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## Brentwood, Oakley celebrate Highway 4 transfer

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by Justin Lafferty

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Caltrans officials on Wednesday transferred control of Highway 4 to Brentwood and Oakley, making the Highway 4 Bypass the official East County thoroughfare.

The transfer removes the highway distinction from Main Street in Oakley and Brentwood Boulevard in Brentwood, giving those cities control over street maintenance and

development. What is now known as the Highway 4 Bypass becomes simply Highway 4. Caltrans will be responsible for its upkeep.

“It’s a great feeling to finally accomplish this,” said Oakley City Councilman Jim Frazier. “Staff has worked hard, and I’ve been pushing and pushing and pushing, and we finally accomplished the goal.”

The celebration might be subdued, however, due to the state’s budget crisis. Earlier this year, the California Supreme Court allowed the state government’s attempt to balance its budget by ending Redevelopment Agencies (RDAs) and reaping the property tax money that cities collected from residents.

Brentwood and Oakley planned to use RDA money to make improvements to their heavily used thoroughfares.

“There are so many questions, and every city right now is trying to figure out what each city is going to do,” said Brentwood Mayor Bob Taylor. “One rule does not fit all.”

Oakley City Manager Brian Montgomery said earlier this month that his city plans to revitalize Main Street, much as Brentwood did with its downtown sector. Frazier is confident the city will find other funding sources and believes that the loss of RDA money won’t hurt too badly. Once the Oakley Generating Station becomes operational in 2015 or 2016, the power plant will pour roughly \$2.7 million per year into city coffers.

In Brentwood, improvements to Brentwood Boulevard will cost between \$25 million and \$40 million, according to city Finance Director Pam Ehler. Brentwood officials are still trying to figure out what the RDA ruling means for the city, and are brainstorming ways to finance work on the city’s namesake street.

Ehler said the city can't form a solid plan for Brentwood Boulevard until the redevelopment question is resolved. "We won't really finalize our new long-term plan until some of the issues with redevelopment are sorted out at the state level," Ehler said. "The state keeps throwing us curveballs. ... I think the legislators are getting bombarded with everything that the cities have been hit with, but they haven't been able to piece it together."

Oakley officials have welcomed the move, as it will allow Main Street to host parades and festivals. The transfer will also move freight traffic away from downtown, a development that will take full effect once the Highway 160 connectors are built in about three years.

"Now we have local control and we don't have to go through all the design standards that are required by Caltrans," Frazier said. "It's a great benefit to moving forward with revitalizing our downtown."

In the works for years, the move allows Brentwood and Oakley to fix potholes or make improvements without running the convoluted gauntlet of state approval. Frazier noted that in the past, getting a permit to do work on Main Street could take anywhere from 18 months to two years.

According to Taylor, "Anytime you as a city have the major control, that's a good thing for the citizens that live within the jurisdiction."

Local transportation officials have already planned a ceremony to commemorate the transfer: Feb. 13 at 10 a.m. at The Streets of Brentwood.

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