

Highway 4 Gets State Funding for Widening

By Federal Glover

Highway 4 drivers may be jumping for joy – or at least honking their horns – at the news of increased funding for the widening of Highway 4. But not everybody is happy with the list of transportation projects recommended for funding by the California Transportation Commission. The CTC approved \$85 million to widen East County’s main roadway all the way to Hwy. 160.

“This past fall, the people of California gave us a clear message that we must invest in our transportation system,” said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, by approving Prop 1B, which provided \$20 billion for upgrading the state’s most congested roadways.

“People are sitting in traffic for hours each day and driving on roads that are in dire need of expansion and repair,” said the governor. “The California Transportation Commission’s draft list of projects is the first step to implementing the will of the people and making much-needed improvements in California's transportation system.”

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission, where I represent the interests of Contra Costa County, had requested that 30 highway projects -- totaling \$2 billion -- be funded from the bond revenues, which are dedicated to improving traffic flow. Besides Highway 4, the Caldecott Tunnel’s fourth bore received \$203 million.

Even though the Bay Area is the second most congested area in the nation, not all of MTC’s 30 proposals for traffic relief got the green light from the CTC.

The Bay Area projects that got funding include:

- Widening Highway 4 in East County between Somersville Road and Highway 160 -- \$85 million.
- A Caldecott Tunnel fourth bore -- \$203.2 million.
- An eastbound carpool lane on I-580 from Hacienda Road to Greenville Road in the Tri-Valley -- \$63 million.
- Freeway and road management technology on Interstate 80 between the Carquinez and Bay bridges -- \$55.3 million.
- Widening of Highway 101 in Santa Clara County from Yerba Buena Road to the junction with Interstate 280 -- \$74 million.
- Four carpool lane projects on Highway 101 in Sonoma County -- \$187 million.

Rejected were the Doyle Drive approach to the Golden Gate Bridge, the Marin-Sonoma Narrows on Highway 101, and the Alameda 580 corridor (a major goods-movement route that suffers from major congestion), said the governor in his letter to the nine-member commission.

At the same time, leaders from the Bay Area and Southern California and the governor decried the road projects outside of the urban areas where the argument for traffic relief was less compelling.

Leaders from the urban areas and the governor are asking the CTC to re-evaluate the projects based on congestion-relief, not necessarily just spreading the money around the state. The CTC approved additional projects in the Bay Area Feb. 28.

One of those rural projects that got axed is the \$175 million rerouting of Highway 101 near Willits. While nice for Willits residents, their worst traffic jam doesn't even begin to compare to the evening commute eastbound, Monday through Friday, on Highway 4.

Highway 4 is the main means for East County residents to travel in and out of this region. It handles over 23,000 vehicle trips every day. Most of those trips are being made by local residents commuting to their jobs in Central County and the job centers in the Tri-Valley area, Silicon Valley, and the urban East Bay.

The widening of Highway 4 -- along with the completion of the Highway 4 Bypass through Oakley and Brentwood -- will provide some welcome relief to our harried drivers, who already have some of the worst commutes in the Bay Area. Already the widening of the road from Bay Point to just west of Loveridge Road in Pittsburg has eased traffic woes a lot according to people who travel "over the hill" on a regular basis.

The next phase is widening Highway 4 to three lanes each way from Loveridge to Somersville Road in Antioch. That will involve building a new underpass for Century Boulevard in Pittsburg.

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