

**Valley VOTE**

Meeting Report for July 20, 2009
By Richard Bort and Denny Schneider

Valley VOTE is a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists, and organizations, committed to exploring and fostering the implementation of programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley and the City of Los Angeles, to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters. We meet monthly to address key policy issues and hear reports from our standing committee chairs.

Valley VOTE Board members, community leaders, and concerned citizens convened on **July 20, 2009** at **Galpin Ford** to hear featured speaker **Assemblyman Paul Krekorian**.



Assemblyman Paul Krekorian (Dem. 43rd AD)

Prior to his recent announcement of candidacy for Los Angeles Council District 2, to replace Wendy Greuel, Mr. Krekorian was invited to speak about the issue of rising speed limits on city streets.

Assemblyman Krekorian represents Glendale, Burbank, and the Los Angeles communities of Los Feliz/Silver Lake, Toluca Lake, Valley Glen, Valley Village, and part of Van Nuys.

Recently, the media publicized that the speed limit on Zelzah Avenue in Granada Hills and Northridge was being increased to legitimize the vehicle traffic exceeding the posted speed limit. Public outrage ensued mainly because the zone of increased speed limits includes three schools and CSUN. A similar situation exists, Krekorian said, on Riverside Drive in Toluca Lake, and many other Valley streets speed limits are being raised, which is increasing the danger to pedestrians and other vehicles.

Mr. Krekorian explained that in order to enforce speed limits using radar guns or other electronic means, existing state law requires that speed limits be set in accordance with an engineering and traffic study (ETS). An ETS measures prevailing vehicular speeds and establishes the speed limit at or near the 85th percentile (i.e., the speed which is exceeded by 15% of motorists). This means, according to Krekorian, that "the law breakers get to make the law."

The state conducted an ETS on Zelzah Avenue and came to the absurd conclusion that since at least 85 percent of the vehicles in the test were exceeding the posted speed limit, the speed limit therefore needed to be raised.

In February 2009, Krekorian introduced **AB 766**, which would allow a local city or county to retain an existing speed limit on any street, other than a state highway, if it makes a finding after a public hearing that a higher speed limit is not appropriate and does not promote safety. The bill was assigned to the Assembly Transportation Committee, which held a hearing in May, where damaging testimony by the AAA and Teamsters Union set the bill back. The AAA fears anything that might create a "speed trap," and the Teamsters oppose the bill because if a teamster is cited for a moving violation while driving a personal vehicle, it adversely affects his professional license.

Krekorian said that he plans to hold a public hearing in Southern California (date TBD) where citizens can testify; and at the suggestion of a Valley VOTE member he urged the public who are AAA members to contact the AAA to express opposition to the AAA's position on AB 766.

Meanwhile, Krekorian will be holding a "Safe Streets Workshop" in the evening on Wednesday, August 5 at the Braude Center in Van Nuys. This workshop is open to the public.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

In Memory – George W. Truesdell, Jr.

George Truesdell, who recently had joined the Valley VOTE Executive Committee, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on July 3, 2009. He was remembered by **Richard Bort**, his friend of 32 years and fellow Executive Committee member. Richard recounted George's career as Treasury Manager at 20th Century-Fox and as civilian Manager of Custody and Property at the L.A. Sheriff's Department at the Men's Central Jail downtown. After he retired in 2005, George became active in the Northridge West Neighborhood Council and the Valley Alliance of Neighborhood Councils. In addition, he volunteered at the front desk of the Santa Clarita Sheriff's Station, and he and his St. Bernard provided "pet therapy" to children at Children's Hospital-L.A. George was a likable fellow and he touched many people as a professional and as a civic-minded volunteer. He will be missed.

Housing

Vic Viereck proposed a novel way of calculating property taxes on a newly purchased home. Instead of using the existing Proposition 13 methodology (one percent of the purchase price plus additional ad hoc taxes), with a maximum 2 percent annual increase in assessed value, Vic's proposal would use as a base the existing property taxes on the purchased home, plus 2 percent (plus the ad hoc taxes). According to Vic, this would provide liquidity to the resale market by restraining the property tax bite.

One Valley VOTE member expressed the reservation that Prop. 13 was intended to keep seniors from being forced to sell because of rapidly increasing property taxes, while this new proposal would encourage everyone including seniors to sell and move up to larger houses. Another member noted that, if adopted, this proposal would of course adversely impact property tax receipts.

Airports

Denny Schneider acknowledged the leadership of Mayor Villariagosa and the City Council for the Board of Airport Commissioners and airport management that recognize the safety issue at LAX is uncompleted maintenance. LAWA has found leaky roofs, uneven floors, inadequate air flow, inadequate electrical power to terminals, as well as infrastructure flaws. Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA) is embarking on a campaign to fix the aged facility despite major funding limitations. The economic downturn has hurt revenue and usage is not improving. Service at LAX is down at least 25% since the 9/11/2001 attack. Money for repair comes from fees on airlines and passengers.

LAWA is replacing the aging baggage handling systems, redoing the inadequate TSA and customs services facilities, improving the utility plant, renovating embarkation gates (one unexpectedly collapsed while empty last year), improving travel comforts and concessions, and redesigning auto traffic flows that get clogged so easily by the many busses at curbside.

The famous Theme Building is emblematic. Two years ago over a ton of concrete fell through a storage room ceiling. During repair rusted superstructures were then discovered greatly expanding the project scope. The condition of underground pipes and major sewer lines was questioned subsequent to the flood in parking structure 2 last week. Recently airport engineers cited a 2006 report insisting that the LAX upper roadway is safe. The report, however, contains numerous repair recommendations by CalTrans and recent citizen observations note unevenly expanding relief joints and waffling roadway surfaces. When (and if) LAWA re-reviews their roadway they should also take a critical look at the condition of the parking structures.

Land Use – Sidewalks – **Pauline Tallent** discussed the need for the city to repair buckled sidewalks throughout the city by providing additional funding to the "Sidewalk 50-50 Repair Program," where the city and homeowner share the cost equally and the city performs the repair work. This is a far superior approach to the sidewalk problem, she said, than the proposed "Point-of-Sale" program that would require home sellers to repair damaged sidewalks as a pre-condition to closing escrow. She also urged the city to use other materials than concrete, such as recycled tires.

Prop. 11 (Redistricting) Update – Under Proposition 11, passed by voters in the November 2008 general election, the California State Auditor is responsible for conducting the process to select the 14-member panel that will redraw the Assembly Districts using the 2010 federal census data. **Joe Vitti** reported that the State Auditor is actively working on developing the rules for selecting Redistricting Commission members. The rules are expected to be completed by the end of this month and posted on the Web at www.oal.ca.gov for a 45-day comment period. The rules will become effective on October 1, 2009, and the State Auditor will be accepting citizens' applications for position of Commissioner from **December 15, 2009 through February 12, 2010**. See the State Auditor's website <http://bsa.ca.gov/> for more information and for a detailed tentative calendar for the selection of members of the Redistricting Commission. Valley VOTE members are encouraged to consider applying to be selected for the Redistricting Commission.

Constitutional Convention – **Joe Vitti** reported that the idea of holding a Constitutional Convention to consider revisions to portions of the California Constitution is gaining momentum and attention, especially in light of the massive budget crisis and political gridlock in Sacramento. He attended a Saturday meeting at USC where Mayor Villaraigosa, Wendy Gruel, Eric Garcetti, in addition to a number of other speakers, spoke to an audience of about 200 attendees. The Mayor said "This topic is an important conversation to have across the state and I support the effort. The system is broken." Wendy said the last convention was 121 years ago and a convention would provide "an opportunity for the state to get back on track." Eric also expressed support for the convention.

Vitti noted that if 2 million signatures are obtained on petitions by April 16, 2010 a proposition to hold a Constitutional Convention could go on the November 2010 general election ballot. If approved a Convention can be held in 2011 and a reform package could be voted upon by the people in November of 2012.

Membership Event, Saturday Evening August 29 –

Richard Leyner reminded those in attendance that Valley VOTE will be holding its annual mixer on Saturday evening, August 29, at his home in Northridge. He has invited a number of political luminaries to mix with Valley VOTE members and guests. This is a wonderful opportunity for informal small group conversations. The tab is \$35 per person and \$55 per couple. Invitations will be mailed and e-mailed shortly.

DWP Electric Rates –

Richard Bort has been studying the increase in the DWP's electric rates that became effective on July 1, and reported on how they are structured and changed. The rate structure is changed from a flat rate to a series of three tiers depending on kilowatt hours (KwH) consumption. Bort estimates that for the average Valley single family household using about 2,000 KwH per month during the High Season (i.e. July 1 through September 30) the DWP bill for electricity will be on the order of nearly 18 percent higher under the new rate plan. From October 1 through June 30, Low season rates will prevail, in which the rates for the three consumption tiers are identical, thereby eliminating any penalty for greater usage. The new Low Season rate reflects an increase in approximately 2.2 percent over the rate that prevailed in the May-June, 2009 period (i.e., before the new rates went into effect).

Jack Humphreville, who could not attend this meeting due to another commitment, asked Bort to convey his opinion that the new rates violate the promise made by the City Council and DWP in April 2008. When the new rates were approved, the new rates were described as "revenue neutral." Jack pointed out that "it is staggering to note that power rates have increased 26% over the past 1½ to 2 years to 12.36¢ (which is) significantly higher than DWP advertised in April 2008 when the City Council approved the interim and multiyear Rate increases." He went on to say in a handout that "Overall, it appears that DWP residential revenues (for electricity) will increase about 6%.... The City's General Fund is the beneficiary of the not-so-revenue-neutral Rate restructuring Plan. The 8% transfer fee and the 10% City utility Tax will generate an estimated \$1.5 million a month to help balance the (city's) not-so-balanced budget.

Transportation – Bart Reed, Executive Director of the Transit Coalition and a regular participant in Valley VOTE, reported that the Mayor is urging the MTA to approve a revised contract with Breda for 100 new rail cars. Reed was told that the cars delivered by Breda exceeded the contractual specification by 12,000 pounds each. "What will this excess weight cost the MTA in the long run?" Reed asked, and noted that the excess weight over the expected 50-year life of the cars will cost a huge amount for increased electricity to propel them, rails and wheels will wear out much sooner, and that several bridges where these car will be used were not built to carry such weight. Moreover, Breda has a history of failure to meet delivery deadlines and failure to create the number of jobs it promises. Reed asked members to contact Mayor Villaraigosa and Supervisor Gloria Molina – both swing votes – to oppose the new Breda contract.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Valley VOTE will be held on Monday, September 21, 2009 at Galpin Ford, 2nd Floor meeting room, 15555 Roscoe Blvd. at the 405 Freeway in North Hills.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

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