



**MENDOCINO
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MCOG Proposes \$177 Million Bypass Project for Bond Funds

At its meeting Monday, the Mendocino Council of Governments unanimously approved a resolution to apply for Proposition 1B bond funds. The resolution “endorses the Willits Bypass project as the candidate for funding under the Corridor Mobility Improvement Account.” MCOG’s top state highway improvement priority, the bypass project needs an estimated \$177 million to fully fund the construction phase. The action was recommended by MCOG’s Technical Advisory Committee.

The application goes to the California Transportation Commission, which has authority over the CMIA program under Prop 1B. At its February 28 meeting, the Commission will decide which proposals from Caltrans and regional transportation planning agencies to fund from the \$4.5 billion available.

MCOG’s Board of Directors heard testimony from 19 members of the public, including police, fire and CHP officials as well as County professional staffers, a Brooktrails director, environmental representatives, and Willits residents. Public safety and evacuation needs were cited by emergency responders as important reasons to fund the bypass. Others emphasized the need to remove highway pollution away from the urban Main Street area and to make improvements for a more walkable, livable community.

“We’re fighting the same problem—had we built this freeway sometime between now and then, you wouldn’t be faced with the enormous costs that we have now,” stated John Mayfield, referring to his term on the Board of Supervisors during the 1960s. “But we need to face it. Go ahead and build the freeway that’s in the project before you, and adopt the resolution.”

Supervisor and MCOG Director Hal Wagenet later remarked, “to my great pleasure, and to the benefit of Willits, Brooktrails and the entire region, my colleagues on MCOG joined in a unanimous vote to submit the Bypass to the California Transportation Commission for full funding. This vote, taken just fifteen minutes before my term expired, demonstrated a clear local commitment to solve our biggest regional transportation problem.”

After 14 years of environmental review, public comment, and response to comments, the Willits Bypass Environmental Impact Report is now complete. The EIR requires a mitigation plan that Caltrans District 1 will implement, with \$23 million of improvements and conservation easements for habitat and other impacted areas of the valley. Now Caltrans may proceed with right-of-way acquisition, which is fully funded. The design phase is well underway, with identification of the Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative (LEDPA), the route alternative named “Modified J1T.” The construction phase is partially funded to date, and as funding partners for state highway projects, MCOG and Caltrans hope to secure remaining funds from the bond program.

Acting as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency, MCOG programs or allocates various types of state and federal transportation funds to Caltrans, the County of Mendocino and the four incorporated Cities of Ukiah, Fort Bragg, Willits, and Point Arena. In addition to projects on state highways and within its five member jurisdictions, MCOG helps support transportation activities of the Mendocino Transit Authority, North Coast Rail Authority, local airports, and others. Projects involve planning, capital improvements, rehabilitation and maintenance, fleet replacement, and intermodal transit centers. For more information, call the MCOG office at 463-1859 or consult the agency's web site at www.mendocinocog.org.

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