

# MUNICIPAL LEAGUE OF KING COUNTY

Report prepared by the Ballot Issues Committee

## I-912 No New Gas tax

November 8, 2005 General Election Ballot

### Summary

Initiative 912 would repeal the 9.5 cent gas tax authorized by the 2005 Legislature. The tax would be phased in over four years, with a first 3-cent increment imposed in July 2005. The increase is on top of a 5-cent increase adopted in 2003, which raised Washington's gas tax to 28 cents. The additional 9.5-cent tax was authorized after several years of negotiation among transportation interests and legislators and after the failure of Referendum 51 in 2002. Major projects that would be partially funded by the 9.5 cents include a replacement Alaskan Way Viaduct, an expanded SR 520 floating bridge, improvements to I-5, I-405 and SR 167 in the Puget Sound region, US 395 in Spokane, I-205 in Clark County, I-90 east of Snoqualmie Pass, and the Hood Canal Bridge. Many other smaller projects statewide would be fully funded.

Since the mid-1990s, officials have been urging that new revenues are needed to replace failing and outdated highways, bridges, and transit infrastructure. This state gas tax package is intended to be one of several revenue sources to fund a number of so-called "mega-projects" that will cost multiple billions of dollars each. Federal funds and regional funds authorized to the Regional Transportation Investment District (RTID) are the other major sources that will complete the funding packages. The RTID is currently working to develop a ballot measure to be placed before Puget Sound-region voters in 2006.

### ARGUMENTS FOR THE MEASURE

The I-912 representative who met with the Ballot Issues Committee made the following case for the measure:

- In 2002 voters of the state voted down Referendum 51 and its 9 cent gas tax increase— exactly what part of NO don't elected officials understand?
- In 2003 the politicians imposed a 5 cent gas tax increase without a vote of the people. Together with the current increase, this represents a 60% increase in two years.
- The gas tax increase would cost \$8.5 billion, yet does not provide enough money to finish a single major project. Only 50% of the money needed for the Viaduct is provided and only 15% of the 520 bridge replacement.
- The fact that projects are not fully funded means that another tax increase will be needed to complete the projects.
- The projects to be funded with this tax do not add significant new capacity to our clogged highways or cut one minute off our commute.
- There has never been an independent and accountable performance audit conducted of the Department of Transportation..
- This is not a well-thought-out plan to invest our transportation dollars.
- The tax was passed at the last minute of the legislative session, denying citizens the right to vote or even be heard.
- The Legislature included an emergency clause that precludes right to challenge legislative action by referendum.
- What is really needed is a comprehensive 30-year plan coordinated by a "transportation czar" to unite the current fragmented system of planning and set priorities.

- Initiative 912 obtained more than the needed 225,000 voter signatures in less than one month, entirely by volunteer effort.

## **ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE MEASURE**

I-912 opponents cited the following arguments against the measure:

- This year the Legislature heard and heeded an urgent message about our state transportation system; more than being just about traffic and the economy, it's about saving lives. This time the priorities are right.
- The legislative action funds more than 270 highway, bridge, ferry and transit projects statewide. All parts of the state will benefit.
- These projects are a critical investment in our state's economy--just as previous generations invested in our current infrastructure to foster today's businesses and jobs.
- Democrats and Republicans worked together this year to develop a prudent investment package that prioritizes safety and repair of failing facilities as well as relieving major chokepoints.
- The needs and project lists have been developed over many years of comprehensive planning and study.
- The Legislature identified the most critical safety projects and included them specifically for funding. They include such projects as the seismically unsafe Alaskan Way Viaduct and the failing Hood Canal Bridge, which could represent disasters of untold magnitude if deferred.
- The Washington State Department of Transportation has been repeatedly audited. In 2004 the Legislature created the Transportation Performance Audit Board to provide ongoing accountability. The leadership of WSDOT is committed to good management practices and publishes its performance measures on the agency website.
- The first 3-cent installment represents just \$0.35 per week for the typical driver who averages 12,000 miles a year; the full 9.5 cents represents \$1.10 per week.
- If I-912 passes, commute times will be longer, costly delays from congestion on Washington highways will be more common, and hazardous conditions will be even more dangerous.
- As a user fee, the gas tax is a particularly appropriate and fair way to pay for road construction--the more you drive, the more you pay.
- I-912 supporters sometimes describe the measure as a "message" to the Legislature about the process followed, the need for audits of the Department of Transportation, or other perceived deficiencies in government process. Neglecting needed repairs and improvements in Washington highways is not an effective way to express those views.
- I-912 is opposed by major civic, business, labor and environmental groups, including the League of Women Voters, Greater Seattle and Bellevue Chambers of Commerce, the Washington Roundtable, the Sierra Club and the Washington State Labor Council.

## **MUNICIPAL LEAGUE POSITION and RATIONALE**

### **The Municipal League opposes Initiative 912.**

The Municipal League trustees believe we cannot continue to avoid the need to fund our long-deferred transportation needs. The League is satisfied that most of the arguments offered by the proponents of Initiative 912 are incorrect. The planning has been done, the priorities have been set, and a bipartisan alliance of elected officials and opinion leaders throughout the state has agreed that the gas tax increase adopted by the 2005 Legislature is necessary. It is one component of a comprehensive funding package that will address both the "mega-projects" and the many smaller safety and capacity projects state-wide. Federal funds and local funds will also have to be raised to complete some of the largest projects.