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

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The right road

Sacramento should copy Seattle and add lots more buses

Not long ago, a region choked with traffic was uncertain about its future. Many compared it unfavorably with Portland. It was headed down the same road as Los Angeles.

Then voters were offered the choice of radically increasing the scope of its bus system. Today, a dense network of buses serve the city, rapid buses serve the suburbs and express buses service the entire region.

That city is Seattle.

Today, Seattle's buses carry more people than ever to work, school, shops and restaurants. The same ballot measure that funded more and better bus service, also funded safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists. It helped to calm runaway traffic.

Proof that better bus service helps everyone to achieve their dreams comes from Seattle, where 90% of bus riders have a car available. A transit rider can save \$150,000 in a decade. By choosing how we get around, we are also choosing when to save and when to spend. Taking the bus to work means we get to keep more of what we earn. And we can reduce our environmental impact.

If given the choice, many Sacramentans would make the same choice. I would.

That's why I started asking why so few people in Sacramento have this choice. The answer won't surprise anyone who has seen Sacramento change. Bus service was cut by 25% during the Great Recession, even as ridership was increasing. Even a decade later, that level of service has not been restored.

The Sacramento Transportation Authority board—16 elected officials from across the region—is debating a sales tax increase for the November ballot and a spending plan to go with it. It meets Thursday, Feb. 13. A half-cent increase could raise more than \$8 billion over 40 years for roads and transit, including buses.

If you are reading this during the commute, there are 155 buses on the road in the Sacramento region. There are 561 buses on the road in Portland, 387 in San Antonio, 418 in Salt Lake City and 550 buses in southern San Diego. Honolulu has about half as many people as Sacramento, but has 455 buses. Starting with



Benjamin Etgen is a Sacramento native and math professor who has ridden buses since he was a child.

far less bus service than many regions, we now have much less.

Like me, you may even remember when Sacramento had a bus network similar to what Seattle has today. Express buses ran downtown from the suburbs, including Whitney Avenue, Marconi Avenue, and El Camino. Local buses served hubs at malls and colleges with connections to regional buses. For example, American River College was served by 11 local bus routes that fanned out across Carmichael, Fair Oaks and Citrus Heights then connected with an express bus to downtown.

We need regionwide access as quick, economic and effective as Seattle. Portland has 16 bus routes that run every 15 minutes or better most of the day, every day. Sacramento has only two such routes. As our region grows, more buses would allow us to accommodate new development. The key is more buses.

Because malls, hospitals, colleges, business parks and universities are not on light rail lines, Sacramento relies on buses more than other regions. Buses have always been an essential part of our transit network. As bus service has been cut, we have also seen a reduction in ridership on light rail.

Today, our region is choked with traffic and uncertain about its future. Many compare it unfavorably with other regions. Where do we go now? □