarding financial planners, and
- (e) create a strategic plan (typically a 7 year plan)

The Transportation Authority contracts with Bechtel for project management. Caltrans performs oversight, and acts as the “gatekeepers.” The County has an arrangement with Caltrans to design certain projects and uses private engineering firms to design other projects. Santa Clara County takes a team approach of using Caltrans and consultants. SSCTA uses program and project consultants. The county hires consultants for all planning, design, environmental review, etc, and Caltrans takes more of an oversight role for projects. Caltrans tends to be engaged more in transportation maintenance projects.

“The Measure A Program – including the widening of 26 miles of Highway 101, extending Highway 85 for 18 miles, and upgrading Route 237 to full freeway status (including four new interchanges) – was completed in approximately seven years, from 1987 to 1994. This is a significant achievement, considering that, even with Measure A funds, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) had estimated that the same package of improvements would take from 14 to 23 years to complete. Without the tax, Route 85, which by 1980 had languished in the design stage for over 30 years, might never have been built. The probability of finishing other Measure A projects was also very low.”⁶⁷

⁶⁷ “How The Santa Clara County Traffic Authority Succeeded In Implementing the Measure A Highway Improvement Program – Ahead of Schedule And Under Budget,” by Armando Razo, David Murray, and Rachel Sumi, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, p. 2.

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

The self-help program allows the county to deliver transportation improvement projects more aggressively. The county is also able to engage in projects simultaneously, due to the ability to use consultants to “fill in gaps” in project and program needs. The county also benefits from the flexibility of being able to control transportation funds, because it is local tax revenue. This allows jurisdictions to use the funds to do projects the way that they want, such as more landscaping and higher sound walls.

Under the Measure A program, three major highway projects were completed, including 85, 101, and 237. The Route 85 project consisted of 18 miles of brand new right-of-way, and was completed very quickly, thereby shielding the project from years of cost escalation. The project was expected to require 18 years for completion, but the project was actually completed in 8 years. The widening of 101 consisted of 2 lanes for 8 miles throughout most of Santa Clara County, from southbound San Jose to Morgan Hill. From start to finish, the project took about 3.5 years for completion. County officials state that under Caltrans, the project would have taken longer to complete.

The Route 237 project encountered soil settlement issues and the Transportation Authority, with the assistance of consultants, (Geotech), convinced Caltrans to allow to a series of compaction tests of the soil. The program passed the compaction tests, enabling the county to simplify the project and begin construction more quickly. Use of consultants to accelerate project delivery helped reduce delivery time from the estimated 17 years to 10 years. By spending \$1 million to test the soil, the county was able to save \$15 million.

For each of these projects, the County first approached Caltrans to complete the work. According to Caltrans’s schedule, however, the projects would have taken too long to deliver, so the county used consultants to delivery the projects instead. Due to the success of these projects, the county has shifted from using only Caltrans to using mostly consultants.

The Santa Clara County self-help program has provided many benefits to the County, such as:

- (a) Placing resources where the county needs them the most
- (b) Creating more accountability
- (c) Providing the opportunity to take calculated, managed risk
- (d) Placing pressure on Caltrans to deliver transportation projects
- (e) Moving the design process faster
- (f) Allowing for quick/prompt decisions
- (g) Providing opportunity for effective management teams
- (h) Allowing and promoting more creativity in the design and delivery of projects

J. Sonoma County

1. Sonoma County's Self-Help Program

Initially, a half-cent transportation sales tax was placed on the 1990 ballot, but the measure received only 48% of the vote.⁶⁸ In 1998, a half-cent transportation sales tax again appeared on the ballot, and again failed to pass.⁶⁹ In 2000, a half-cent transportation sales tax appeared on the ballot for a third time, in the form of two measures. These measures received 59% and 60% of the vote – less than the two-thirds approval required.

⁶⁸ Los Angeles County approved a half-cent transportation tax in 1980, but since that program is transit focused, Santa Clara County is often considered the first county in California to approve a self-help program. See also, Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

⁶⁹ Los Angeles County approved a half-cent transportation tax in 1980, but since that program is transit focused, Santa Clara County is often considered the first county in California to approve a self-help program. See also, Self-Help Counties Coalition - Election Results (<http://selfhelpcounties.org/SalesTaxInformation.html>)

In 2004, Sonoma voters finally approved a quarter-cent transportation sales tax, titled Measure M, with 67.2% approval. “The passage of Measure M creates a stable funding source for local transportation projects that cannot be taken away when the State budget runs into crisis. Though it will not fund all of our transportation needs, it will allow us to make significant progress in widening Highway 101, maintaining local roads, improving local transit service, developing passenger rail service, providing safe bike and pedestrian routes and making key local street improvements.”⁷⁰

The allocation of funds under Measure M has proven to be successful. The sales tax has helped Sonoma with rehabilitation of transportation. The key capital project under this measure provided two additional lanes for 101 (one in each direction). This project consists of 7 segments. One of the segments was completed before the ballot measure was passed. Four of the segments were included in the ballot cost estimates. Funds have been allocated to these segments, covering about 50% of the costs. The following three segments of 101 will reach construction this year:

- (a) Central: The County has hired consultants for this segment. Consultants have already completed the environmental portion of the design.
- (b) Wilfred: The County is using Caltrans for the construction of this segment. This segment has already completed the design stage and environmental portion of the design.
- (c) North: The County is using Caltrans for the construction of this segment. Consultants have already completed the environmental portion of the design. Caltrans has completed rehabilitation on the North, along with the widening.

2. Perceived Benefits from the Self-Help Program

The self-help program has provided the County with the local control of funds necessary to drive improvements in transportation project delivery. The Sonoma County

⁷⁰ http://www.sctainfo.org/reports/archive/Measure%20M/2005_Measure_M_Strategic_Plan.pdf

official believes that without the self-help program, important capital projects would not have been delivered.

K. Monterey County

1. Monterey County's Experience As A "Wanna-be" Self-Help County

Monterey County does not have a self-help transportation program, however, the County and the cities in Monterey County are very interested in initiating such a program. The proposed sales tax is one element of the County's transportation investment plan. Other elements of the plan include a Regional Development Impact Fee, which is a unit cost for the development of residential and commercial property, and city-level development impact fees, which have been passed by each of the cities in Monterey County.

The County is placing a half-cent transportation sales tax measure on the November 2008 ballot. The tax would remain in effect for twenty years. This is the second time a self-help sales tax measure has been placed on the Monterey county ballot. The first measure received a 60% "yes" vote – less than the two-thirds vote required for passage.

The Monterey County official explained that the motivation behind the enactment of a self-help sales tax program is "to actually get things funded." The benefits anticipated from the program include having the flexibility to quickly adjust to changes, and having the discretion to use Caltrans or contract with the private sector for needed services. The official explained that the County would like to follow the "Santa Clara model" of making extensive use of consultants in the private sector. This would enable the County to speed-up project delivery by avoiding Caltrans's "methodical" approach, which lengthens the time required to complete projects.

Some of the key projects that would be funded under the proposed self-help program include intersection and widening of Highway 68 and interchange, extension, and lane widening of Highway 1. The County has experienced some difficulty delivering projects that were promised to residents. The self-help program, according to the official,

would allow the County to have a transportation plan and the means to execute that plan. The program would also create more accountability and would interject more competition, leading to greater efficiency. These changes would allow projects to be delivered on time and on budget.

VI. CONCLUSION

Our survey reveals that self-help counties take different approaches to delivering transportation projects to their residents. Some counties, such as Los Angeles, primarily rely on Caltrans for project delivery, and use consultants to overcome bottlenecks and thereby accelerate delivery. Other counties, such as Santa Clara, primarily rely on private consultants for engineering and design services, although Caltrans plays an important oversight role.

All counties pointed to the additional funds available under self-help programs as an important reason for the programs' success. We would have been surprised if they felt otherwise.

Our focus in designing and conducting the survey was on how the self-help program affects the counties' ability to deliver the transportation projects desired by their residents, without regard to fund availability. The counties' responses generally revealed the following points of agreement:

1. Because counties are able to exercise control over self-help funds, they have considerably more influence over how transportation projects are delivered.
2. With more influence over delivery, self-help counties can adopt those project delivery mechanisms that will be most effective in meeting perceived needs.
 - a. In some cases, the most cost-effective delivery mechanism will involve reliance on Caltrans for engineering and design services.
 - b. In other cases, the most cost-effective delivery mechanism will require the use of private consultants to provide these services, as well as overall project management.
3. The ability to use private consultants to deliver transportation projects is extremely valuable – even to counties who rely primarily on Caltrans for project delivery. The value of private consultants in these circumstances is three-fold:

- a. Private consultants can maintain project momentum and speed-up delivery when Caltrans is resource-constrained.⁷¹
 - b. Private consultants can be brought in to supplement Caltrans resources, quickly, when problems arise, special expertise is required, or creative solutions are needed to advance projects.
 - c. The county's ability to hire private consultants in lieu of Caltrans staff introduces a healthy element of competition that encourages Caltrans to be more responsive to county preferences, more budget-sensitive, and less "plodding."
4. Where self-help counties have made extensive use of private consultants, they have found that consultants make significant contributions to the counties' transportation program. These contributions take three main forms.
- a. First, and most importantly, use of consultants greatly speeds up project delivery. This benefits county residents in three major ways:
 1. Residents obtain the benefits of enhanced transportation facilities sooner, saving them time that can be used for other purposes.
 2. Businesses obtain the benefits of enhanced transportation facilities sooner, saving them money that ultimately will be passed along to consumers (in the form of lower prices), employees (in the form of increased compensation), and investors (in the form of increased return to ownership).
 3. Taxpayers realize significant savings because when transportation projects are delivered more quickly, they are less exposed to the ravages of inflation.

⁷¹ Resource constraints cannot be eliminated without imposing heavy excess costs on taxpayers to support excess Caltrans staff when demand for Caltrans services slackens.

- b. Second, consultants are much more responsive to the needs and priorities of county residents because their continued retention depends entirely on their performance.
- c. Third, consultants are likely to be significantly more cost-effective, because they are more attuned to staying within project budgets. This allows counties to stretch their transportation dollars further, to cover more projects desired by their residents.

The flexibility that self-help counties enjoy, by virtue of their control over transportation funding, enables voters to hold transportation officials accountable for their performance. Such accountability is lacking when counties are dependent on Caltrans for project delivery.

The increased accountability means that transportation projects funded under the self help programs are more responsive to the needs of county residents, and more cost-effective.

We note that the benefits resulting from the ability to use consultants for project delivery do not require the funding mechanism (*i.e.* a sales tax dedicated to transportation) utilized by the self-help program. These benefits stem from the control and flexibility enjoyed by self-help counties. Extending this control and flexibility to non-self-help counties would enable them to realize these benefits.

APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUALS INTERVIEWED

The Honorable Quentin L. Kopp, Chairman of High-Speed Rail Authority, Former California State Senator & Transportation Chair, and San Mateo County Superior Court Judge

Marian Bergeson, Former California Transportation Commission Member

Will Kempton, California Department of Transportation Director

Jim Beall, California State Assembly Member

A. Alameda County

Christine Monsen, Executive Director of Alameda County Transportation Authority

B. Contra Costa County

Bob McCleary, Executive Director of Contra Costa County Transportation Authority

Bill Gray, President of Gray-Bowen and Company and Former Chief Deputy Director to the Contra Costa County Public Works Department

C. Los Angeles County

David Yale, Director of Capital Programming of Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

D. Orange County

Kia Mortazavi, Executive Director of Development of Orange County Transportation Authority

E. Riverside County

Anne Mayer, Executive Director of Riverside County Transportation Commission

F. Sacramento County

Brian Williams, Executive Director of Sacramento County Transportation Authority

G. San Bernardino County

Norm King, Former Executive Director of San Bernardino Associated Governments

H. San Diego County

Jim Linthicum, Division Director of Engineering and Construction of San Diego Association of Governments

Charles “Muggs” Stoll, TransNet Program Manager of San Diego Association of Governments

I. Santa Clara County

Eileen Goodwin, Former Executive Director of Santa Clara County Traffic Authority

John Ristow, CMA Director

J. Sonoma County

Suzanne Smith, Executive Director of Sonoma County Transportation Authority

K. Monterey County

Wayne Tanda, Director of Monterey county resource Management Agency

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Questions Regarding Overview of Self-Help Program

1. When did your county's self-help program begin?
2. Why did the county take the initiative to start this program?
3. What were the key arguments that convinced the voters to approve this program?
4. How many projects costing how much money have been delivered to date by your county's program? [Please provide details.]
5. How many projects costing how much money are projected to be completed in the future? [Please provide details.]
6. How big an in-house staff did the County use to deliver projects and what were the responsibilities of the staff?

B. Questions Regarding Program Accomplishments

7. Prior to starting this program, did County officials have an idea of when the state would be able to deliver the projects that eventually became the self-help county program? [Please provide specific examples.]
8. During the campaign to secure voter approval of the local sales tax measure, did the program supporters promise the voters specific projects within certain timelines? [Please provide details.]
9. How did those dates compare with the county's expectations prior to launching the self-help program?
10. Did the program meet the time estimates for project delivery that were promised to the voters?
11. How did the expected cost of projects that were part of the self-help program compare to the expected of these projects in the absence of the self-help program?

12. How important were the project cost savings, if any, made possible by more-rapid completion of the projects (i.e., saving time is saving money, given the rate of inflation in construction costs)?
13. How important were the project cost-savings, if any, made possible by the flexibility to hire outside consultants to value-engineer, manage, and/or design and engineer the projects?
14. How did the county's success in delivering projects within the promised timelines and budgets affect the voters' willingness to renew the local sales tax?
15. If the county's program had never occurred, what would be the state of transportation in the county today?

C. Questions Regarding the Use of Outside Consultants

16. To what extent and for what purposes does the county use outside consultants?
[Please provide details.]
 - (a) Value engineering?
 - (b) Project design?
 - (c) Project engineering?
 - (d) Other functions?
17. What factors determine whether the county contracts for services with Caltrans or hires/retains outside consultants? [Please provide details.]
18. In general, have the county's outside consultants delivered the needed services to the county on time and within budget?
19. To what extent, if any, have outside consultants contributed to the success of the self-help transportation program?

20. If the county had been prohibited from using outside consultants, how would the self-help program's performance have been different?
21. Are there any metrics – or examples – that demonstrate the benefits gained by using outside consultants?