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## SELF-HELP COUNTIES

### A Statewide Model for Long-Range Transportation Investment

*(Informational Overview for Commissioners & Board Members)*

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#### What Are “Self-Help Counties”?

Self-Help Counties are California counties that have established locally directed transportation investment programs to improve roads, bridges, transit, pedestrian/bike safety, and mobility. These counties participate in the Self-Help Counties Coalition (SHCC), a collaborative statewide group that shares best practices, project-delivery strategies, and long-range planning tools.

Becoming a Self-Help County does not happen automatically, it is a structured, voter-controlled process defined in state law.

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#### Why Do Counties Use This Model?

Across California, counties face similar challenges:

- Aging road and bridge infrastructure
- Long-term pavement maintenance needs
- Increasing storm, fire, and flood impacts on transportation systems
- Limited and unpredictable state and federal funding
- Growing demands for mobility, safety, and access improvements

Self-Help Counties develop stable, multi-year transportation programs that help maintain system reliability and deliver local priorities more efficiently.

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## What Do Self-Help Counties Typically Invest In?

Examples of projects delivered through Self-Help County transportation programs include:

- Roadway rehabilitation and resurfacing
- Bridge repair and replacement
- Safety improvements, guardrails, and intersection upgrades
- Traffic congestion relief projects
- Transit operations, vehicles, and facility improvements
- Sidewalk, bicycle, trail, and ADA accessibility enhancements
- Emergency access, evacuation routes, and resilience investments

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## Benefits Observed in Peer Counties

Self-Help Counties often experience:

- More predictable project delivery due to long-term planning
- Greater local control over project priorities
- Improved leverage when competing for state and federal grants
- Transparency and accountability through annual reporting and oversight committees
- Enhanced resiliency to disasters through planned investments in infrastructure

These outcomes vary by county and depend on each county's adopted long-range program.

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## HOW SELF-HELP COUNTY PROGRAMS ARE CREATED

### *(Understanding the Legal Process in California)*

California requires a clear, transparent, voter-controlled process before any county can become a Self-Help County. Local agencies cannot implement transportation investment programs on their own, they must follow the steps below, established by state law.

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#### **1. The Program Must Be a Stand-Alone Measure**

Under the California Transactions & Use Tax Law (Rev. & Tax. Code §7251 et seq.) and Proposition 218:

- A transportation program must be presented to voters as its own ballot measure
- It must include a detailed expenditure plan
- Voters must understand exactly what the funds would be used for

This ensures complete transparency.

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#### **2. A Detailed Expenditure Plan Is Required**

Before anything can appear on a ballot, counties must prepare a plan outlining:

- Categories of projects (roads, bridges, transit, safety, etc.)
- Estimated funding allocations
- Oversight and accountability provisions
- Sunset or renewal timelines
- Relationship to existing transportation plans and state/federal requirements

This plan must be published and publicly reviewed.

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#### **3. The Governing Board Must Formally Approve the Plan**

California requires:

- Approval by the Board of Supervisors or a Transportation Authority,
- Review by County Counsel, and
- Adoption of ballot language prior to submission to the Registrar of Voters.

Local boards cannot bypass these steps.

## **4. Voters Must Approve the Program**

Because transportation programs are considered special taxes, they require:

- Two-thirds (66.67%) voter approval, per Proposition 218.

Only the voters can authorize the creation of a Self-Help County program.

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## **5. Accountability Measures Are Mandatory**

If voters approve a program, the county must provide:

- Annual independent financial audits
- Public reporting of expenditures
- Oversight committee reviews
- Strict adherence to the adopted expenditure plan

These requirements ensure transparency and long-term trust.

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## **Why This Information Is Being Shared Now**

This flyer is intended to educate commissioners and board members on statewide practices used by transportation agencies across California. Understanding how other counties structure long-range transportation investment programs help support informed future planning discussions.

This information:

- Does not propose or endorse any funding mechanism
- Does not initiate a local measure
- Does not commit the County or TCTC to any action
- Is solely provided for education and awareness

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## **Learn More**

Self-Help Counties Coalition: [www.selfhelpcounties.org](http://www.selfhelpcounties.org)