

VIA, city agree on plan to use sales tax



Voters will decide the fate of an eighth-cent portion of the state sales tax in November.

COURTESY OF VIA

By [W. Scott Bailey](#) – Senior Reporter, San Antonio Business Journal Jul 16, 2020, 10:11am EDT

The city of San Antonio and VIA Metropolitan Transit have agreed on a plan that, if approved by voters, would direct a portion of the state sales tax to fund economic recovery efforts and transportation needs in the region.

That plan hinges on a referendum in the November general election, which would allocate an eighth-cent share of the sales tax revenue that would be shared by the city and VIA.

The city would get initial access to the revenue, which would fund workforce development and vocational training initiatives designed to help families in San Antonio and Bexar County.

“By working together, we have crafted a plan for recovering from the economic ravages of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has dramatically changed our community’s employment landscape,” Mayor [Ron Nirenberg](#) said. “This approach will prepare San Antonians for jobs with a future while ensuring the long-term health of our transit system.”

After the city exhausts its share of the revenue, VIA would gain permanent access to the eighth-cent portion of the tax, allocated through the Advanced Transportation District, to address what its leaders have characterized as a chronic underfunding of transportation.

“A sustainable future funding source for VIA will ensure we can meet the growing transportation needs of the region moving forward,” VIA President and CEO [Jeffrey Arndt](#) said. “It means we can preserve vital connections and develop more equitable access to the opportunity that public transit can deliver.”

The agreement between the city and VIA could ease some tension.

The VIA and Advanced Transportation District boards voted unanimously on July 2 to call for a November proposition to allocate an eighth-cent portion of the sales tax to the transit authority currently dedicated to the Edwards Aquifer.

“If we do not act now, we may not have the opportunity again. Not in May, not in a generation,” VIA Board Chairwoman [Hope Andrade](#) said then.

Nirenberg and Bexar County Judge [Nelson Wolff](#) had stressed that San Antonio had more pressing priorities due to the pandemic.

The new agreement enables leaders to address workforce needs and transit funding. Details of the ballot initiatives will be developed in the coming weeks, with both VIA and the city calling a vote on their respective plans by mid-August.

Backers believe under the joint proposal voters will now have an opportunity to support economic mobility and transportation needs.

“It allows us to move together toward recovery and is a testament to what is possible when we work for a common goal,” Andrade said.