County plan lets commuters go west

BAY POINT: Proposal would ease traffic congestion from Bay Point to Concord, improve biking trails

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Plans to make it easier to venture west from East County are on the road again.

County officials unveiled Tuesday a draft spending plan for \$8.6 million in federal money aimed at easing commuter congestion between Bay Point and Concord.

In front of about 80 residents who attended a town hall-style meeting at the Ambrose Recreation and Park District Community Center, John Greitzer of the county's Community Development staff outlined a revised version of a plan to spend money the U.S. Navy gave the county following the closure of the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

The plan would put \$1.3 million toward a second left-turn lane from Evora Road onto Willow Pass Road, thus reducing the morning backup as commuters drive over the hill into Concord, Greitzer said. Other road improvements on Evora Road have been identified in plans for redeveloping old Concord Naval Weapons Station land.

The turn lane was the only road improvement identified in the draft plans, much to the chagrin of several residents.

"When Port Chicago Highway was closed, we lost a road. In this plan, we don't get a road back," said Bay Point resident Angelika Wall. "This project is supposed to have a regional impact, and we're basically only gaining a left-hand turn signal. I'm not impressed."

However, the bulk of the audience -- many of whom were bicyclists and proponents of building trail land -- praised the plan.

Expenditures included \$1.5 million for bicycle safety along Bailey Road, \$750,000 for landscaping connecting the Delta DeAnza Regional Trail to the waterfront and \$2.35 million toward looking at building a stretch of the Great California Delta Trail from Pittsburg through Bay Point Park into Martinez.

"The money would be a wonderful kickstart," Greitzer said, referring to the trail project. Supervisor Federal Glover, who hosted the discussion with Supervisor Susan Bonilla, said the plan "didn't put all the eggs in one basket."

Some, like Bay Point resident and East County regional planning commissioner Ed Stevenson, liked that the plan met a lot of different needs, or what Greitzer called "doable" projects.

"It seems to meet a lot of different needs. It will enhance property values and solve part of the park problem," he said, adding that Bay Point has a disparity between park space and development.

The plan would also give bicyclists a flat land path to Concord, which they had lost when Port Chicago Highway closed, Stevenson said.

Greitzer said most of the proposed projects could be completed with the set-aside money.

The funding -- originally a \$5 million allocation back in the late 1980s -- was from the Navy as compensation to get rid of a part of Port Chicago Highway between Bay Point and Clyde. Plans to use the money in 1991 to expand Evora Road were nixed due to objections by the City of Concord over possibly having to relocate the Diablo Creek Golf Course.

Use of the funds for projects was brought forward again by state Sen. Tom Torlakson, D-Antioch, in April 2007 and developed from many public meetings, officials said.

More input and public outreach is to be conducted on the plan in April, Greitzer said. The county Board of Supervisors will consider adopting a final version in mid- to-late May, he said.

To view the plan, go to http://www.cocoplans.org.

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the plan's main points

Would add second left-turn lane from Evora Road onto Willow Pass Road. Cost: \$1.3 million.

Would improve pedestrian and bicycle safety on Bailey Road from Mims Avenue to BART station. Cost: \$1.5 million.

Would build trail along unused railroad corridor by Port Chicago Highway. Cost \$1.5 million.

Would improve existing trail between Bella Vista Avenue and Bailey Road. Cost: \$500,000.

Would restore landscaping on Driftwood Drive between Delta DeAnza Regional Trail and Bay Point waterfront. Cost: \$750,000.

Would improve access of Bay Point Waterfront Park. Cost: \$450,000.

Would establish environmental impact review and start building segments of the Great California Delta Trail from Pittsburg to Martinez. Cost: \$2.35 million.