

Cost savings continue on bids for Highway 4 widening project through Antioch

By Paul Bugarino Contra Costa Times Contra Costa Times

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ContraCostaTimes.com

ANTIOCH -- The final piece of the Highway 4 widening project moved closer to reality recently as bids to build the segment at Hillcrest Avenue came in lower than expected.

Rancho Cordova-based Bay Cities/Myers is in line to get the contract following a bid of \$48.67 million -- about \$7 million less than the anticipated price tag of \$55.7 million.

The low construction bid for the Hillcrest project means that each of the five segments awarded for the Highway 4 widening over the last two years has yielded millions in cost savings.

About \$75 million has been saved on the project because of the low bids, said Ross Chittenden, deputy executive director of projects for the Contra Costa Transportation Authority.

"It ensures that we'll continue to have the capacity to finish the project," said Antioch councilman Brian Kalinowski, who represents the city on transportation issues.

There had been some concerns and uncertainty when the widening started that there would not be enough money, he said.

The transportation authority board will consider approving the bid at its Nov. 14 meeting. Construction is expected to begin in January, weather permitting, said Susan Miller, the agency's director of projects.

Work on that stretch of Highway 4 will include adding lanes from just east of Hillcrest Avenue to the Highway 160 interchange, along with a on- and offramps at Hillcrest. It will also include several components of BART's station east of Hillcrest, including a pedestrian overcrossing, station platform and station house and a tunnel underneath the westbound lanes so trains can get into their maintenance station, Miller said.

Local officials point to the cost savings as one of the few bright spots to come out of the economic downturn of the past few years.

"The timing has really been perfect," Chittenden said.

"We're really fortunate to be in this marketplace," said county Supervisor Federal Glover of Pittsburg. "It's provided a cushion and an opportunity to look at other projects."

The transportation authority was able to use some of the cost savings, Glover said, to pay for other projects, including a widening project and on- and off-ramps farther east on Highway 4 in Brentwood at Sand Creek Road.

"That wouldn't have happened if we hadn't experienced this type of savings," said Glover, who sits on the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

The transportation agency has been able to reinvest about \$14 million dollars in savings in other county road projects in the county, while keeping a reserve of \$12 to \$15 million for the Highway 4 project.

About \$30 million in local transportation dollars are no longer committed to the widening, but can be used for other projects.

In addition to the lower bid prices, East Contra Costa transportation has also benefitted from the slowdown in residential construction over the last few years, Kalinowski said.

"It's allowed the infrastructure in the region to catch up. I can't imagine what Highway 4 would be like if Antioch,

Oakley and Brentwood continued to grow like gang busters," he said. "As we continue to catch our breath and build out the corridor, we should be positioned well going forward."

Meanwhile, work continues on widening the freeway from Loveridge Road in Pittsburg to Hillcrest.

Officials say the work is going at a smoother, quicker pace than they had anticipated.

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Good TIMING:

Each of the five segments put out to bid for the Highway 4 widening project from Loveridge Road in Pittsburg to Highway 160 have been awarded at lower-than-anticipated costs.

Segment Estimated Cost (millions) Awarded Cost (millions)

Loveridge to Somersville \$91 \$64.5

Somersville to Contra Loma \$49.7 \$35.7

Contra Loma to Lone Tree \$50.8 \$42.4

Lone Tree to Hillcrest \$59.2 \$52.2

Hillcrest to Highway 160 \$55.7 \$48.7