



MENDOCINO  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

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January 12, 2007

John Barna, Executive Director  
California Transportation Commission  
Mail Station 52, Room 2222  
1120 N Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: CMIA Program Project Nomination - U.S. 101 Bypass of Willits

Dear Mr. Barna:

The Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG) is pleased to submit a nomination package for Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) funding for our highest priority highway improvement project – the bypass of Willits on U.S. 101. At the MCOG meeting on January 8, 2007, the Board of Directors unanimously adopted a resolution (attached) endorsing this project as its candidate for CMIA funding.

Willits remains the only incorporated community where U.S. 101 functions as “Main Street” between the Golden Gate Bridge and Eureka. Although a bypass was conceived in 1956, the first STIP funding was not programmed until 1990. Additional STIP funding was added in 1992 and partnership funding began with the (post SB 45) 1998 STIP. To date, MCOG has programmed over \$31 million in Regional Improvement Program shares towards this project. The most recent display of support was last year when MCOG dedicated over \$14 million in the 2006 RTIP to fully fund the right-of-way for this project.

MCOG is confident that our candidate project is an excellent fit for the CMIA program. The project will greatly improve the connectivity of this route that is often referred to as “the lifeline of the North Coast”. Not only is U.S. 101 a principal arterial, it is a component of the National Highway System and has been identified as a “focus route” in the 1998 Interregional Transportation System Plan. It is the top priority of Caltrans District 1 and is the only CMIA candidate on U.S. 101 on the North Coast. And now that there is a Record of Decision on the project Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR), Caltrans is prepared to deliver this project for construction in 2010.

Construction of the bypass has enjoyed unwavering support over the years not only from MCOG, but from the County of Mendocino, the City of Willits, and the Brooktrails Township. In addition, emergency response personnel including the Willits Chief of Police, Little Lake Fire District Chief (Willits area), California Department of Forestry Unit Chief, and California Highway Patrol Commander have expressed their support for the project due to its positive impact on safety and emergency response efforts.

This project has garnered unparalleled interregional support. MCOG has worked with two transportation agencies to our south, the Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA) and the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) to identify corridor improvements on U.S. 101. The draft product, entitled *Highway 101 Corridor – North of the Gate*, identifies needed improvements on the 101 corridor in all three counties. This plan was presented to the Commission at the October meeting in Santa Rosa. It prominently displays the Willits Bypass as a key component to Highway 101 corridor improvement. The Sonoma County Transportation Authority had previously supported our successful efforts in acquiring earmark funding through the federal reauthorization process.

To our north, the Humboldt County Association of Governments (HCAOG) and the Del Norte Local Transportation Commission have both endorsed the Willits Bypass for CMIA funding. These two agencies understand the invaluable role that U.S. 101 plays in the entire North Coast economy, and recognize the significant and growing constraints on interregional traffic and commerce because of the bottleneck through Willits.

Wider support for our project has also been obtained through the process established for the CMIA program through the adopted guidelines. Twelve northern California regional agencies grouped by the CTC for the purpose of establishing programming targets worked cooperatively to endorse a list of prioritized project nominations for the CMIA program (attached). This group, identifying itself as the “North State Super Region” has identified the Willits Bypass as one of three “Highest Priority” projects in this huge part of the state.

As the top priority of Caltrans District 1, a draft application for the Willits Bypass project was prepared and submitted requesting \$177 million from the CMIA program. Caltrans Headquarters has since considered statewide requests and has supported CMIA funding of \$150 million within a draft Caltrans CMIA program that totals over \$6 billion. Caltrans proposes that the \$27 million gap in this project be funded with a combination of 2006 STIP Augmentation and 2008 STIP funding.

MCOG supports the application prepared by District 1 but cannot support the funding scheme proposed by Caltrans Headquarters. Dedication of 2006 STIP Augmentation funds toward this project may be justified since the funding source for the augmentation is as stable as the CMIA program itself. But MCOG cannot support encumbering 2008 STIP funds for this project as well. Our large project in our very rural county has been identified as an example of a project that is difficult to fund through the STIP process and therefore may fit well with the intent of the CMIA program. We understand that CMIA

provides an opportunity to relieve some of the pressure on future STIP cycles by funding major, high-impact projects now through CMIA. We expect that the CTC will agree with MCOG that deferring a portion of the funding gap to the 2008 STIP is inappropriate.

There is also a practical and local reason why we must differ from the amount requested by Caltrans. MCOG Resolution No. M2004-02 identifies highest STIP funding priority for the Willits Bypass project, but recognizes that a funding partnership has to be maintained in order to deliver our other large Highway 101 project, the Hopland Bypass. As the only rural RTPA with two large bypass projects, encumbering future STIP cycles to complete the funding scheme for the Willits Bypass will delay our efforts to reserve funding for our second priority state highway improvement.

MCOG has worked closely with Caltrans District 1 in preparing the CMIA application for this project. Following the advice of your staff, we will not be submitting copies of the narrative, the benefit/cost analysis, and the draft Corridor Management Plan that you will be receiving directly with the Caltrans nomination package. In that MCOG and Caltrans differ on the funding plan only, we are submitting a separate Project Nomination Fact Sheet and a separate Project Construction and Funding Plan for this project.

The MCOG Board of Directors and staff look forward to CTC review of our nomination package. We believe this project to be fully responsive to the intent of the CMIA program and may be the best project of its type in all of rural California.

Thank you for your consideration of this application and the work that the CTC has put into developing the guidelines for this program. But most of all, let's all thank the voters of California!

Sincerely,



Phillip J. Dow, P.E.  
Executive Director

cc: Marsha Wharff, MCOG Chair  
Charles Fielder, Caltrans District 1 Director  
Tami Jorgensen, Mayor, City of Willits  
John Pinches, County of Mendocino 3<sup>rd</sup> District Supervisor

Enclosures

List of Enclosures to

*January 12, 2007 Letter to John Barna, CTC Executive Director*

1. MCOG Resolution No. M2007-01
2. MCOG Resolution No. M2004-02
3. Project Nomination Fact Sheet
4. Project Cost and Funding Plan
5. Humboldt County Association of Governments Letter of Support
6. Del Norte County Local Transportation Commission Letter of Support
7. North State Super Region Priorities

Notes: MCOG's 2005 Regional Transportation Plan is posted at [www.mendocinocog.org](http://www.mendocinocog.org)

The adopted Willits Bypass EIS/EIR is posted at [www.dot.ca.gov/dist1/d1/projects/willits](http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist1/d1/projects/willits)