

City Beat: Measure C subcommittee meeting turns scary

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/03/17/3828337/measure-c-subcommittee-meeting.html>

Posted by George Hostetter on March 17, 2014

On Monday I stumbled upon a meeting of the Fresno Council of Governments' Measure C Regional Transportation Mitigation Fee Subcommittee in downtown Fresno.

The news was scary.

First, what is the regional transportation mitigation fee, or RTMF? Here's what COG's Web site says: RTMF "is an important part of the Measure 'C' Extension approved by Fresno County voters in 2006. The RTMF is intended to ensure that future development contributes to its fair share towards the cost of infrastructure to mitigate the cumulative, indirect regional transportation impacts of new growth in a manner consistent with the provisions of the State of California Mitigation Fee Act. The fees will help fund improvements needed to maintain the target level of service in the face of higher traffic volumes brought on by new developments."

Measure C is the local transportation sales tax measure. To wisely spend the RTMF, the experts need to do two things. First, they need to know what projects to fund. Second, they need to accurately predict population and economic trends so they'll know how much money is likely to come in.

The experts made a prediction in 2007 about Fresno County's population growth. I learned on Monday that the prediction was 4% too high for the actual population at the end of 2013.

I thought: 4% shy of the prediction — that's pretty close.

The experts also made a prediction in 2007 about Fresno County's employment growth. I learned on Monday that the prediction was 27% too high for the employment growth through 2013.

I thought: 27% shy of the prediction — that's a disaster!

I learned that the experts now see Fresno County by 2030 experiencing 27% less economic activity than originally predicted. Yes, population growth is slowing. But, most serious of all, more and more people of prime working age are expected to be without work.

There were a few other eye-openers at Monday's meeting. For example, rural and small-town areas of the county are seeing more population growth than originally expected.

I learned this could lead to less traffic in urban areas (Fresno and Clovis) due to lower population density.

And I learned that this could lead to increased traffic on the county's roads as people in rural areas make longer commutes to get to work in the big cities.

How to make sense of it all? No one in the meeting went down that path. The participants did note that RTMF collections could shrink, leading to delays in projects such as Veterans Boulevard. And Fresno City Manager Bruce Rudd along with Public Works Director Scott Mozier did reflect on the future of Mayor Ashley Swearingin's infill development plans.

But to a layman like myself, all the chatter had one key message: People throughout Fresno County must get jobs — and keep the jobs.

If not, we're in big trouble.