

## MWDOC Board Reaffirms Commitment to Twin Tunnel Project

By Damon Micalizzi



Just days before a Pineapple Express douses the north with precious supplies, much of which will be lost to the ocean, water managers in the southland are gearing up for a vote that would ensure we capture big storm events in the future. Before a packed Board room at Wednesday's Workshop Meeting with the Municipal Water District of Orange County (MWDOC) and the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD), MWD General Manager Jeffrey Kightlinger set the stage for what will be a critical decision on the California WaterFix. Should Metropolitan commit to ensure that the whole project- two tunnels, get built, or

go forward with a 'staged project' where one tunnel gets built and then another tunnel is phased in later. That route in the long run is more costly and more vulnerable to legal challenges.

"Two tunnels obviously brings more operational flexibility, optimizes benefits for the fish and the environment, and enhances seismic resiliency," said Kightlinger before later adding, "One tunnel is better than what we have now."

The MWDOC Board voted unanimously to support Metropolitan's additional investment in the twin tunnel project, in spite of the fact that presently there is no agreement in place for the Central Valley Project (CVP) contractors to subscribe. While at first, the move would present some financial risk to Metropolitan, most believe that if MWD opts to finance the whole project, there will be a flurry of buyers for the water.

MWDOC Board President and Metropolitan Director, Brett Barbre, who will be voting next Tuesday, likened the WaterFix to Metropolitan's previous monumental endeavors, the Colorado River Aqueduct and Diamond Valley Lake.

"This is a generational project and Metropolitan needs to lead the way on this," Barbre said. "That's what we've always done. We need to show the courage and commitment to build both tunnels and we need to do it now."

Representatives from MWDOC Member Agencies echoed support of the two tunnels being built, some even suggesting Orange County go so far as to pick up more of the bill if the Metropolitan Board is unable to reach the 50 percent plus one needed to move on the project. However...

"That's not the way Metropolitan is set up," Kightlinger explained.

Still though, some MWD Board Members will likely vote 'no' on any iteration of the WaterFix be it one tunnel or two. A no vote that will likely be more costly to their rate payers.

“Four dollars and eighty cents per household, fifteen years from now is far less than any of the local projects that will need to be built if the WaterFix doesn't happen,” said MWDOC General Manager, Rob Hunter. “Voting no on the WaterFix because of the cost of the project, will only hurt your rate payers more.”

The Metropolitan Board is scheduled to vote on Tuesday, April 10<sup>th</sup>.