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SELF-HELP COUNTIES

A Statewide Model for Long-Range Transportation Investment

(Informational Overview for Commissioners & Board Members)

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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