

## Broward voters unlikely to expand mass transit, newspaper poll says

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Broward County commuters often complain about getting stuck in traffic, but will they buy a sales tax proposal that promises to ease their commuting woes?

On Nov. 7, Broward voters will be asked to increase the county's sales tax to 7 percent from 6 percent to pay for a broad, if somewhat vague, plan to expand mass transit.

A 1-percent increase in the sales tax would cost the average consumer about \$45 a year.

Commuters like Bryan Daniel of Fort Lauderdale, say the idea of a more efficient bus system sounds great. But he doesn't have confidence in county government, which would control the \$260 million for improvements the tax would bring in each year.

Daniel holds a number of jobs, including officer manager for a mortgage broker and part-time owner of a catering company. He has taken mass transit in the past but stopped because the service was inconvenient and not frequent enough.

His commute to the mortgage company is less than two miles so he often rides his bike. His other jobs require a car.

"The bus is simply not an option," Daniel said. "Driving in this county is bad, though I've seen worse. Projects take too long. The only thing I've seen [are] cones and barriers, but no workers or workers napping or just standing around."

The county's plan focuses on adding buses and creating new bus service. It avoids any mention of a proposed east-west rail line along Interstate 595, as well as other rail projects in downtown Fort Lauderdale and along the Florida East Coast Railway.

It would spend about \$4 billion over the next 25 years, including:

Buying 106 new buses to decrease waiting times and carry more passengers for \$33.6 million;

Creating five express shuttles between two busy locations for \$17 million;

Synchronizing traffic lights for \$46.5 million;

Building neighborhood bus depots for \$8.1 million;

Creating five rapid transit routes with limited stops and possibly a dedicated bus lane for \$135 million;

Operating costs through 2030 for \$1.6 billion.

Critics say the plan depends on the county receiving matching state and federal grants.

"What they fail to calculate in their plan or tell you is that there is no guarantee that we will receive one dime in state and federal dollars," says one ad by Ax The Tax, the Broward chapter of an anti-tax group. "And then what? Will they come back to us in a couple of years for another 16.7 percent increase in sales tax?"

Supporters say traffic is guaranteed to get worse if the county does nothing. They recently turned to one of South Florida's most beloved sports figures, retired Dolphins quarterback Dan Marino, to make their case.

"I've had NFL defenses stop my progress," Marino says in a TV commercial. "But that's nothing compared to how traffic and gridlock in Broward County stop me from getting where I need to be. So vote yes in November and



we'll open up those passing lanes."

People for Progress, a pro-business group supporting the tax, has raised \$501,596 and spent \$331,672 on the campaign through Sept. 29, according to county records.

The group's biggest contributors include Auto Nation, the Huizenga Family Foundation and City Furniture, which donated \$25,000 each.

Other big donors include a number of engineering firms such as PBS&J, Carter Burgess and DMJM Harris, all of which gave \$25,000. The city of Hallandale Beach, which donated \$50,000, was the single largest contributor.

If the tax is passed, the commission plans to consult experts and a citizen advisory committee before deciding which projects to fund.

A *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* poll taken in October found 36 percent of likely voters supported the sales tax. It was opposed by 55 percent, with 9 percent undecided. Research 2000 of Rockville, Md., conducted the countywide telephone survey of 400 likely voters for the *Sun-Sentinel*. The sampling error margin is plus or minus 5 percentage points.

Voters have twice rejected sales tax increases in Broward, but proponents say it is the only way to avoid total gridlock on roads, considering an extra 600,000 people are expected to live in Broward by 2030.

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