By Amy Sylvestri

San Leandro Times

The Alameda County Transportation Commission demanded a recount of votes for Measure B1, the transportation sales tax that was narrowly defeated in the Nov. 6 election, but the early returns of the recount didn't show much change so it was ended after just one day.

Measure B1 would have doubled the existing half-cent county sales tax that benefits transportation and also made it permanent, when it was originally set to expire in 2020.

Measure B1 would have raised $7.8 billion over the next 30 years for projects including road repairs and BART extensions.

The measure received 65.53 percent of the vote when it needed 66.67, such a narrow margin that the Alameda County Transportation commission (ACTC) paid for a recount.

In addition to the $630,000 ACTC spent trying to get the measure passed, the recount cost $6,000 per day, paid for by county taxpayers. But ACTA spokeswoman Tess Lengyel says the money was spent wisely.

“There are a tremendous amount of people who support Measure B1 and because the margin was so close, we honored that support by requesting the recount,” Lengyel said.

The recount began Tuesday and at the end of the day the ACTC had the option of calling it off, thus saving money, Lengyel said that the ACTC didn’t take the decision to go forward lightly.

The recount was an intensive process, involving nine members of the staff of the Registrar of Voters hand counting each ballot while one proponent and one opponent of the measure looked on.

They looked for things like incomplete lines on the arrows the voters complete to indicate their choices or scratched out votes. If there is some inconsistency on the ballot, the registrar workers must make a decision regarding the voter's intent.

Lengyel said that the ACTC requested that the Registrar of Voters begin their recount with ballots from the Berkeley precincts because they got a lot of support in that area. Though the recount could've eventually encompassed all of the county's ballots, that was unlikely because of the expense of the process. Lengyel estimates they got through about 30,000 ballots on Tuesday.

Measure B1 opponent Chris Pareja went to the Registrar's office to observe the recount and said that, after about a half-day's work, only 20 to 30 ballots were changed.

"It has been going well, " said Pareja, who was against the measure because he thinks it's wasteful. "But of course this is costing Alameda County taxpayers either way, unfortunately."