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SURVEY SHOWS SOCAL VOTERS PREFER INVESTING IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION OVER ROADS

Southern Californians also now prefer walkable, mixed-use communities over conventional residential neighborhoods where they have to drive

LOS ANGELES — A survey of voters in the six-county region served by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) finds voters now want planning to emphasize investments in transit, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure over building new roads. Voters surveyed also want to shift new development into cities with a good mix of jobs and services, and they see all of these approaches as the best way to reduce traffic congestion and commute times, while also saving them money, creating jobs and improving the economy, air quality and public health.

The survey was sponsored by three nonprofit organizations — Move LA, the American Lung Association in California and the Natural Resources Defense Council — and designed to assess Southern California residents' priorities for reducing regional traffic congestion and air pollution. SCAG is currently working on its 2012 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS), which lays out transportation investments and land use strategies for the next 30 years. SCAG's Regional Council will vote on a "preferred alternative" for the RTP/SCS on Thursday, November 3.

The survey provided a strong showing of support for transit, with four of five voters saying they support investing in public transportation, and 51 percent saying they "strongly" support these investments. Those polled prioritized expanding public transportation over expanding roads and highways by a two-to-one margin.

Survey participants also indicated they would prefer to live in communities that are pedestrian friendly (64 percent), rather than in conventional residential communities that require driving to stores and other businesses. Sixty-five percent indicated they would rather live in communities with smaller houses and lots and shorter commute times than in communities with larger houses and lots and longer commutes.

"Voters prioritize expanding public transportation as the most effective means of reducing traffic congestion and air pollution," said Denny Zane, executive director of Move LA. "The findings also show

that voters would prefer living in communities that are walkable and mixed-use even if this means living in a smaller home.”

Amanda Eaken, NRDC’s deputy director of sustainable communities, added that “If Southern California voters were in charge of our transportation plans, the region would look very different. Voters understand what so many studies have told us: widening roads will not solve traffic congestion. Instead, designing communities that increase our mobility and freedom — helping us to get out of our cars — is what will ultimately solve the problem.”

Survey respondents were also given a list of several different approaches to reducing air pollution and traffic congestion and were asked to rate them on a scale of one to seven, with seven representing “extremely effective” and one representing “not at all effective.” Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 percent) ranked “expanding public transportation” as “extremely effective” or “very effective,” while expanding transportation options such as shuttles, bike lanes, and safer sidewalks and crosswalks ranked next, and “widening existing roads and highways” and “building new roads and highways” ranked last (37 percent and 32 percent respectively).

Survey respondents were then asked to imagine they were in charge of their region’s transportation budget, and to allocate a hypothetical \$100 budget across five spending categories. Their responses indicate they would like to see a significant majority of the region’s transportation dollars allocated to expanding and improving public transportation and providing more bike and pedestrian infrastructure. And while voters would allocate about 25 percent of funding to repair and maintain existing roads and highways, they would allocate less than 20 percent of the budget to expanding roads and highways.

The survey also queried voters about whether they believe that building new homes in walkable, mixed-use communities close to jobs and providing more transportation choices would help the region achieve important goals. More than 70 percent of respondents indicated they are either “very convinced” or “somewhat convinced” that such strategies would reduce traffic congestion, improve the economy and create jobs, improve quality of life by allowing them to spend more time with family and less time in their cars, reduce their household transportation costs and their healthcare costs by reducing air pollution.

“The epidemic of air pollution continues to place a huge burden on our hospitals and emergency rooms,” said Jane Warner, president and CEO of the American Lung Association in California. “The human and economic tolls underscore the importance of pursuing smarter growth and increased alternative transportation options now.”

The survey, conducted by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates, a public opinion research firm based in Santa Monica and Oakland, consisted of 758 telephone interviews with registered voters living within the Southern California Association of Governments’ six-county jurisdiction. A summary of key findings and the polling results are available at <http://www.moveLA.org/polling/>.

Move LA is a nonprofit business-labor-environmental coalition that advocates for the development of a comprehensive, diverse, robust, clean, and financially sound public transportation system for Los Angeles County. The American Lung Association in California is a nonprofit organization that uses research, education and advocacy to improve the health of Californians and their lungs. The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment.