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Willits Bypass Environmental Process Closer to Completion

Good news was received this week in the lengthy environmental review process for the Willits Bypass project. MCOG and Caltrans District 1 have received word that the federal permitting agencies concur with the proposed "Least Environmentally Damaging Practicable Alternative" (LEDPA). Much of the environmental work ongoing for more than a year has been directed toward this goal.

"I'm pleased that we have achieved a major milestone in the Willits Bypass environmental process," said Tami Jorgensen, Willits Mayor and MCOG Vice Chair. "I believe many members of our community will be glad to know we are one step closer to relieving traffic congestion on our main street."

After eliminating numerous bypass route alternatives originally proposed, study has been narrowed down to the one named "Modified J1T." This route would gently curve through the Little Lake Valley near the eastern city limits, carefully avoiding impacts to important features along the way.

Now that this hurdle has been cleared, the environmental process can be concluded and plans for the permitted route can move forward. Remaining environmental work includes completion of a biological assessment and preparation of a "Conceptual Mitigation Plan." Once these have been completed, Caltrans will prepare the final EIR (Environmental Impact Report), including responses to previous public comments.

District 1 will hold another public open house meeting in Willits on August 9 to keep people informed of the preferred route, procedure and schedule. Construction is now expected to begin by early 2008.

MCOG (Mendocino Council of Governments) is the Regional Transportation Planning Agency. For more information, consult the website at www.mendocinocog.org or call 463-1859.

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