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CTC Staff Recommends \$177 Million of Bond Funds for Willits Bypass

On Friday, February 16, the California Transportation Commission released its initial staff recommendations on applications for Proposition 1B bond funds within the Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) program. The Willits Bypass project is recommended for funding at \$177 million. This is the estimated amount needed to complete construction of the bypass, the Mendocino Council of Governments' top state highway improvement priority.

On Wednesday, February 28, the Commission will meet in Southern California to make its final decisions and award up to \$4.5 billion of CMIA funds to project nominations statewide. The Commission, a Governor-appointed body, has authority over the CMIA program under Prop 1B.

A total of 149 project nominations were received, amounting to \$11.3 billion, two-and-a-half times the amount available. Commission staff recommended 43 projects for funding, divided into two categories, "congestion relief" and "connectivity." As a rural project, the Willits Bypass is on the connectivity list. Further details of the staff recommendations may be found at the Commission website, <http://www.catc.ca.gov>, or by contacting MCOG's office.

MCOG councilmembers and staff are cautiously optimistic. Phil Dow, MCOG Executive Director, and Tami Jorgensen, City of Willits Mayor and MCOG Vice Chair, attended a Commission hearing in Sacramento on Tuesday, February 20 to answer any questions.

With the Environmental Impact Report for the Willits Bypass recently completed and certified, and other CMIA program criteria met, MCOG believes that the project is well positioned for bond funding. The answer will be known at month's end.

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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