



**SANTA CRUZ METROPOLITAN TRANSIT DISTRICT (METRO)
BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES*
ADMIN OFFICE, 110 VERNON STREET, SANTA CRUZ, CA
DECEMBER 19, 2025 – 9:00 AM**

A regular meeting of the Board of Directors of the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) convened on Friday, December 19, 2025, as a hybrid meeting.

The Board Meeting agenda packet can be found online at www.SCMTD.com. *Minutes are “summary” minutes, not verbatim minutes. Audio recordings of Board meeting open sessions are available to the public upon request.

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1 CALLED TO ORDER at 9:01 AM by Board Chair Downing.

2 SAFETY DEBRIEF

Gregory Strecker, Safety, Security & Risk Management Director, provided a debriefing on safety, emphasizing METRO’s response to an active threat, fire, earthquake and/or medical emergency, and the evacuation routes.

3 ROLL CALL

Director Martinez announced she is participating remotely for just cause under AB 2449 due to the need to provide care for a family member. The following Directors were **present**, representing a quorum:

Director Rebecca Downing	County of Santa Cruz
Director Jimmy Dutra AR 9:39 AM	City of Watsonville
Director Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson	City of Santa Cruz
Director Manu Koenig	County of Santa Cruz
Director Fabian Leonor	County of Santa Cruz
Director Donna Lind	City of Scotts Valley
Director Monica Martinez	County of Santa Cruz
Director Scott Newsome	City of Santa Cruz
Director Melinda Orbach	City of Capitola
Ex-Officio Director Alta Northcutt	Cabrillo College
Ex-Officio Director Edward Reiskin	UC Santa Cruz

Corey Aldridge

Julie Sherman

CEO/General Manager

General Counsel

4 ANNOUNCEMENTS

4.1 Today’s meeting was broadcast by Community Television of Santa Cruz County.

4.2 Maria Avila from Language Line Services provided Spanish interpretation services for today’s meeting.

5 BOARD OF DIRECTORS COMMENTS

Director Orbach attended METRO's holiday party and commended staff for putting on a festive event.

Board Chair Downing thanked METRO staff for coordinating and attending the committee and Board meetings in 2025. Conducting Board meetings beyond this room are challenging and she appreciates all the work that staff does so that METRO can hold its meetings throughout the county. She also thanked the Board Members for their work and the members of the public, both in person and online, for attending. METRO always wants to hear from you and we appreciate the time you take to share your thoughts and opinions with us.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

6 ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brian Peoples, Trail Now, expressed concern on how METRO's representation on the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) recently voted on securing a grant. He asked METRO's representatives on the RTC to be supportive of METRO.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

7 LABOR ORGANIZATION COMMUNICATIONS

Jaime Renteria, SMART Chairperson, Local 23, read his letter submitted to the Board Members. He emphasized it is crucial that METRO doesn't shut down its hydrogen fueling system and the need to continue serving the public.

Olivia Martinez, SEIU Region 2 Director, commented that SEIU supports the hydrogen system. However, SEIU is concerned about how the Board conducted the community meeting and potentially violated the Brown Act. Their concern centers on transparency and ethical processes.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

8 ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION TO SUPPORT EXISTING AGENDA ITEMS

There were five additional communications to the Board of Directors that will be added to the agenda packet.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

CONSENT AGENDA

All items appearing on the Consent Agenda are recommended actions which are considered to be routine and will be acted upon as one motion. All items removed will be considered later in the agenda. The Board Chair will allow public input prior to the approval of the Consent Agenda items.

9.1 ACCEPT AND FILE: PRELIMINARY APPROVED CHECK JOURNAL DETAIL FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER 2025

Chuck Farmer, Chief Financial Officer

- 9.2 ACCEPT AND FILE MINUTES OF:
A. OCTOBER 15, 2025 METRO ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
B. NOVEMBER 21, 2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS REGULAR MEETING
Corey Aldridge, CEO/General Manager
- 9.3 APPROVE: RECOMMENDED ACTION ON TORT CLAIMS
Gregory Strecker, Safety, Security and Risk Management Director
- 9.4 ACCEPT AND FILE: FINANCIAL UPDATE AS OF NOVEMBER 2025
Chuck Farmer, Chief Financial Officer
- 9.5 APPROVE: CONSIDERATION OF CONTRACT AWARD TO CAPUZZI CONSULTING GROUP INC. FOR RAPID CORRIDORS DESIGN AND ENGINEERING
John Urgo, Chief Planning and Innovation Officer
- 9.6 APPROVE: APPOINTMENT TO THE METRO ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC)
Corey Aldridge, CEO/General Manager
- 9.7 APPROVE: CONSIDERATION OF ELECTRONIC PAYMENT ACCEPTANCE SERVICES UNDER STATE AGREEMENT NO. 5-10-99-02 WITH ELAVON, INC. FOR PAYMENT PROCESSING OF CONTACTLESS CREDIT/DEBIT CARD TRANSACTIONS ON METRO BUSES
John Urgo, Chief Planning and Innovation Officer

There were no public comments.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing called for a voice vote.

ACTION: MOTION TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA AS PRESENTED

MOTION: DIRECTOR KOENIG

SECOND: DIRECTOR LEONOR

MOTION PASSED WITH 8 AYES (Directors Downing, Kalantari-Johnson, Koenig, Leonor, Lind, Martinez, Newsome, and Orbach). Director Dutra was absent.

REGULAR AGENDA

Board Chair Downing announced that Item 15 will be heard before Item 14.

10 UPDATE ON BALLOT MEASURE SURVEY RESULTS

Sara LaBatt, EMC Research, spoke to her presentation (attached) and provided a summary of the ballot measure survey with likely voters in Santa Cruz County. This study was conducted in November 2025. She covered the methodology used and key findings. She reviewed public awareness and attitudes towards METRO and taxes, revenue measure wording, initial support for a measure, support and opposition motivations, components that voters prioritize in maintaining METRO service and the communities who benefit from this service, and conclusions of the survey.

Discussion followed on:

- The weight of the 12-year provision of these results and how it compares to other measures EMC Research has worked on
- Free fare programs
- Opposition voters
- Providing a breakdown of potential voters by location within the county to Board Members
- Educating and providing personal interaction with community (e.g., community meetings, social media, TV, canvassing neighborhoods, etc.)
- Whether potential voters understand the new tax rates in their jurisdictions if passed and the financial impacts
- Traffic impacts and those that rely on METRO's service
- Affordable housing projects approved and tied to transit service

Jared Boigon, Team CIVX, spoke to the presentation and provided an overview of the process used with public agencies for ballot measure planning purposes.

Additional discussion continued on:

- Board Member reelection efforts conflicting with ballot measure
- Understanding the alternatives if a measure does not pass
- Opportunity to educate voters and the tools METRO can use
- Visual advertising (e.g., 90X running on Hwy. 1)
- Citizen initiative process
- Contingency planning in parallel to a potential measure
- Providing direction to staff to agendize a broader discussion item for the January 2026 Board meeting along with a request to Legal Counsel to provide training on ballot measure advocacy

Ms. LaBatt and Mr. Boigon addressed all questions.

Mr. Renteria commented that SMART is willing to help but needs guidance on the matter so it is done properly.

Board Members thanked both Ms. LaBatt and Mr. Boigon for their informative presentation.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

11 METRO ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC) SEMI-ANNUAL ORAL UPDATE

Veronica Elsea, MAC Chair, commented that MAC Members have continued their excellent attendance of participating in the quarterly meetings and on tasks in between meetings, and thanked the membership for their work in 2025. She reviewed the issues covered with staff in the past year. She announced the 2026 MAC meeting schedule and encouraged Board Members to attend. She thanked Board Chair Downing for including MAC in the "A Week Without Driving" campaign. She praised Chuck Farmer, Chief Financial Officer, for providing a clear and thorough budget update to MAC. She thanked Customer Service for working with MAC on understanding the new transit app. The committee looks forward to welcoming Bobi Wood, Mobility Training Coordinator, to the February meeting.

She thanked CEO Aldridge for approving MAC holding special meetings, if needed, for time-sensitive issues that may arise between the quarterly meetings. She thanked James Von Hendy, outgoing MAC Member, for serving on MAC.

Board Chair Downing thanked Ms. Elsea for her leadership and to all the MAC Members for their work. She encouraged other Board Members to attend the meetings because MAC does bring a unique perspective and it is important for us to hear it so that we can make decisions that benefit everyone. Director Lind agreed and added she had attended MAC meetings and found them informative.

There were no public comments.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing moved to the next agenda item.

12 APPROVE ADOPTING A RESOLUTION TO RENAME PACIFIC STATION TO THE ROTKIN TRANSIT CENTER

Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson, Donna Lind, and Scott Newsome, METRO Board Directors spoke to this item. Director Kalantari-Johnson said this is an opportunity to recognize Mike Rotkin's decades of serving Santa Cruz County, shaping public transportation, and expanding opportunities to communities we care about. He was rooted in equity, access, and sustainability. This is an opportunity to visibly honor Mr. Rotkin and recognize our shared values in our community for decades to come. I want to acknowledge and thank Madelyn McCaul, Mr. Rotkin's wife, for being here today and being Mr. Rotkin's rock and sounding board in his roles beyond METRO.

Director Newsome mentioned that Mike meant a great deal to our community and had a very positive impact over his 46 years in public service, both on this Board and the Santa Cruz City Council. He touched the lives of many people as a mentor, both at UCSC and the political world. I think this is a wonderful way for us to recognize his legacy and remember his work in the City of Santa Cruz.

Director Lind stated she had known Mike for 50 years and appreciated his dedication and passion. He was the first to step forward to help a new Board Member or someone new to politics. He had a huge heart. She provided an anecdotal story of when she worked on the police force and everyone joked about arresting the mayor in Santa Cruz because Mike had been arrested in Santa Cruz. He felt so passionate about issues that he was willing to be arrested. That fun sense of humor is going to be missed but we won't forget him. This is a wonderful way to remember him for decades to come.

Board Chair Downing added that Mike touched the lives of many people in the county but there are many who never met or knew him and now will have an understanding of his impact on this county if this resolution passes.

There were no public comments.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing called for a voice vote.

ACTION: MOTION TO APPROVE A RESOLUTION TO RENAME PACIFIC STATION TO THE ROTKIN TRANSIT CENTER

MOTION: DIRECTOR KALANTARI-JOHNSON SECOND: DIRECTOR NEWSOME

MOTION PASSED WITH 9 AYES (Directors Downing, Dutra, Kalantari-Johnson, Koenig, Leonor, Lind, Martinez, Newsome, and Orbach).

Madelyn McCaul, thanked the Board for consideration and passage of this resolution on behalf of her whole family.

The meeting was paused for a break at 10:49 AM and resumed at 11:01 AM.

13 UPDATE ON CHANGES TO THE RALPH M. BROWN ACT (SB 707)

In light of the time, this matter will be agendized for the January 23, 2026 meeting.

14 MOBILE HYDROGEN FUELING STATION

Corey Aldridge, CEO/General Manager, introduced John Urgo, Chief Planning and Innovation Officer. Mr. Urgo provided a summary of how and why METRO started down the path of hydrogen buses, the grant funding sought and received, defining the agency's goals, the state mandate on transitioning to zero-emission vehicles, and the challenges of using battery-electric buses. At that time, switching to hydrogen seemed the best option. However, replacing the volume of buses needed at this agency, and other transit agencies, put incredible demand pressure on the industry with only one vehicle manufacturer, New Flyer. This put New Flyer in the position to dictate the schedule. We were not able to align the delivery of the buses with the permanent fueling station being built. Therefore, the temporary fueling station was pursued to get these buses in service.

Corey Aldridge, CEO/General Manager, added that Plug Power Inc. (Plug) had a mobile hydrogen fueler available that could be set up and running within months. One of the conditions of the contract was for Plug to comply with all local, state and federal ordinances. However, that did not materialize and the fueler was louder than anticipated. We reached out to Plug to mitigate the noise. Plug's solution was to install a muffler, but the installation kept getting pushed out for months and was finally installed in November. It was supposed to reduce the noise by 40 dB (decibel) and bring the fueler into compliance with the local noise ordinance but the noise was only reduced by 10-15 dB. We continued to hear from the community how loud and intrusive the noise is to their lives. We had a town hall meeting this past week with the surrounding neighbors to review the results of a noise study that was performed and listened to their concerns.

METRO is a lifeline for many people in our community. Without METRO, they can't get to work, appointments, school, etc. If we stop using the hydrogen buses currently in service, METRO will need to cut service by 5%, affecting routes throughout the county. We continue to work with Plug for a solution and the current Plug proposal is to swap out the 3" stack (muffler) with an 8" stack. It has shipped and should be here Monday, December 22, and will be installed immediately. We hope that will further reduce the level of noise and bring it into compliance.

Outside of that, Plugs has another proposed fix of installing surge tanks but that will require more time to install. This is a liquid hydrogen fueler so it stores hydrogen at -400 degrees. As the hydrogen moves into the tank, it heats up and expands. At some point, when it hits 100% pressure, it has to be released. We can release that pressure by filling buses or have it manually vent into the air. We've changed the venting process so that it doesn't vent overnight. Starting Monday, December 22, we will change our fueling hours from 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM and manually vent at 6:00 PM. The hope is that changing out the stack will eliminate all of these noise issues. Until we have the results from that we continue to work on contingency plans to minimize the sound to daytime hours. We are actively working on mitigating the noise as much as possible and holding Plug accountable on what they said they will do. We have held back the last 20% of what we owe them and we are working with Legal Counsel on writing a Notice of Default letter. We need to figure out METRO's path forward and have the Board weigh in with the direction they would like the agency to take.

CEO Aldridge walked through the recommended action detailed in the staff report.

Discussion followed on:

- Legal recourse with Plug Power Inc.
- Steps METRO is taking to avoid venting outside the hours described
- Addressing the concern brought up earlier in this meeting regarding an allegation of a violation of the Brown Act. Legal Counsel Sherman clarified the meeting in question was a staff-led community meeting and there was not a quorum of the Board in attendance.
- Decibel reduction with the 8" stack modification
- Installation of surge tanks, if needed
- Hiring experts in the hydrogen field
- Under the Biden administration, capital funding was only being awarded to battery-electric or hydrogen fuel-cell bus purchases
- ARCHES (Alliance for Renewable Clean Hydrogen Energy Systems) funding
- Contingency plans if compliance is not achieved
- Timeline for permanent fueling system
- Leasing a gaseous hydrogen fueler
- Issues with battery-electric buses
- Status of older buses
- What other transit agencies are doing

Staff addressed all concerns.

Jill Damashek, member of the Ocean Street Extension neighborhood, commented that there is a lack of accountability of management and the implementation of the hydrogen bus project. She expressed concern about the neighborhood living with this noise for six months and how changing the hours does not help us. She has no confidence that METRO or its vendor are able to bring this issue into compliance.

Mike Nussbaum, also a neighbor, felt it was audacious that METRO opted to go with hydrogen buses and be an early adopter. He understands it is a learning process and supports public transportation but felt the agency is too reliant on its vendors. He suggested getting an architectural acoustics consultant and putting an enclosure around the fueler.

Mr. Renteria said we can't quit this process and need to keep moving forward.

Gwyn Rhabyt, member of the Ocean Street Extension neighborhood, expressed that METRO communications have noticeably improved and felt the community meeting held Tuesday evening was valuable. The noise for some of us is a bit quieter but for others, not so much. The seriousness of the Board's response at the November meeting was valuable. It prompted more frequent and more substantive engagement on the part of staff and he thanked the Board for taking this seriously. However, independent measurements in the noise study report confirm that METRO is currently breaking the law and has been doing so for six months. Given the past promises from both METRO and Plug have been broken repeatedly, any community buy in is going to require significant teeth in a proposal.

Jessy Beckett Parr, member of the Ocean Street Extension neighborhood, mentioned there has been proactive communication and testing along with the community meeting. She thanked Directors Martinez and Kalantari-Johnson for their support. Her understanding was that the Board was clear that if the interim noise mitigation didn't work that the fueler would be shut down. Reducing service levels by 5% is a lot for people who rely on the bus. However, we need a guarantee from this Board that there is going to be continued accountability.

Rohan Tuli, member of the public, commented that there have been issues with this rollout; however, there is a path forward. Having these new buses allows service to be maintained and he thanked the Board and METRO staff for working through these issues.

Mr. Renteria reminded the Board there are issues with electric-battery buses as well and that METRO doesn't have that infrastructure in place.

Veronica Hamilton, member of the public, spoke in favor of maintaining the hydrogen fueling station but at reduced hours. We should do whatever we can to reduce the sound and our bus routes are vital to the community. Students at UCSC need those routes intact.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing called for a voice vote.

ACTION: MOTION TO APPROVE THE RECOMMENDED ACTION OF DIRECTING STAFF REGARDING CONTINUED INTERIM OPERATION OF THE MOBILE HYDROGEN FUELER, INCLUDING AUTHORIZATION TO PROCEED SUBJECT TO DEFINED MITIGATION REQUIREMENTS, ENFORCEABLE DEADLINES, COST ACCOUNTABILITY, CONTINGENCY ACTIONS, AND REPORTING BACK TO THE BOARD, AS FOLLOWS:

- **DIRECT STAFF TO IMMEDIATELY ISSUE AND ENFORCE A FORMAL BREACH-OF-CONTRACT NOTICE TO PLUG POWER.**

- **AFFIRM THAT THE MOBILE HYDROGEN FUELER MAY CONTINUE OPERATING ON A TEMPORARY, INTERIM BASIS ONLY WHILE ADDITIONAL NOISE MITIGATION EFFORTS ARE UNDERWAY, VIA CONDITIONS OUTLINE BELOW.**
- **STARTING ON DECEMBER 22, 2025, FUELING HOURS WILL BE FROM 9AM TO 3PM, WITH THE LAST MANUAL VENT AT 6PM, WITH LOCKOUT CONTROLS PREVENTING EVENING AND OVERNIGHT FUELING.**
- **DIRECT PLUG POWER TO INSTALL THE 8-INCH STACK MODIFICATION IMMEDIATELY UPON DELIVERY ON DECEMBER 22, WITH INSTALLATION TO BE COMPLETED WITHIN TWO (2) BUSINESS DAYS.**
- **DIRECT STAFF TO CONDUCT INTERNAL PRELIMINARY SOUND MEASUREMENTS FOLLOWING INSTALLATION, AND IF FOUND TO BE IN COMPLIANCE, PROCEED IMMEDIATELY TO HAVE AN INDEPENDENT SOUND CONSULTANT COMPLETE AN OFFICIAL NOISE STUDY TO VERIFY THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS.**
- **DIRECT STAFF, IN THE EVENT OF NON-COMPLIANCE, TO REQUIRE PLUG POWER, AT ITS SOLE COST, TO IMPLEMENT AND TEST ADDITIONAL ENGINEERED MITIGATION MEASURES INCLUDING SURGE TANKS.**
- **DIRECT STAFF TO SUSPEND OPERATION OF THE PLUG POWER MOBILE LIQUID HYDROGEN FUELER IF COMPLIANCE IS NOT ACHIEVED AFTER MITIGATION OPTIONS ARE EXHAUSTED OR BY JANUARY 31, 2026, WHICHEVER COMES FIRST.**
- **DIRECT STAFF TO CONTINUE, THROUGHOUT THE INTERIM OPERATION PERIOD, PARALLEL EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVE FUELING OPTIONS, INCLUDING THIRD-PARTY SOLUTIONS AND A GASEOUS HYDROGEN FUELER, TO ENSURE MINIMAL DISRUPTION OF SERVICE IF THE PLUG POWER MOBILE LIQUID HYDROGEN FUELER CANNOT MEET THE REQUIRED STANDARDS.**
- **DIRECT STAFF TO PROVIDE UPDATES TO THE BOARD AND NEIGHBORING RESIDENTS FOR WHICH WE HAVE EMAIL ADDRESSES, FOLLOWING EACH DEFINED MILESTONE OR EVENT, INCLUDING INTERNAL PRELIMINARY SOUND RESULTS, COMPLIANCE DETERMINATIONS, SERVICE IMPACT IMPLICATIONS, AND A CLEAR RECOMMENDATION REGARDING CONTINUED OPERATION, DISCONTINUATION OF THE MOBILE LIQUID HYDROGEN FUELER, WITH A FORMAL UPDATE AT THE JANUARY BOARD MEETING.**
- **AMEND ORIGINAL MOTION TO ENGAGE AN INDEPENDENT ACOUSTIC ENGINEER TO HELP PROBLEM SOLVE IF VENDOR'S SOLUTION(S) DO(ES) NOT COMPLY WITH THE SANTA CRUZ CITY NOISE ORDINANCE.**

MOTION: DIRECTOR MARTINEZ SECOND: DIRECTOR KALANTARI-JOHNSON

MOTION PASSED WITH 9 AYES (Directors Downing, Dutra, Kalantari-Johnson, Koenig, Leonor, Lind, Martinez, Newsome, and Orbach).

15 CONSIDERATION OF A RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION FOR OUTGOING BOARD MEMBER

Rebecca Downing, Board Chair, read the resolution.

Ex-Officio Director Northcutt explained that she is in a different position at Cabrillo College now and wants her team to have an opportunity to serve on the METRO Board and have greater access to information to better serve Cabrillo College students. She introduced Alma Márquez, Cabrillo's Student Support Specialist, who has been chosen to sit on the Board in 2026.

Director Lind commented that Ex-Officio Director Northcutt has been a mentor to many students who have gone on to fulfilling careers in public politics. Director Dutra commented that Ex-Officio Director Northcutt has been his rock and appreciates her support and loyalty not only to Cabrillo College but to the City of Watsonville. She always voiced her opinions on topics and has been a great voice for who she represents and we will miss her on this Board.

Board Chair Downing thanked Ex-Officio Director Northcutt for her service on the METRO Board and at Cabrillo College. The passion and energy of working on behalf of students really showed and you kept us informed and mindful of their needs as we made our decisions. We are grateful and wish you well in your new adventure.

Mr. Renteria commented that he is sorry to see her go but wished her all the best.

Ms. Márquez thanked Ex-Officio Director Northcutt for giving her this opportunity.

Hearing nothing further, Board Chair Downing called for a voice vote.

ACTION: MOTION TO APPROVE A RESOLUTION OF APPRECIATION FOR OUTGOING BOARD MEMBER ALTA NORTHCUTT

MOTION: DIRECTOR DUTRA

SECOND: DIRECTOR KOENIG

MOTION PASSED WITH 9 AYES (Directors Downing, Dutra, Kalantari-Johnson, Koenig, Leonor, Lind, Martinez, Newsome, and Orbach).

16 CEO ORAL REPORT

Corey Aldridge, CEO/General Manager, did not provide an oral update to expedite the meeting, and will email the report to the Board Members instead.

17 ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEXT MEETING: FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2026 AT 9:00 AM AT THE SCOTTS VALLEY CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 1 CIVIC CENTER DRIVE, SCOTTS VALLEY, CA

Board Chair Downing

18 ADJOURNMENT

Board Chair Downing adjourned the meeting at 12:40 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Bauer

Sr. Executive Assistant



SANTA CRUZ
METRO

Survey of Likely Voters
Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District
Revenue Measure

Executive Summary Presentation
December 19, 2025



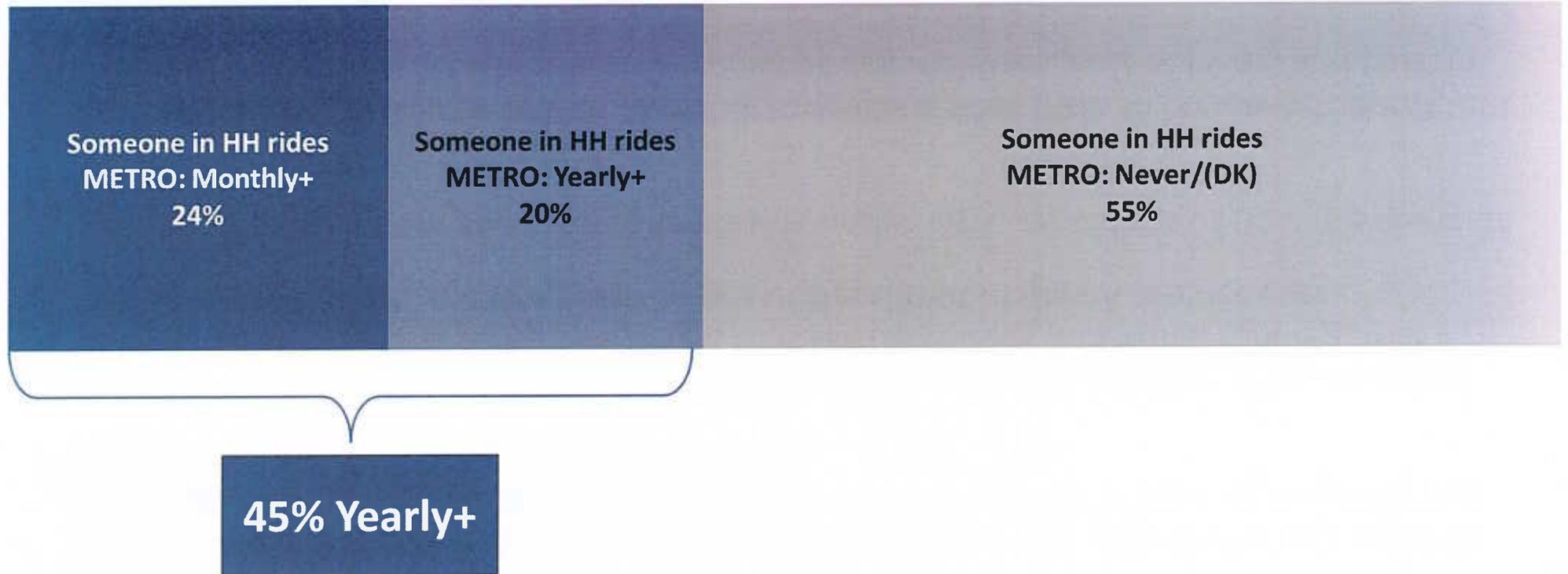
Methodology



- ▶ Mixed-mode (telephone/web) random sample survey of likely 2026 Santa Cruz County voters, conducted November 9-17, 2025
- ▶ Offered in English and Spanish
- ▶ 600 interviews; overall margin of error ± 4.0 percentage points
- ▶ Split sample design employed to assess two different ballot question models
 - 300 interviews conducted per sample; margin of error ± 5.6 percentage points
- ▶ Where applicable, results compared with previous Santa Cruz County voter surveys

Please note that due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to exactly 100%.

METRO Ridership Among Voters (Self-Reported)



**Showing combined frequency of respondent or others in household riding Santa Cruz METRO buses or ParaCruz services.*

Key Findings



- ▶ Santa Cruz County voters are slightly more optimistic than last year, and nearly **eight in ten have a favorable opinion** of Santa Cruz METRO. A majority believe high-quality bus service benefits the entire community.
- ▶ Over half have seen or heard something recently about METRO, with mentions largely positive. While there is some awareness that METRO needs additional funding, that feeling is **not urgent**, and few seem aware of the threat of drastic service cuts.
- ▶ **Support for a half-cent sales tax today is just under 60%**, regardless of how the question is framed.
- ▶ Providing **additional information about the measure does little to increase support**, but the survey does reveal potential vulnerabilities around taxes, cost of living, and trust in government.

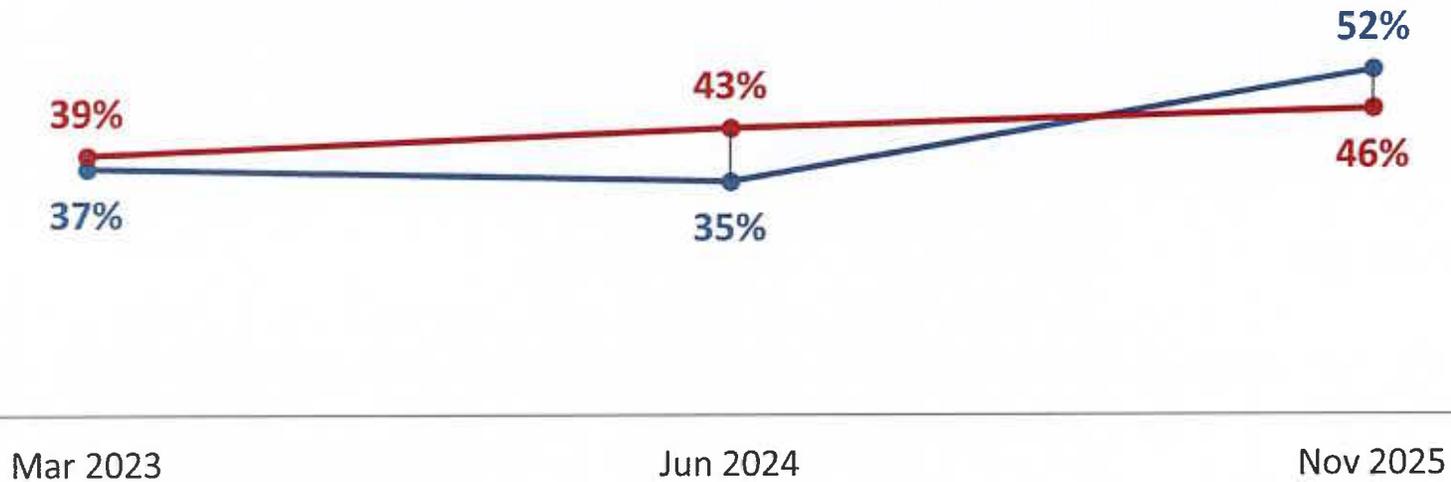
Right Direction/Wrong Track



Voters are a bit more optimistic than they were in 2024.

Do you feel that things in Santa Cruz County are generally going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten pretty seriously off on the wrong track?

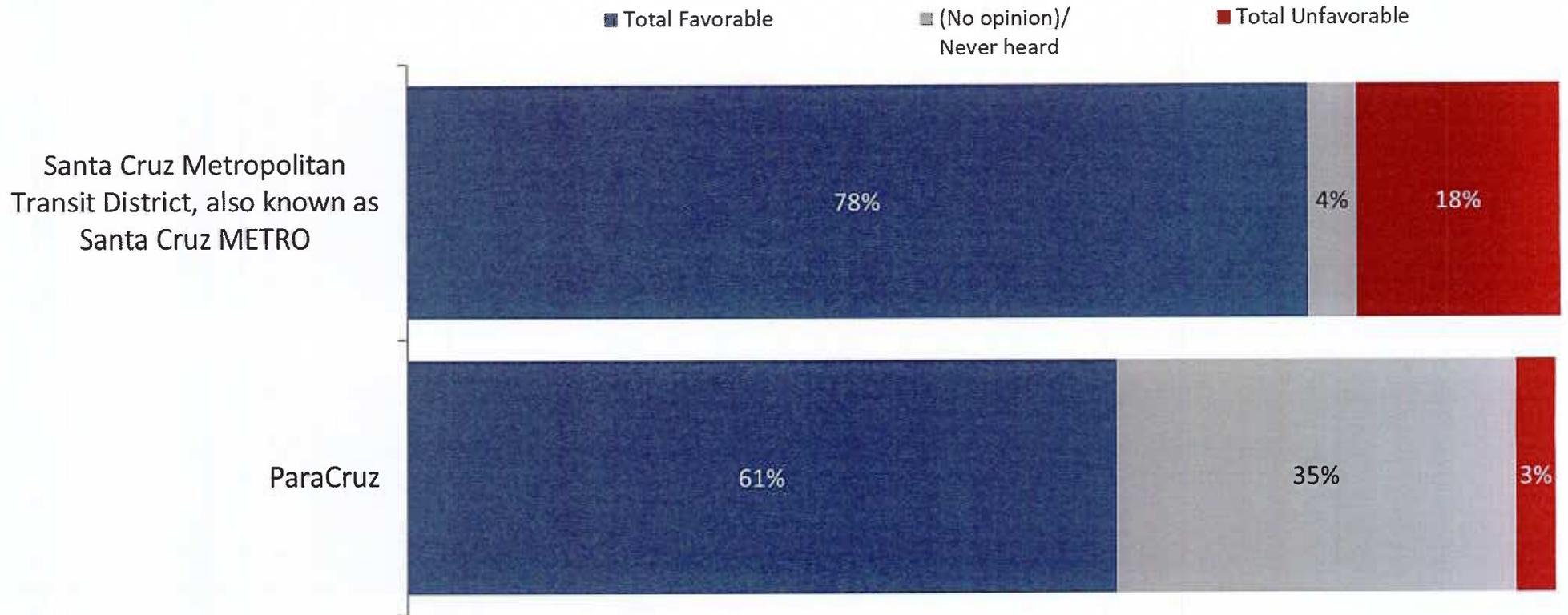
● Right Direction ● Wrong Track



Favorable Ratings



Almost eight in ten Santa Cruz voters view Santa Cruz METRO favorably. While awareness of ParaCruz is lower, voters who are familiar with it express very positive opinions.

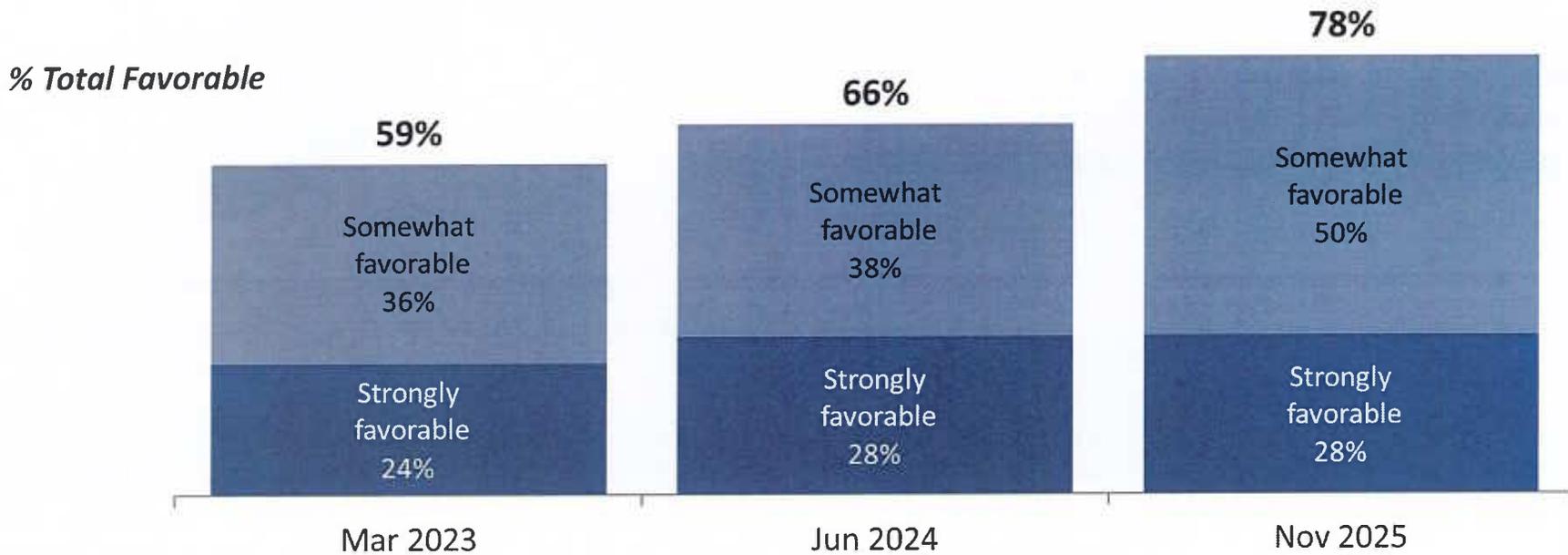


What is your opinion of each of the following people and organizations?

Santa Cruz METRO Favorable Rating Over Time



Eight in ten voters have a favorable opinion of Santa Cruz METRO, significant growth from earlier surveys.



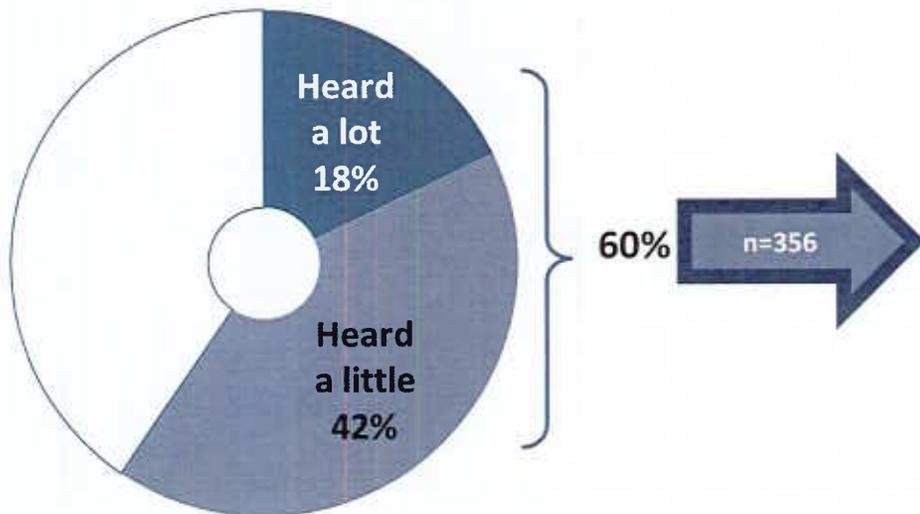
What is your opinion of each of the following people and organizations?

Santa Cruz METRO Awareness



Just over half have heard or seen something about Santa Cruz METRO. Most mentions are generally positive, with just a few mentioning potential for cuts.

Before getting this poll, had you heard or seen anything recently about Santa Cruz METRO?



Increased service/System improvements
Cutting routes New bus lanes
Environmentally friendly buses/New buses
New transit center
Advertisements/News/Social Media
Empty buses/Low Ridership
Bus route changes
Bus wraps/design
Deficit/Wasteful spending

Public Transit Attitudes



A majority agree that high-quality bus service benefits the entire community, including half of non-riders.

Having high-quality, reliable bus service in this area benefits everyone, even people who don't ride it

■ Agree ■ (Don't know) ■ Disagree

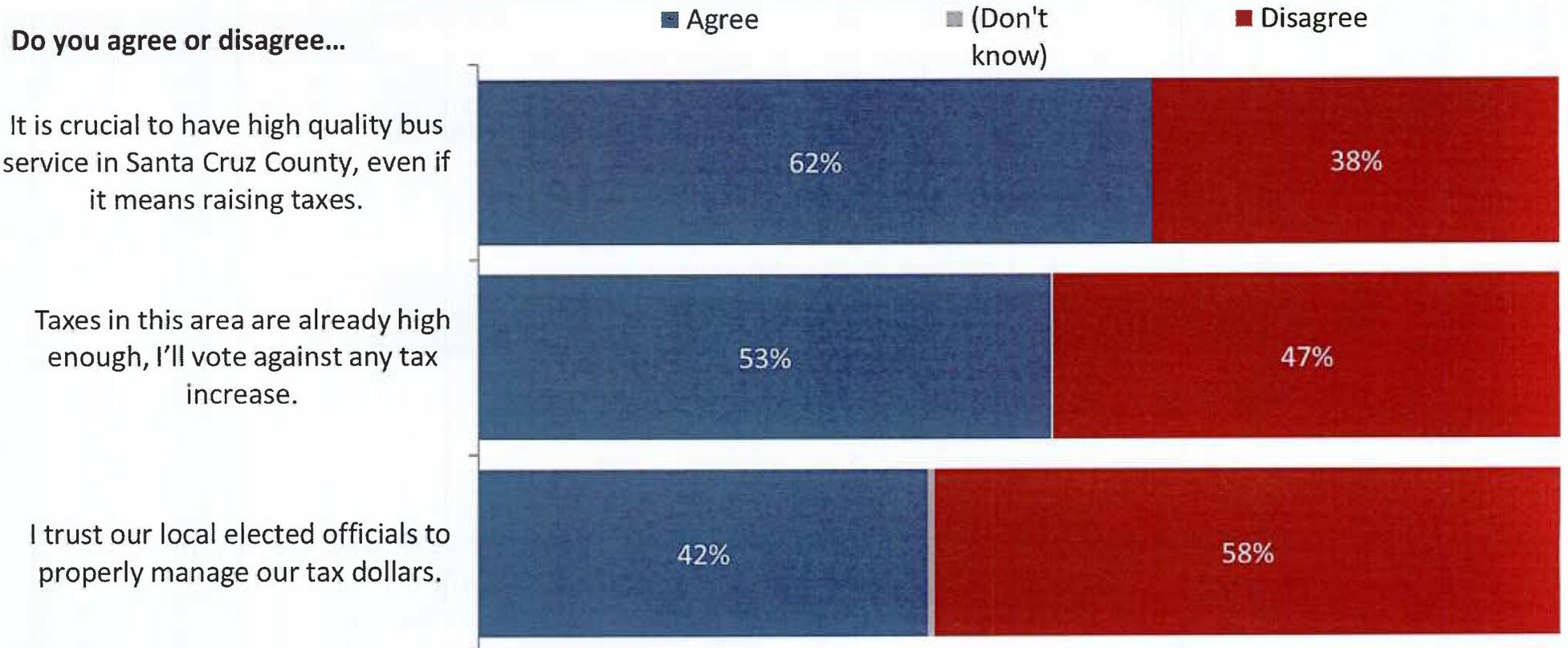


Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Tax Attitudes



Six-in-ten voters say high-quality bus service is essential even if means raising taxes, yet most also feel taxes are already too high and would vote against any further tax increase and express low trust in government spending.



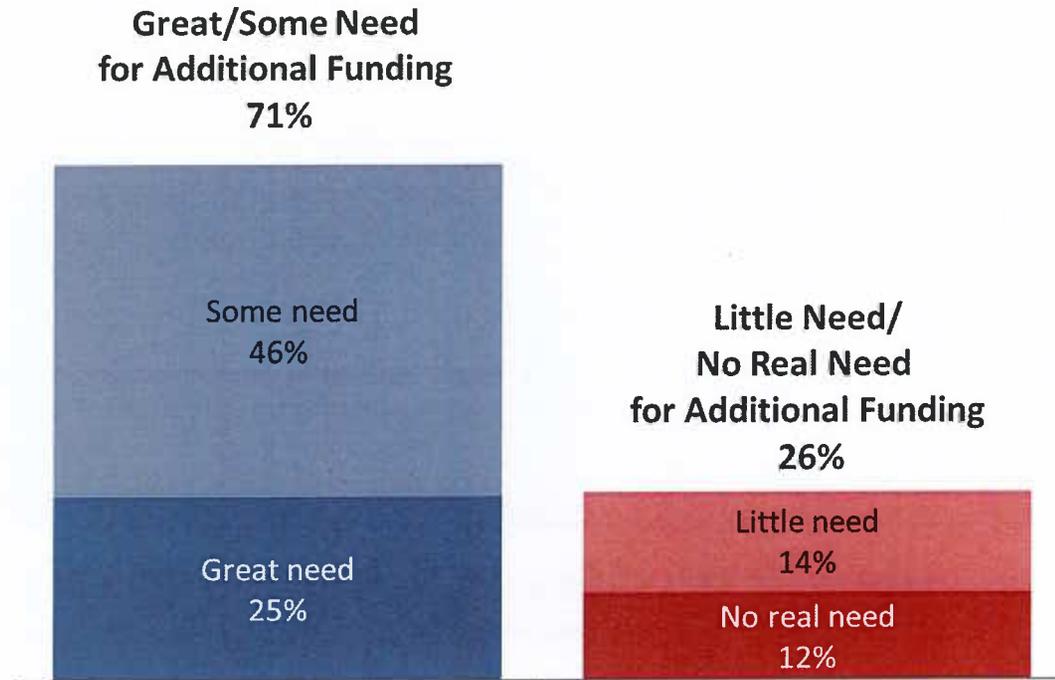
Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

Need for Public Transit Funding



Seven-in-ten voters say that the public has at least some need for public transit funding, but intensity is relatively low.

As you may know, you live in the Santa Cruz METRO Service area, which runs the public bus system in your area. For public transportation in the County, would you say that Santa Cruz METRO has...?



Would you say that public transit in your area has...?

Revenue Measure Wording



Each survey respondent heard or read only one version of the transportation revenue measure, assigned at random.

[Split A] Full Model Ballot Question

To reduce traffic, protect local air quality, and protect Santa Cruz County's public transportation for everyone including seniors, people with disabilities, students, youth, and commuters, by: maintaining affordable, reliable, predictable transit service; supporting bus cleanliness/ safety; improving bus frequency; enhancing connections to regional transit; and reducing pollution from aging buses; shall Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District's Ordinance levying a 1/2¢ sales tax, providing \$27,000,000 annually for 12 years, requiring locally-controlled funds, public spending disclosure, and independent audits, be adopted?

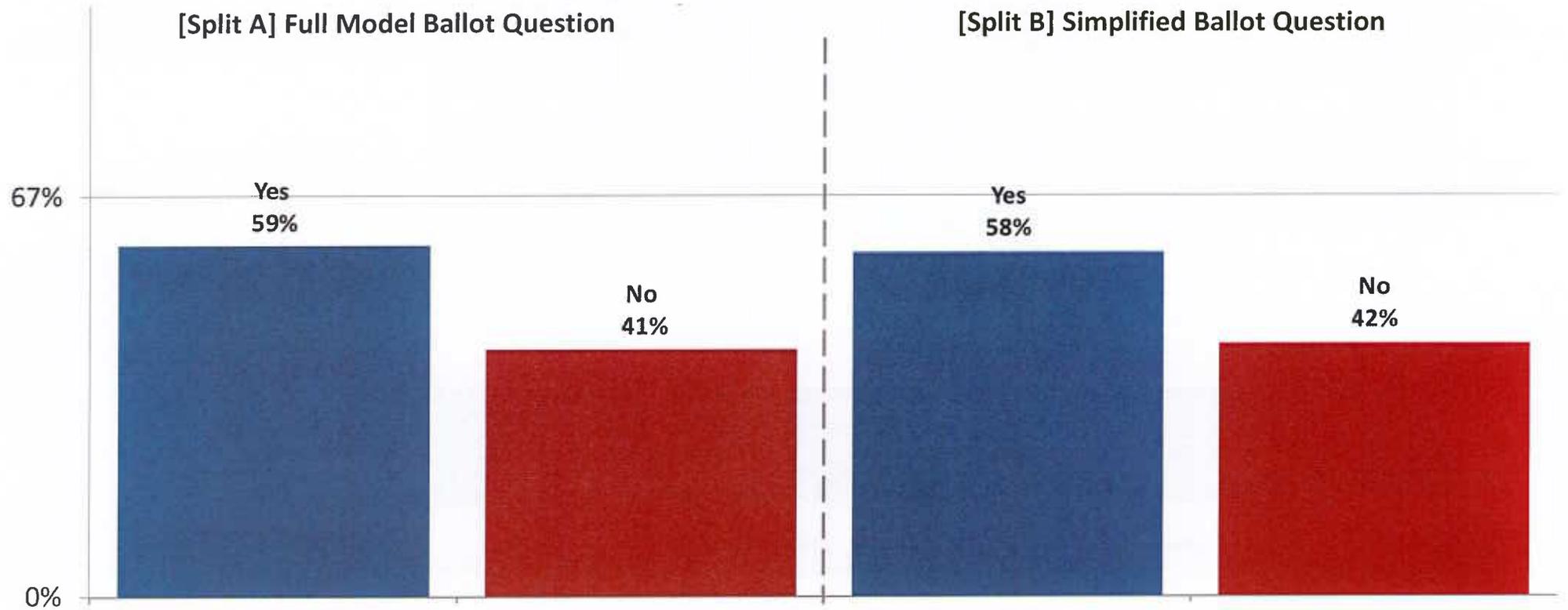
[Split B] Simplified Ballot Question

To maintain and protect clean, safe, affordable, reliable public transit for Santa Cruz County, including specialized service for seniors and people with disabilities, bus passes for K-12 students, and maintaining existing bus routes, shall Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District's Ordinance levying a 1/2¢ sales tax, providing \$27,000,000 annually for 12 years, requiring locally-controlled funds, public spending disclosure, and independent audits, be adopted?

Initial Vote



Initial support for the revenue measures tested is below two-thirds for either model tested, with no statistical difference between the two ballot questions.

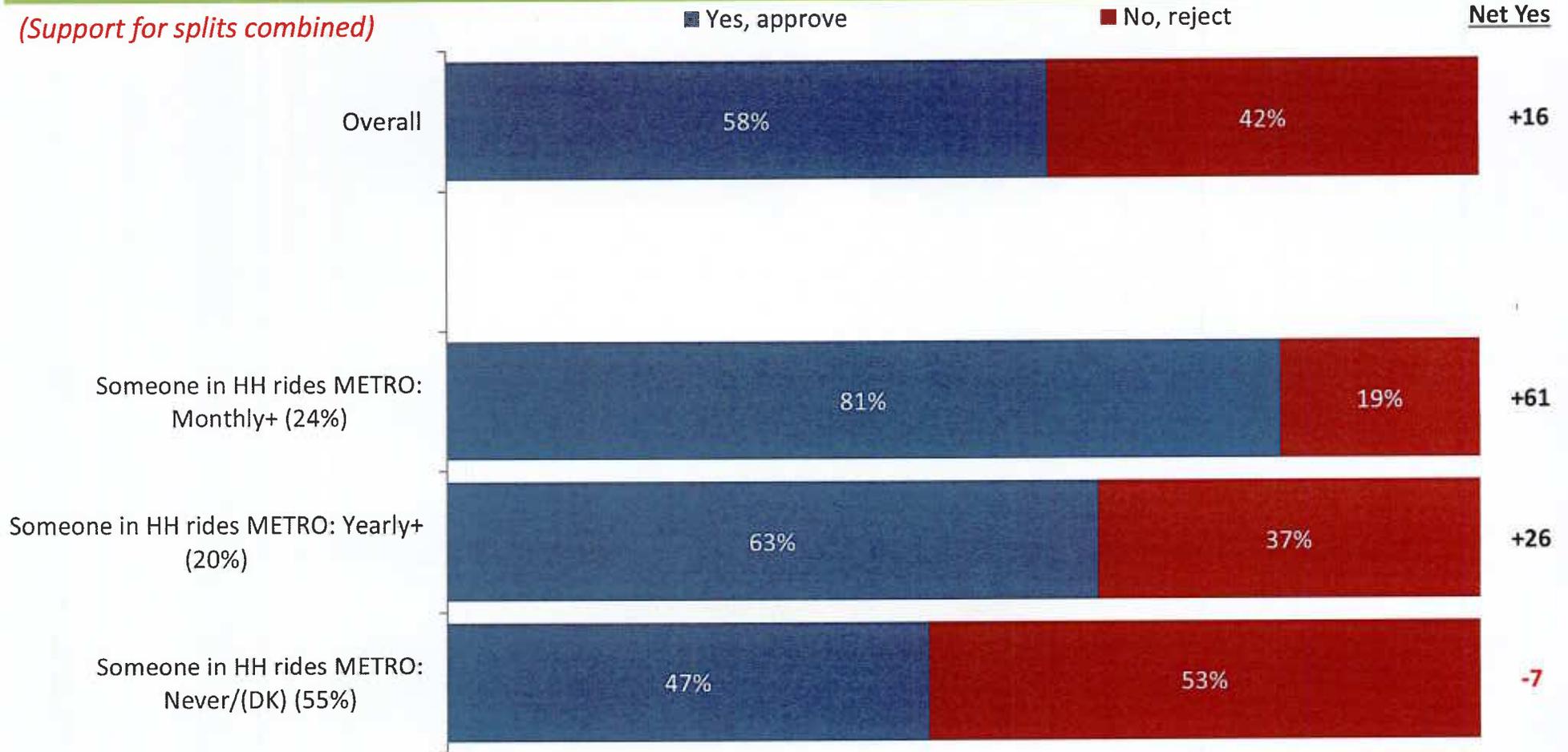


*Sample size for each split = 300n, MoE=±5.6 % points

Initial Vote by Ridership



(Support for splits combined)



Support and Opposition Motivations



Why would you support this measure?

Supporters focused on supporting reliable access to transit for those who rely on it, the collective benefit of transit for the general community (including traffic relief) and their belief that transit was likely under-resourced. For this group, **it was worth higher taxes to support transit service in the county.**

"Any additional public transportation is positive for the community. Especially if it's frequent and inexpensive."

"Traffic!"

"Bus transportation is important. We don't all have cars."

"It's very important for seniors, children, students, and people with disabilities."

Why would you oppose this measure?

Opponents focused on the cost of the tax, concerns about whether they could trust it would do what was promised, and whether it would benefit them personally. Their **opposition was driven more by taxes and skepticism than the idea of supporting transit.**

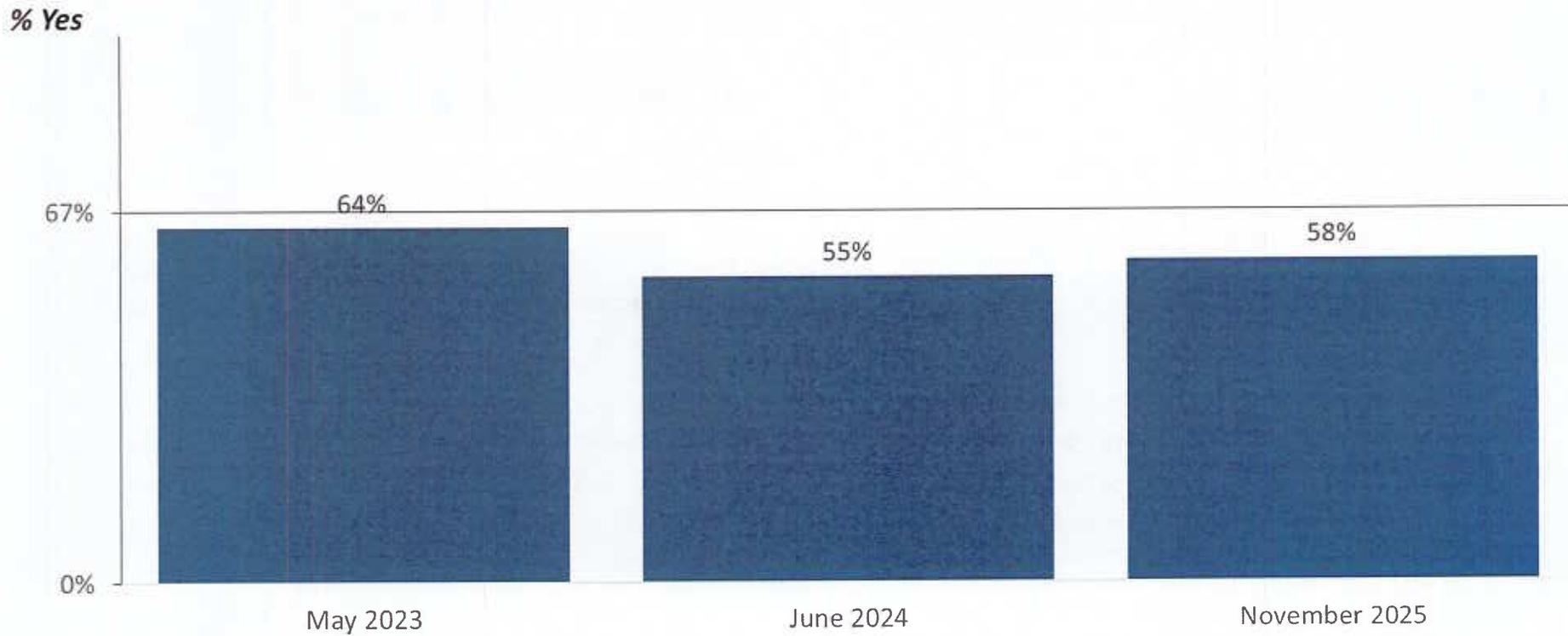
"Yet another money grab that will be mismanaged and wasted."

"Budget is already bloated."

"Not sure that the tax will equal greater ridership."

"We just can't afford any more tax. The taxpayers are tapped out."

½ Cent Sales Tax Support Over Time

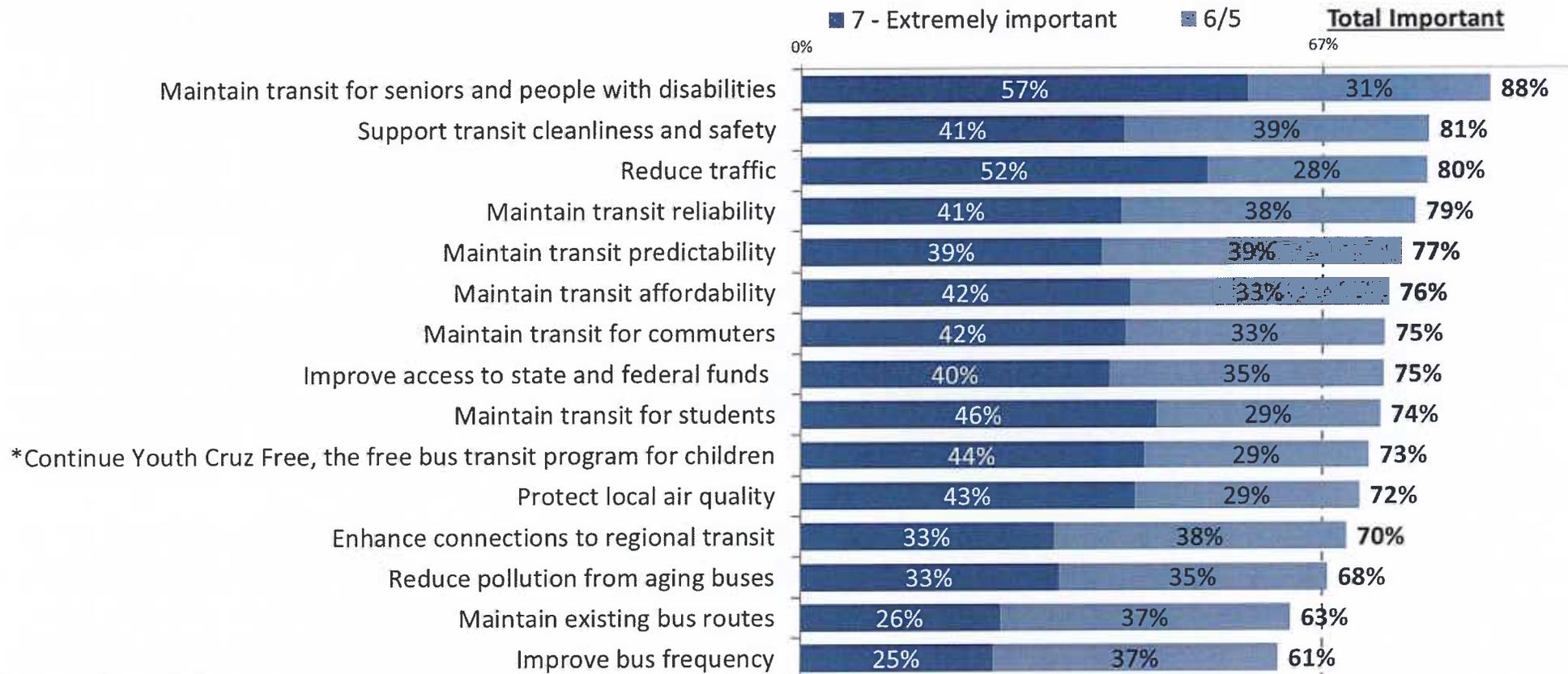


NOTE: While all surveys tested a ½ cent sales tax for Santa Cruz METRO, specific question wording differed for each poll

Importance of Components



Voters prioritize maintaining METRO service.



How important is that item to you?
 *Abbreviated label

Top Information

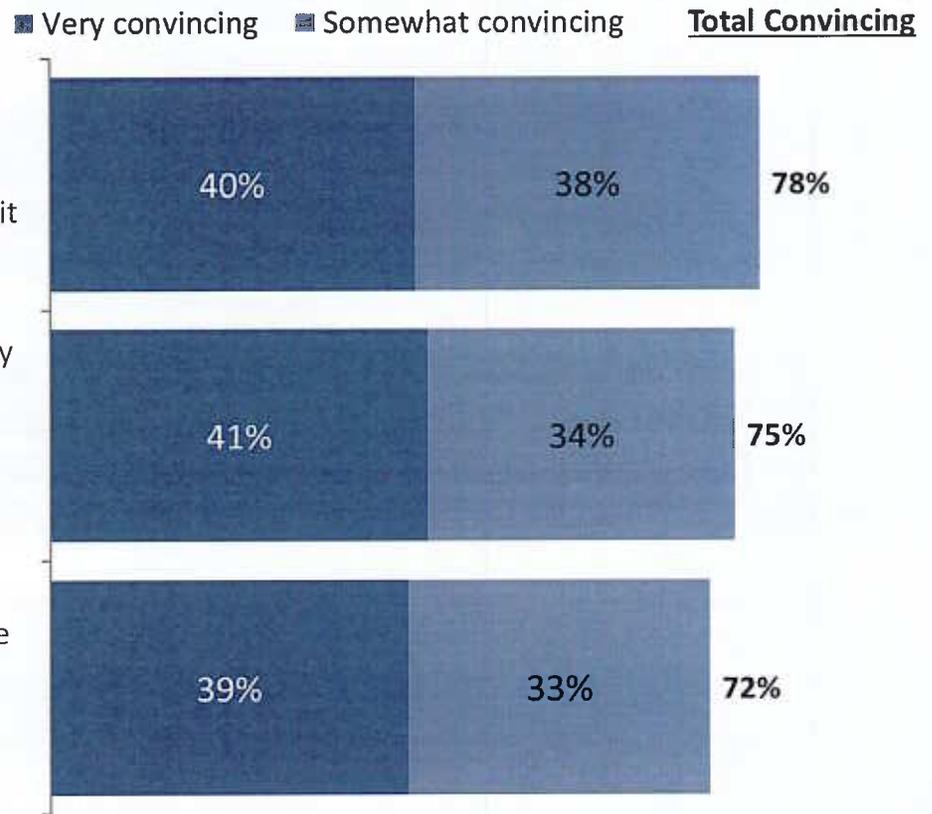


Messages that emphasize maintaining transit service for those who rely on it, including seniors and riders with disabilities, youth and students, and vulnerable communities, are the most convincing reasons to support the measure.

[SENIORS/DISABLED] As our population ages, more seniors and people with disabilities are relying on public transit to get around. This measure helps maintain and improve ParaCruz, METRO’s senior and disabled transit service, preserving their independence and mobility.

[YOUTH/STUDENTS] Many students rely on METRO to get to school safely and on time. This measure will allow the K-12 Youth Cruz Free transit program to continue and preserve frequent service to UC Santa Cruz and Cabrillo College, ensuring students get to school on time and ready to learn.

[VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES] We need to support our most vulnerable communities, where lower income working families may not have reliable access to transportation. This measure helps create better opportunities for people in these communities to work, go to school, and care for their families.



How convincing is that statement as a reason to vote for the proposed measure?

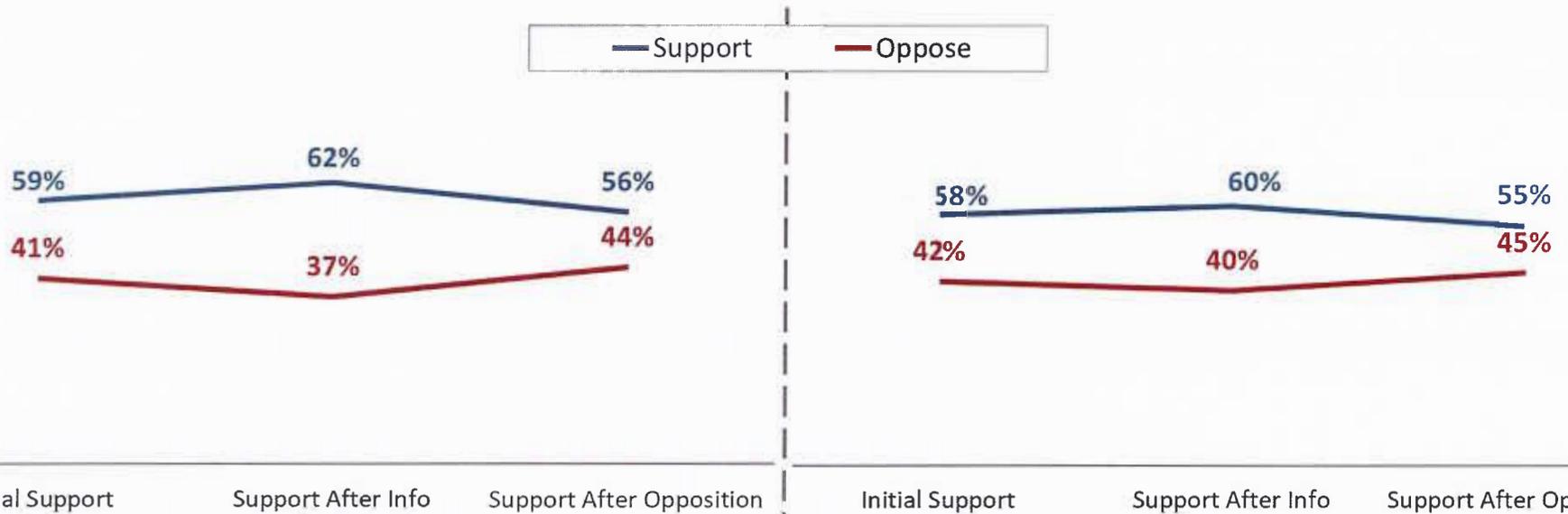
Measure Support Progression



While support grows as voters hear more information about a measure, general opposition messaging is effective at eroding support.

[Split A] Full Model Ballot Question

[Split B] Simplified Ballot Question



Opponents of this measure say that with the struggling economy and rising costs of living we simply can't afford more taxes right now. There are higher priorities for our tax dollars, especially since the buses in our area look new and few people ever ride them. There is already plenty of money for transit, officials just need to make hard choices and live within their means like the rest of us.

Finally, after everything you have heard, would you vote yes to approve or no to reject a 1/2¢ sales tax for Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transportation District?

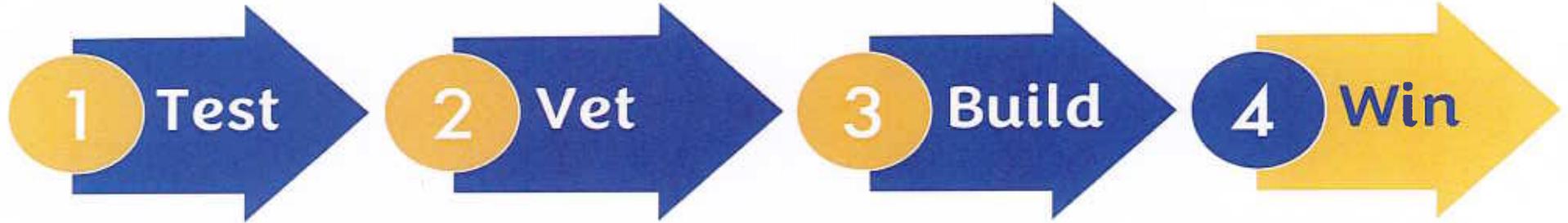
Conclusions



- ▶ Santa Cruz County voters recognize the need for increased funding for transit, view Santa Cruz METRO favorably, and **feel it is important to maintain METRO service** for the benefit of the entire community.
- ▶ While a measure that supports transit service while easing traffic congestion is appealing to a majority of Santa Cruz County voters, **voters are not recognizing the urgency needed to overcome concerns** about additional taxes, government waste, and cost of living.
- ▶ **Increased transparency** with the public about the potential for severe service cuts will be an important part of ensuring the public knows what is at stake with a measure.



Ballot Measure Planning



- ✓ Needs Identified
- ✓ Tax Rate
- ✓ Tracking Voter Survey
- ✓ Election Timing
- ✓ Political Landscape

- ✓ Non-Advocacy Communication
- ✓ Existing comms
- ✓ Informational mailers / digital ads
- ✓ Internal and external audiences
- ✓ Seek feedback
- ✓ Refine proposal
- ✓ Community readiness?

- ✓ Ballot Resolution/ Ordinance
- ✓ 75 words
- ✓ Projects & Programs
- ✓ Ballot Argument & Signers
- ✓ Official Vote (>88 days pre Election)
 - March 6 (Primary)
 - Aug 7 (General)

- ✓ Volunteer leaders
- ✓ Fundraising
- ✓ Website/Social
- ✓ Endorsements
- ✓ Grassroots
- ✓ Lawn Signs
- ✓ Mailers
- ✓ Digital Ads
- ✓ Get Out the Vote

**Campaigns must be privately funded*



Attachment



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