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## BREAKING NEWS: Amended sales tax bill clears Senate committee

With almost no prior warning, the state Senate's Appropriations Committee quickly convened this afternoon and approved AB 2321, the state bill that would allow a proposal for a half-cent sales tax increase in Los Angeles County to be placed on the Nov. 4 ballot.

**UPDATE:** The vote was 14 to 0, with one absence. Among the supporters were state Sen. Jenny Oropeza and state Sen. Gil Cedillo, both of whom had issues with the bill before it was updated.

I just got off the phone with Assemblyman Mike Feuer (D-Los Angeles), the sponsor of the bill. He said the amendments included so-called "intent language" that clarified that some of the sales tax revenues should be spent on several projects, including a Green Line Extension to LAX, fixes at traffic hotspots along the 605 freeway, the Gold Line extension and 710 Freeway improvements.

However, the intent language does not change the list of projects in either the state bill or the MTA's sales tax ordinance. Those two lists must match or the sales tax initiative could have been invalidated, according to MTA officials and Los Angeles County attorneys.

I want to convey to your readers it's a good day because the logjam has been broken here," Feuer said. "I think it's smooth sailing to the ballot and it's up to all of us who support this to gain the support of two thirds of the voters."

The other amendment to the bill -- and in my view, the one that you should note -- requires that the MTA give the state Legislature one year's prior notice if the MTA board decides to change the spending plan for expected sales tax revenues. In other words, if the MTA board wants to take money from one project and give it to another, they have to let the Legislature know way ahead of time so anyone who wants to cry foul can do so.

The state bill still must pass the full Senate, then go back to the Assembly for approval. Then it must be signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who has said he won't sign any more bills until the state budget deficit is solved. Schwarzenegger has said that he supports this bill -- but it remains to be seen if he makes an exception if the budget problems can't be solved.

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**Steve Hymon** is The Times' Road Sage. He covers traffic and transportation in a region united by a confounding network of freeways that frustrate drivers daily. The Bottleneck Blog is Steve's website home, where he breaks transportation news, reports on

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