

## CapMet and homeless petitons to be pushed at the polls Nov. 3rd

Turnout for gubernatorial  
election makes gathering  
signatures quick and easy

### ROAD Petition

The Reclaim Our Allocated Dollars (ROAD) petition involves a strategy that's akin to a complex bank shot in a game of billiards. Since there is no method for the public to force the Capital Metro board to reduce its one-percent sales tax rate, ROAD founder Gerald Daugherty has taken the indirect route of trying to force the city council to request that the Texas Legislature limit the tax to a half-percent. The city council clearly would not want to do this because a strong public transit system is fundamentally important to the success of the city's Smart Growth Initiative, which seeks to boost population density (and tax base) in the urban core and slow suburban sprawl. Frankly, Daugherty is less concerned with forcing the council to do something it does not want to do than he is with taking the petition—signed by tens of thousands of registered voters—to the State Legislature and getting state rep. Terry Keel, R-District 47, to sponsor legislation to let Austinites vote on it. Keel's 1997 bill would have made Capital Metro's sales tax expire and be reset at a quarter-cent or half-cent unless an election were held in November 1997 and voters approved continuation of a higher tax rate. That bill was killed on a point of order, however. Keel is not optimistic he'll fare any better in the 1999 session. "The obstacle is you are dealing with a Travis County delegation in the House of Representatives that's 4-1 against this measure," Keel says.

If you go to the polls Nov. 3 you're going to get a chance to do more than mark ballots to elect state and county officials and decide the fate of \$712.3 million in city bonds. Depending no where you vote, you will likely have the chance to sign a couple of petitions that could have a far-reaching impact on Austin's future. Two unrelated campaigns are gearing up, each saying they will put hundreds of their own separate volunteers at polling places to gather signatures. One campaign is bent on whacking **Capital Metro's** sales tax in half. The other aims to kill mayor **Kirk Watson's** plan to expand downtown homeless shelters. Both campaigns seek to pass ordinances by using **City Charter** procedures to get their measures on the ballot for voter approval. **Gerald Daugherty** founded **Reclaim Our Allocated Dollars (ROAD)** in early 1996. He claims to have 270 volunteers lined up to meet a goal of 20,000 signatures on election day. His ordinance would force the city council to ask the Legislature to amend the **Texas Transportation Code** to cut in half **Capital Metro's** one-percent sales tax. **In Fact** Nos. 32 and 161 reported his 1996 ROAD petition to reduce Capital Metro's tax to a quarter-cent. He got 11,000 signatures on that petition, which played a part in the 1997 legislation to reform the transit authority. Daugherty says Capital Metro is making a bad political mistake by operating on a two-third's of the sales tax it collects and stockpiling money for possible later use on light rail. "I'm going to ask state legislators how it is you can keep collecting a tax and not spending it," he says. "There's not a legislator in this state who will let you collect money indefinitely." He says he'll push for a total of up to 50,000 signatures. Under the **City Charter**, to put an ordinance on the ballot a petition must be signed by 10 percent of the city's registered voters. There are now 394,608 people registered to vote in the city's Nov. 3 election, meaning Daugherty needs the valid signatures of some 39,500 registered voters. Even if he fails to get enough signatures to put the ordinance on the ballot, tens of thousands of signatures would give Daugherty leverage to return to the Legislature for another round of lawmaking that could wind up reducing Capital Metro's sales tax.

Capital Metro board chairman **Lee Walker** says the agency currently has about \$70 million-plus set aside in reserve to fund a transit system beyond buses or be returned, and that figure will grow to \$100 million-plus by the time the fiscal year ends Sept. 30, 1999. He hopes to have a plan to put to voters by late 1999 or early 2000. He notes the current board has been at work for just a year and had to clean out the rot of 14 years before turning to planning. "If Daugherty says he sees no progress he's in a dishonest position or has made no effort to become informed," Walker says. Daugherty says progress is illusory and every board has been excited about every new general manager. Beyond that, he says the board is missing the point. "I contend that too much sales tax is dedicated to public transit—period. They don't get it...Whether they think they're doing a good job or not doesn't matter." Daugherty says the ROAD petition will exert extra pressure on **Beverly Griffith** and **Daryl Slusher**, the two council members who serve on Capital Metro's board and who will be wooing voters for reelection next May. Griffith says

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