

# Madera County's \$800 million transportation sales tax, explained



by Gregory Weaver  
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Credit: Von Balanon

Madera County has some of the worst roads in the state of California. The fifth-worst out of the state's 58 counties, **to be exact**. Transportation planners estimate Madera county's average pavement condition is over 30% worse than down the road, in Fresno County.

The cost of meeting the county's road maintenance needs is daunting. At the current level of funding (**\$12-13 million a year**), a third of Madera's roads will fall into disrepair by 2028. Even increasing it by \$4-5 million annually (**\$16-17 million a year**) will still leave the roads in their bad existing conditions. And to improve road conditions to a level similar to Fresno's? That will cost 400% more, **\$64 million a year** for the next 20 years, \$1.3 billion in total.

The \$800 million Measure T spending plan on the Madera County ballot this fall will only cover a fraction of these road repair concerns. The plan's streets and road programs will bring in \$15-20 million annually into the county for road maintenance – enough for upkeep, but not enough to hit the \$64 million goal that's needed to improve the county's road quality.

How much of the county's transportation needs will be addressed in Measure T's proposed spending plan? What can the plan accomplish? Is it enough to win over 66% of the county's voters this fall?

Here's everything you need to know about Madera County's Measure T.

#### ▼ Will Measure T add to my taxes?

No, Madera County residents have been paying into Measure T's half-cent sales tax since 1990.

#### ▼ What will happen to local transit or road funding if we don't renew Measure T this year?

Your local transit programs **will not lose funding** if the Measure T renewal fails this year. Neither will current funding for roads. The current version of Measure T doesn't expire until 2027.

Local leaders have two more election cycles – 2024 and 2026 – to write up a plan and renew Measure T before the current version expires.

#### ▼ How long will the tax last, if passed?

If approved this fall, Measure T will become a "forever" half-cent sales tax, which means that voters will pay into the tax indefinitely, unless they create an initiative to end Measure T.

## ▼ What's in the plan?

The largest category for the plan is **Local and Neighborhood Street Maintenance** (\$303.1 million, 35%). According to data from county planners, this program will be enough to maintain Madera's County's average road condition, but not improve them to Fresno County's planned levels.

The plan also has two other road categories: **Community & Neighborhood Streets** (\$130 million, 15%), which is targeted for road-widening projects, sidewalks and bike lanes, and the **Local "Flex" Subprogram** (\$108 million, 12.5%), which will be used at the discretion of your local governing agency, such as the City of Madera or Madera County. The plan has no formal public procedure yet for local residents to collaborate with local officials on how "flex" Measure T funds are spent, but road expansions, street repair, and new bike lanes all qualify.

The second-largest category is **Major Routes, Access & Safety Improvements** (\$200 million, 25%). The road project list is focused on four, six, and eight-lane expansions on Avenue 12 (\$15 million), an expansion of Highway 99 (\$25 million), and a \$50 million report to explore the possibility of wildfire escape routes in Oakhurst and North Fork.

The remaining 11% of the funds will be split between **public transit** (\$34 million, ~1 million annually, 4%), **safe routes to schools** (\$34 million, ~1 million annually, 4%) and **clean air programs** (\$26 million, ~1 million annually, 3%).

## ▼ Will the plan improve Madera's road quality?

No. The plan increases road maintenance funding by \$5-6 million annually relative to the current version of Measure T, but it stops short of hitting the \$64 million goal that's needed to significantly raise the average road conditions.

However, the plan will bring in \$15-20 million a year for road maintenance, which is enough to keep the roads in their present condition.

## ▼ Will the plan build a wildfire escape route for Oakhurst?

No. Oakhurst currently does not have a multi-lane wildfire escape route, which is dangerous because if a single car breaks down along one of the two-lane routes, **people may not be able to escape in time.**

When the current version of Measure T was approved in 2006, the spending document planned for a half-mile road expansion along the main Oakhurst Highway 41 wildfire escape route, but it was never built because of its \$100 million price tag.

In this fall's proposed version of Measure T, there's a spot for a future \$48 million study of wildfire escape routes in the area, but there is no definite road project planned.

### ▼ What will the plan do for EV charging stations?

In the **clean air program** (~\$1 million annually), EV stations qualify to receive funding. At maximum, this is enough to annually build 150 commercial stations, or 25 rapid-charging ports every year.

### ▼ What will the plan do for bicycles and pedestrians?

The spending plan will cover about 6% of the total bike and pedestrian need, according to Madera's comprehensive Active Transportation Plan – the planner's blueprint for new bike lanes and walking paths. Hundreds of millions of dollars are needed for sidewalk and bike paths in Madera County. Estimates conducted by Madera County in the last four years range from **\$160 million** to **\$590 million**.

In the proposed Measure T plan, \$34 million is dedicated specifically for bike and pedestrian routes, and a small portion is likely to also come from the \$238 million pot of funds for road maintenance and flex dollars.

But it's up to the discretion of local officials to decide how much of the flex dollars get spent on bike and pedestrian trails, and there is no specific public process yet in Measure T for the residents to shape that bureaucratic decision. Any additional funds that bike and pedestrian paths receive will have to be negotiated implicitly, along with many other funding sources, during an annual city/county budget approval process.

### ▼ Who supports the Measure T spending plan?

Madera County Supervisor Rob Poythress

California Alliance for Jobs – Rebuild California Committee

Richard Caglia, local businessman and developer

Robert McCaffrey, developer of Tesoro Viejo

### ▼ Who opposes the Measure T spending plan?

Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability

### ▼ Who is funding the opposition and support of Measure T?

#### **Yes on Measure T**

This fall, financial support for the Measure T campaign comes from a statewide building PAC, local developers Robert McCaffrey and Richard Caglia, and a Madera County Supervisor's six-year-old campaign committee.

Total funds raised so far: as of Oct.20: \$48,000

#### **Top donors:**

California Alliance for Jobs – Rebuild California Committee: \$25,000

Caglia Environmental: \$10,000

Elect Robert Poythress as Madera County Supervisor 2016: \$5,000

Robert McCaffrey: \$5,000

#### **No on Measure T Campaign**

Currently, there is no official opposition campaign against Measure T.

Click on the graphic below to explore the donations.

