

Mendocino Council of Governments

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Funding Slashed for Local Transportation Projects

Everyone is aware that the State has been facing major financial struggles over the last few years. What many people don't know is how this has affected our local transportation systems.

Many local transportation projects are funded with a combination of State and Federal money that comes to local cities, counties and transit agencies through the Mendocino Council of Governments. These funds are used to repair and reconstruct roads, build new sidewalks, construct bicycle facilities, improve the area's State highway system, and fund transit projects. The source of the money is primarily State and federal gas tax which flows into the State Highway Account, then is dispersed for State and local projects.

Unfortunately, these funds have not been enough to fully address the region's transportation needs. In 1999, the California Transportation Commission released a report identifying funding needs for transportation systems statewide. In this report, it was estimated that there was a **\$90 million backlog of deferred maintenance to the transportation systems in Mendocino County** at that time, part of an estimated \$10.5 billion statewide backlog.

For over five years the transportation community has known that it has a maintenance and improvement backlog in California that measures in the tens of billion of dollars. Ironically, as transportation officials and professionals have been engaged in ways to increase revenues to retire the backlog, the already insufficient revenue stream has been diverted to the general fund. This is sinking California Transportation into the hole at an ever increasing rate.

In 2002, in response to the ever deteriorating condition and increasing need for expansion of our transportation systems, 70% of voters approved Proposition 42, a State constitutional amendment that permanently dedicated revenues from the sales tax on gasoline to transportation infrastructure needs. Under provisions of Proposition 42, upon declaration of the Governor and with a two-thirds concurrence of both houses of the Legislature, the use of these funds for transportation can be suspended. Consequently, none of the gasoline tax expected under Prop 42 (approximately \$1.1 billion per year statewide) has been made available to address transportation needs. **Over \$1 million that could have been spent on Mendocino County streets and roads has already been lost.**

While aware that in a statewide economic crisis all facets and interests must bear a burden, transportation has been hit especially hard. For too long it has been too easy to raid transportation funds for non-transportation purposes. **As MCOG Chair Patti Campbell has stated, “Transportation funds need to go toward Transportation projects.”**

Gas taxes have not been immune from diversion either. Over the past three years, **nearly \$6 billion (\$5.6 billion of which is gas tax and weight fees) has been diverted to the State General Fund.** The Mendocino County share of this amounts to about \$63 million. That is money that would have been spent on repairing and improving State highways, local streets and roads, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and transit busses and buildings.

Our response to this loss of revenue has been to delay projects that have been planned for many years. In 2002, roughly **\$36 million in programmed local transportation projects were delayed** due to State financial troubles. Many projects once scheduled for construction as early as 2002 have now been delayed to 2008 and beyond. In addition to the delays, the region has been denied access to funds that had been reserved for transit and rail use. Some of the impacted projects include:

- Willits Bypass, (\$17 million in local funding)
- North State Street Improvements (\$3.7 million) in the Ukiah area
- Arterial/Collector Rehabilitation in Ukiah (\$700,000) including Bush Street, Empire Drive, School Street, Spring Street, W. Clay Street, W. Perkins, and W. Standley
- Franklin Street Reconstruction in Fort Bragg (\$1.7 million)
- Rehabilitation of Holly Street in Willits (\$427,000)
- Local Street Rehabilitation in Point Arena (\$172,000)
- Asphalt Concrete Overlay Program in the County (\$3.64 million) including Comptche-Ukiah Rd, Branscomb Rd, Sherwood Rd, Simpson Ln, Flynn Crk, and Little Lake Rd
- Reconstruction of East Side Potter Valley Road (\$3.8 million)

- Installation of sidewalks and disabled access ramps in Fort Bragg (\$649,000)

Not only will we have to wait nearly a decade to see these and other projects completed, but they will cost more to do when the time comes. With each year that passes, the cost of construction increases. In addition, the roads further deteriorate, meaning more work to improve them. In other words, the longer the projects wait, the less that can be done with the same amount of money.

Last year all funding from the State transportation Improvement Program for our local road projects was suspended and remains so. The outlook for this year is even worse. Unfortunately, it is likely that this depletion of transportation funding and the deterioration of our roads, transit systems, and bikeways will continue due to the loop holes in Proposition 42, low prioritization of transportation needs at the State level, and failure of Congress to pass a new Federal transportation bill.

Recently, the Governor signed a compact with several tribes that will generate revenue for transportation. But if either of two propositions (Propositions 68 and 70) on the November 2004 ballot are successful, the \$2.1 billion that would go for California transportation would be negated.