

INLAND VALLEY Daily Bulletin

GOLD LINE EXTENSION

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Rejecting federal funds not smart

Let's see if we have this straight. There was \$320 million in federal funding on the table, to be used to start the Gold Line Foothill Extension project, which would bring light rail from Pasadena east to Montclair and, we hope, L.A./Ontario International Airport.

To claim the \$320 million to improve transportation options for regional commuters and day-trippers, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority had to allocate \$80 million to the project.

But the Metro board opted Thursday not to take four federal dollars for each dollar it put up itself. Instead, the board voted to draft a proposal that would add an additional half-cent Los Angeles County sales tax to fund road and mass transit projects.

In effect, the board decided that instead of accepting the already available federal tax money to help the residents of eastern L.A. County and western San Bernardino County, it would tax L.A. County more so that the Foothill Extension could be built later.

Does that make sense? Not to us.

Do the Metro board members know that California is already a big donor state that receives only about 70 cents back for every dollar it sends to Washington? We see no harm in reclaiming some of our hard-earned tax money from the feds.

Do they know it wasn't easy for lawmakers like Rep. David Dreier, R-San Dimas, and Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena — both longtime Gold Line boosters — to make those federal funds available? Everyone thinks the only worthy earmarks are the ones that help their own area, but in *this* case we're *right*: The Gold Line extension is needed to alleviate traffic along the Alameda Corridor East that provides the rest of the nation with most of its imported goods. Federal traffic relief here is fully justified.

Do they know that motorists are straining under \$4.50-a-gallon gasoline — and that gas will probably be prohibitively expensive by the time the Gold Line could be extended east? Did they notice that ridership on the existing Gold Line has shot up 19 percent?

Do they know the San Bernardino-to-Los Angeles line carries far more riders than any other Metrolink line? That's an indication that there's demand for connecting points in San Bernardino County with those in Los Angeles County, as the Foothill Extension would do.

L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, the de facto leader of the Metro board and a politician with gubernatorial aspirations; failed this test of regional leadership. He promised those who live around LAX that he would divert traffic from there to airports like ONT, and he verbally supported extending the Gold Line to Ontario's airport to do so. But when it came time to allocate the money, he stuck with ill-advised projects like the "subway to the sea" instead.

Good luck convincing voters to tax themselves more to get something they already could have had.