

Measure R

by ReadWorks



Residents of Los Angeles, California, must deal with gridlock traffic every day. It can take up to an hour to get from the east side of the city to the west side, especially during rush hour, which can last up to three hours. Over the past decade, the city government has made legislative inroads in expanding and building public transportation, in part, in order to alleviate the hours of driving commuters must put in on a daily basis. Car culture in Los Angeles is so pervasive that many residents oppose the building and expansion of existing subway and bus lines. Some residents, especially in high-density housing in Hollywood, have filed official complaints with the city and housing authority in areas that have been marked by government officials as potential opportunities for public transportation. One of the major complaints about the expansion of public transportation in Los Angeles has to do with residents losing their views of the city from their residences in the hilly neighborhoods just below the Hollywood Hills.

One of the issues that plagues transportation in Los Angeles is that it is basically necessary to own a car-due to the city's sprawl and far-flung neighborhoods-in order to get by. Public transportation in the city consists primarily of an inefficient bus system, which does not run on a consistent and timely schedule, often getting stuck in the same traffic as cars, and an incomplete subway system, which is inaccessible to many commuters. For wealthier residents of Los Angeles, who are able to pay monthly car payments and ever-rising gas costs, this issue does not hold much importance. However, the issue is a daily problem for Angelenos (that is the name of Los Angeles's inhabitants) who are unable to purchase or rent a car. They must leave early to get to work on time, and they return home late. The commute bleeds into work-life balance, making it difficult to have significant personal or family time after getting home.

In 2008, city officials put forward Measure R, a piece of legislation that would raise sales taxes by a half-cent for 30 years. The measure was then extended in 2012 with the name of Measure J. The publication *The Huffington Post* reported that the money would go toward transportation projects and improvements promoted as a way to "improve the environment by getting more Angelenos out of their cars and into the region's growing subway, light rail, and bus services." By 2039, Measures R and J will have been responsible for the funding of the construction or expansion of a dozen rail lines in Los Angeles County. The specific projects that Measure R is intended to fund include: the "Subway to the Sea," which will run through Beverly Hills; the Green Line light rail, which will run to LAX International Airport; the addition of carpool lanes (accessible only to cars driving two or more people) to major freeways; and the widening of the I-5 freeway. Angelenos have met these projects with a variety of emotions: one of the more notorious reactions has been dissent, even outright hostility.

To those who had initially been opposed to Measure R, a significant event in Los Angeles transportation history provided some perspective: the so-called "Carmageddon." The Sepulveda Pass is a 10-mile stretch of the I-405 freeway, with Sepulveda Boulevard winding along next to it, which connects drivers to the San Fernando Valley and to the west side of Los Angeles, as well as Mulholland Drive. As part of the Sepulveda Pass Improvements Project, the I-405 was closed on the Sepulveda Pass to all drivers for an entire weekend in 2011 in order to expand one of the bridges that connects Mulholland Drive across the hills of the Santa Monica Mountain range. The expansion was necessary in order to introduce an extra lane to the I-405, a project intended to alleviate the high levels of traffic that occur in the Sepulveda Pass on an almost hourly basis. The weekend closure would be mimicked almost exactly a year later, during the summer of 2012, in order to do more roadwork.

The lead-up to "Carmageddon" was feverish: then-Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa urged residents to get out of town, or at least to stay off the roads; billboards were posted up all over the city letting Angelenos know about the coming closure; radio statements were made by all the major radio personalities; one airline offered four-dollar plane rides from Los Angeles to Orange County; bike groups sponsored cross-city excursions; helicopter companies offered half-hour long discounted rides to see the construction in action from the air; and local bars and restaurants offered "Carmageddon" specials, which included special dishes and discounts on food and drink. The Los Angeles Police Department was brought in to ensure drivers did not sneak onto the freeway or onto Sepulveda.

In both the San Fernando Valley and the west side of Los Angeles, residents were interviewed and questioned about their experience of "Carmaggedon" and what their plans were for the weekend.

"I'm just going to take the Mayor's advice and get out of town!" a man living in Sherman Oaks told reporters. He was planning on going to Las Vegas for the weekend, to soak up some sun and do some gambling.

"The mayor did local business a real disservice, by making that statement," T. Donovan, an employee at a popular cheese and charcuterie store in the Valley, told reporters, shaking his head. "This could have been a really great opportunity to jumpstart community and neighborhood spirits." His store was offering a "Carmageddon" sandwich, which included ingredients sourced from farms west of the Los Angeles city center and away from the Sepulveda Pass.

Because of the furor leading up to the weekend, the lack of tension shocked many people when the closure actually occurred. People weren't even driving on freeways and streets unaffected by the closure. The streets were, for once, close to empty and free from traffic. In a sense, it was as if a

breath of fresh air had descended on the city. People realized that maybe they *didn't* need cars to survive in Los Angeles. This realization only strengthened the response to the need for public transportation in Los Angeles.

A year later, in 2012, the second closure was scheduled for another summer weekend. This time, there was little hullabaloo about the closure: the term "Carmageddon" had been just about forgotten. Instead, Angelenos seemed to welcome the respite from reliance on cars and traffic that the closure afforded them. More residents stayed in the city the second time the closure occurred, and a much more relaxed attitude was palpable: airlines did not offer hour-long lifts across the county, and helicopter tours were not advertised.

Perhaps residents' experience with both years of closures will pave the way for more support for public transport and maybe even more transportation legislation. One thing is clear, though: Los Angeles is in dire need of a solution to its traffic problem. The sooner this fact is accepted, the sooner change will occur.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the passage, what must residents of Los Angeles, California, deal with?

- A. badly constructed roadways
- B. unpredictable weather
- C. gridlock traffic
- D. government gridlock

2. What problem do Measure R and J attempt to address?

- A. Measure R and J attempt to reverse "Carmageddon."
- B. Measure R and J attempt to lower taxes for Angelenos.
- C. Measure R and J attempt to encourage more Angelenos to use their cars.
- D. Measure R and J attempt to expand public transportation in Los Angeles.

3. In the passage, the author describes the many hours that it takes for drivers to get across Los Angeles. Based on this evidence, what conclusion can be made?

- A. Gridlock traffic in Los Angeles is very bad.
- B. Angelenos need to get their cars fixed.
- C. Los Angeles has a great system of public transportation.
- D. There are very few cars in Los Angeles.

4. How did Angelenos most likely feel in the lead-up to "Carmeggedon"?

- A. terrified
- B. anxious
- C. happy
- D. confused

5. What is the main idea of this passage?

- A. Los Angeles has a great system of public transportation.
- B. Los Angeles needs a solution to its traffic problem.
- C. "Carmageddon" was very harmful to Los Angeles.
- D. Car culture improves the lives of people in Los Angeles.

6. Read the following sentences: "Public transportation in the city consists primarily of an **inefficient** bus system, which does not run on a consistent and timely schedule, often getting stuck in the same traffic as cars, and an incomplete subway system, which is inaccessible to many commuters."

As used in the passage, what does the word "**inefficient**" mean?

- A. poorly operated
- B. important
- C. logical
- D. dangerous

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

There was furor leading up to "Carmaggedon;" _____, there was a lack of tension when the closure actually occurred.

- A. particularly
- B. moreover
- C. and
- D. however

8. Why is it basically necessary to own a car in Los Angeles?

9. The lead-up to "Carmaggedon" was feverish. Which evidence from the text supports this conclusion?

10. Why does the author suggest that Los Angeles residents' experience with years of road closures will pave the way for more support for public transportation expansion and legislation? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.