

Hobbs vetoes GOP-backed bill to extend transportation sales tax in Arizona's biggest county

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Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs on Tuesday vetoed a Republican-backed proposal to extend a longstanding half-cent sales tax that funds transportation projects in Maricopa County and is set to expire at the end of 2025.

The legislation approved in party-line votes would have prohibited the sales tax dollars from being used in Maricopa County to expand a light-rail line to the state Capitol, which was criticized by Republican lawmakers as a waste.

It would have put more money into freeway projects and fewer dollars into public transit than Hobbs had sought. It also would have raised the speed limit on the freeway system in Maricopa County to 65 mph.

"I'm dedicated to continuing Arizona's economic growth, building and attracting businesses, and creating good-paying jobs for Arizona workers," the governor said in a statement. "This partisan bill does none of those things."

If the proposal had been signed into law, voters would have been asked two questions.

First, they would have been asked if the vast majority of revenues from the tax should be spent on freeways, public transit and arterial streets. Next, voters would have been asked whether the remaining money should go toward maintaining light rail.

The tax, which was first approved in 1985, helps to pay for major Phoenix-area freeway projects, bus service and the Phoenix area's light rail system. It was extended in 2004.

It's set to expire on Jan. 1, 2026, unless the tax is put on the ballot and voters extend it.

The mayors of Phoenix, Mesa and four other communities in Maricopa County voiced their opposition to the proposal, saying the transportation priorities of the bill's backers don't mesh with the realities of a fast-growing county.

Maricopa is the only county in Arizona that must ask the Legislature for permission to ask their voters to impose a transportation tax.

Last year, the Legislature voted to extend the sales tax, but the proposal was vetoed by Hobbs' predecessor, Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, who called it ill-timed because of rampant inflation.



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