



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CALIFORNIA

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The Honorable Kevin Murray
Chair, Conference Committee on Infrastructure Bonds
California State Senate
P.O. Box 942848
Sacramento, CA 94248-0001

Re: Infrastructure Bond Proposals

Dear Senator Murray:

The League of Women Voters of California supports efforts to address the state's current infrastructure needs. We offer the following comments about policies and practices that would best serve the public interest, based on League positions established after member study and consensus.

Fiscal policy: The League supports bond financing for construction or purchase of capital facilities, and for repair or modernization of existing facilities for which other funding is not available. Bond measures may need to include some funds for planning projects, but should not include money for operating programs.

Long range planning is necessary in this process, but at the same time we think it essential to maintain the flexibility to meet changing needs and circumstances.

We do not support:

- A constitutional cap on the allowed percentage of General Fund debt. The state's low credit rating, which causes California's borrowing costs to be relatively high, is generally attributed to our continuing inability to balance the state budget, rather than to our level of debt.
- Removal of the suspension provision in Proposition 42. Had this provision not been in place in the recent budget crisis, even more painful cutbacks in education and other critical social programs could have been necessary.
- Approval by this legislature of bond measures that will not be on the ballot until the distant future.
- Provisions for continuous appropriation of the bond money that would bypass legislative oversight. The involvement of both the Governor and the Legislature in implementing an infrastructure program should be ongoing.

Policies that protect communities and the environment: The League has joined other environmental, public policy, and public health organizations in issuing a ten-point statement of principles (*Protecting Communities and the Environment: What Our State Needs in an Infrastructure Bond*, attached). We believe these principles are a needed guide to an infrastructure investment program that preserves and protects our environment, avoids sprawl and poorly planned development, and promotes the social and economic welfare of all Californians.

As an example of the need for infrastructure investment, transportation infrastructure for moving people and goods is a priority issue because funding has been very limited, especially in inner city areas where the needs are enormous. There are projects in every region of the state that have been stalled due to lack of funds, despite many local sales tax measures that have been approved by voters. It is important to set priorities and avoid including projects simply for political reasons.

The LWVC supports these elements of an infrastructure program:

- The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other environmental and public health laws that protect a community's ability to participate in decisions on projects must not be impaired in any bond measure or related legislation.
- Infrastructure investment should go to projects in adopted local, regional and state transportation plans. There should be an emphasis on funding for public transit and other travel alternatives.
- Transportation investment must be tied to good land use planning and the development of affordable and work-force housing. We support infrastructure spending that promotes the economic health of urban areas, improves the quality of urban life, provides education and job opportunities, and encourages new infill development, thus reducing vehicle miles traveled and promoting a jobs/housing balance that puts jobs near safe, decent, adequate housing for all Californians.
- Infrastructure funding should also provide for stewardship of our natural resources by improving air quality, sustaining agriculture that is protected from the threat of urbanization, protecting open space, mitigating past environmental damage, and encouraging a strong regional role in decision making.
- Infrastructure funding for water supply and water quality projects should improve existing facilities, especially in disadvantaged communities, and avoid premature investment in increased surface storage. Water resources must be managed and developed in ways that emphasize water conservation and water use efficiency.
- Addressing the risk to existing communities should be the highest priority for flood control projects. New land development should not be allowed in flood prone areas.

- We support efforts to make California’s ports more secure, devise better ways to handle transportation to and from the ports in congested urban areas, and address critical public health problems related to poor air quality. As an example of applying a “beneficiary pays” principle for infrastructure investments that provide a direct commercial benefit, we endorse user fees on containers handled at the ports to cover the cost of the projects and the mitigation of the pollution they cause.
- Education facilities should be an integral part of any comprehensive infrastructure plan for California. It is estimated that both new construction and modernization funds from Propositions 47 and 55 will be fully apportioned within the next two and one-half to three years. The siting of education facilities should adhere to land use policies that will discourage sprawl development, promote compact development patterns, and ensure that facilities are located in the areas that are most in need of them.

Well-planned and adequately funded infrastructure supports our social and economic life. We urge your careful consideration of the interconnection of the elements of infrastructure spending and how the costs and benefits are balanced. Finally, we believe that Californians must be willing to pay for what they want and need.

Sincerely,

/s/ Jacqueline Jacobberger
President

Attached: Protecting Communities and the Environment: What Our State Needs in an Infrastructure Bond