

Kelly, Sherry

From: Hawley, Miriam
Sent: Friday, September 20, 2002 10:45 AM
To: Kelly, Sherry
Subject: Supplemental Communications for Council's Sept. 24 meeting.

Please include this article in the supplemental agenda for the Sept. 24 Council meeting. It is background material for my item #13, asking Council to oppose Prop. 51.

Thanks
Mim Hawley

Published Tuesday, August 13, 2002, in the Sacramento Bee

Many Prop. 51 allies would reap benefits
By Mary Lynne Vellinga

A long list of prominent Sacramento individuals and institutions have put their money behind Proposition 51, a statewide transportation measure on the November ballot.

Their enthusiasm is understandable. The initiative, derided by critics as a giant pork barrel, is packed with goodies for the Sacramento region and other parts of the state.

Proposition 51 would divert almost \$1 billion from the state general fund and steer it toward projects that run the gamut from new freeway interchanges in Southern California to shoreline restoration near San Francisco.

Sacramento would get \$100 million over the next 10 years to help build a light-rail line to the airport, \$7 million for a new museum of technology in the downtown railyard and \$1 million annually for maintenance of the American River Parkway.

An additional \$1.5 million would go each year for an indefinite period to Sacramento County ranchers who agree to manage their land in an environmentally sensitive way.

The city of Sacramento would receive \$4 million to help accomplish one of its dreams: decking Interstate 5 to reconnect downtown with the Sacramento River.

Supporters say Prop. 51, sponsored by the Planning and Conservation League, would make California's cities more livable. "It will fund wonderful transportation and open space projects throughout the state, but it's especially important for Sacramento because it will be a huge leap forward in getting our light-rail improvements funded," said Eleni Tsakopoulos-Kounalakis, president of AKT Development, the region's most prominent development firm.

The Tsakopoulos family has contributed \$192,500 in loans and donations to the Proposition 51 campaign, according to records filed with the secretary of state's office.

But critics deride the measure as a pork barrel package funded by potential beneficiaries such as AKT, which is a primary player in the development of North Natomas, en route to the airport.

"It's one of the worst public policies I have ever seen," said Lenny Goldberg, executive director of the California Tax Reform Association.

"It spends about \$1 billion of the state general fund on particular programs and projects without regard to the current budget situation."

Proposition 51 would take 30 percent of the sales taxes from motor vehicles -- money that now goes into the state general fund. Although it's being billed as the Traffic Congestion Relief and Safe School Bus Act, the measure includes items as diverse as the railroad technology museum and the I-5 decking.

Trudy Schafer, program director for the League of Women Voters of California, called Proposition 51 a "hodgepodge" of programs and projects.

"Some of them are very meritorious, but it's obvious how others got in, because those people were going to help with the campaign," Schafer said.

Representatives of the Planning and Conservation League, a coalition of environmental groups, say the projects represent the highest priorities of California communities.

"There's a huge overlap between what's popular and what will raise money," said Eddy Moore, transportation director for PCL. "While the connection to traffic may not seem obvious for some of the projects, such as the railroad museum, part of the underlying theme is to make cities more livable places."

Making cities nicer, he said, will lessen the tendency of people to move to the suburbs and increase traffic congestion. Moore said the measure contains an insurance clause to make sure it doesn't further strap the state in an already bad economic year. If the general fund dips in a given year, funding for the projects included in the measure would be dropped for that year, Moore pointed out.

Many of the measure's provisions were added in response to specific requests from individuals, public and private.

Sacramento County Supervisor Roger Dickinson said he asked that the money for light rail be put in. The supervisor also recruited the Tsakopoulos family to help fund the campaign. Their infusion of cash came when PCL was debating whether to drop the initiative or press ahead.

"I can't overstate the importance of this measure to us," Dickinson said. "There is no transportation project in this region that captures the imagination of people as much as getting light rail out to the airport."

Jane Hagedorn, chief executive officer of the American Lung Association of Sacramento-Emigrant Trails, helped get the American River Parkway funding into Proposition 51. As a volunteer, Hagedorn has for years struggled to find a way to better fund parkway operations.

"It's in there and we're really pleased, and we're working really hard," Hagedorn said. She has contributed \$1,000 to the campaign.

Ranchers in east Sacramento County asked that the county get \$1.5 million annually for long-term agreements with ranchers.

Development pressure has been growing in the still-rural east county, and ranchers say they should be compensated for letting their property serve as the region's open space.

Sacramento County ranching families and their representatives have contributed at least \$30,000 to the initiative.

The California State Railroad Museum Foundation, backers of the museum

project, has kicked in \$28,000.

The Planning and Conservation League has made a tradition out of ballot box planning. Its executive director, Gerald Meral, has pushed through a series of measures that have funded everything from parkland acquisition to train routes.

The league has long been criticized for including projects based on campaign contributions.

About a decade ago, in response to one PCL measure, the Legislature passed a law against what then-Sen. Quentin Kopp described as "buying and selling an initiative." But a state appellate court overturned the law as a violation of free speech.

Supporters of Proposition 51 say Meral's methods, while controversial, produce results.

"If there was another way to go about this, I might agree with the critics," Dickinson said. "But the fact is, this is what we need to do to get needed transportation improvements."